

LESSON 2

MAN AND HIS BODIES

NOTES

According to Theosophy, the generally prevailing idea that man is a body and has a soul should be reversed. The physical body, it is maintained, is not the real man, and to regard it so is equivalent to mistaking a house for the one who dwells within it. Man—the true man—is the monad, a fragment of divinity, a spark of the divine flame. In the well known Biblical story, when Jesus had driven the money-changers out of the temple, he said to those who questioned him, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up...” But he spoke of the temple of his body.¹ Jesus spoke from that lofty state of awareness toward which, says Theosophy, we all move: The Christ-consciousness which knows the body as but a vehicle. The seed of all power, all wisdom, and all goodness is encased in the shell of the body awaiting fruition, and man, in the course of his evolution, has to unfold its latent potentialities.

It is a truism that only through limitation does awareness develop. It is for the purpose of developing awareness that the monad has clothed itself in matter of varying degrees of limitation and density—or, as it might be said, has surrounded itself with fields of different velocities of energy, the densest being the physical body. It may be pointed out again that matter and energy are now known to be interchangeable and that what we call solid matter is in reality only a vortex of energy, however solid and impenetrable it may seem to us; even the hardness of a stone is now known to be due to the intensity with which its constituent atoms cling to each other.

In these fields of force in which the monad has voluntarily imprisoned itself for the purpose of evolving all its latent potentials an expanding its consciousness, the higher velocities interpenetrate the lower in each case, but because all are vibrating at different rates, they do not interfere with each other. We are familiar with the fact that the atmosphere is filled with myriad waves and that we may capture one and exclude the others by "tuning in" at the proper frequency on instruments devised for these purposes

In the theosophical philosophy, our solar system comprises seven concentric planes or fields, consisting of these interpenetrating grades of matter, or velocities of energy. Five of these are directly concerned in the evolution of man; in this lesson the chief attention is given to three—the physical, the emotional or astral, and what is called the lower mental. Man's perishable bodies are composed of these three grades of matter. The term “bodies” is used for convenience, but they should not be thought of as fixed and static; we know

¹ St. John 2:19, 21

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our physical bodies appear to be the same from day to day, they are constantly changing, although of course at a much slower rate than the others because of the slower velocities involved. The more subtle bodies might be thought of as flowing lines of force which follow generally a certain pattern, modified in each instance by the characteristic thoughts and emotions of the individual, the attitudes he maintains toward life and the world, and the manner in which he reacts to the things that happen to him. They are in reality localized fields of force, or concentrations, in individual foci, of the energies of the larger fields in which they operate. At death, man discards these perishable bodies, one by one, as he would put by his worn out clothes, to take on new ones when he is ready again to enter the world of objective experience.

For purposes of discussion, we speak of these bodies as separate, terming them physical, astral, and lower mental, but it should be remembered that they are not, and cannot be, really separate. They are interdependent and function as a whole. We know that we never feel emotion without thought, nor do we think without feeling some emotion. And it is well known in medical science that thoughts and emotions affect our physical mechanism and vice versa. While interpenetrating the physical, the astral body is said to extend somewhat beyond it, as the lower mental body interpenetrates both and extends beyond the astral body. These subtle bodies are, of course, beyond the range of our normal vision but are considered nonetheless real. Those who have the faculty of clairvoyant vision have described them, and since these descriptions have a basic similarity, it can be assumed that what the clairvoyants are seeing does indeed exist.

The causal body, mentioned in Lesson 1, might be spoken of as the “incorruptible body.” It is composed of still more tenuous matter—or higher frequencies—of the higher mental plane or field. This is where the human ego, or soul, “resides”: It is called the causal body because it is here that causes are stored which sooner or later become effects and conditions in the outer, visible world. Again, we must not think of this “storage” in terms of space; it would be more accurate to say “in terms of vibratory possibilities”, or as centers of force, untold numbers of which can exist without interfering with each other in any way. The causal body is the permanent repository of that treasure laid up out of the experiences of thought, feeling, and action in the three lower bodies; it is the individual “heaven” mentioned by St. Matthew as the place where treasures are not corrupted.² The subject will be discussed more fully later.

Description of the dense physical body, composed of solids, liquids and gases, is not considered necessary here. There is, however, an important and largely invisible aspect not mentioned in physiology textbooks. This is called the

² St. Matthew 6:19-21

or “vital body”, and it has an important function, being the mold into which the dense physical body is built. Not only the outer frame, but every cell of the physical body has this etheric counterpart, formed of finer matter, and ordinarily - although not always - invisible to the human eye; it is easily seen by most clairvoyants. Since the etheric double cannot sustain consciousness apart from its dense counterpart, it is not a true body in the sense of being an individual vehicle. It is, however, the carrier of physical sensation and acts as a bridge between the dense physical body and the more subtle aspects of man’s being. It absorbs energy from the sun and transmits it as vitality, sending it streaming along the nerves in globules of rosy light and emitting the surplus in every direction as a bluish-white light. It is sometimes called the “health aura” because its colors and vibrations indicate the individual’s state of physical vitality and health. It can be driven out of the physical body temporarily by anesthetics or in mediumistic trance.

However, it remains attached to the body by a thread of its own matter -- -the “silver cord”—spoken of in Ecclesiastes 12:6³ When this “silver cord” breaks and the etheric double is finally withdrawn from the body, vitality ceases to flow and what we call “death” ensues. The etheric double quietly disintegrates in the vicinity of the body, its function for the incarnation being ended.

The astral, or emotional, body, extending slightly beyond the physical form and etheric double, is the vehicle of feeling and desire, ranging all the way from the animal passions to those higher and ennobling emotions which are, in one sense, reflections of higher principles of man to be discussed in a later lesson. It is described by clairvoyants as in constant motion, radiant and luminous in appearance. It is because of this luminous appearance that it is called the “astral” or star-like body. When the physical body sleeps, the consciousness continues to function in the astral body (memories of the experiences in this body sometimes come through to the physical brain in the form of remembered dreams or other impressions). The greater part of the latter composing the astral body is concentrated within the limits of the physical frame, and since during waking hours most of the lines of force in the astral body follow the outlines of the physical body, it tends to maintain the same shape and appearance during sleep, so that the person is easily recognizable in the astral world by his friends and acquaintances. In an individual of high spiritual and cultural development, the astral body is said to be extremely beautiful, imbued with vibrant and luminous colors. In the undeveloped person the tints tend to become darkened. When emotions such as selfishness, greed, jealousy, and sensuality predominate, the dark brown, the muddy greens and reds are most conspicuous: we sometimes use the words “muddied thoughts and feelings”, a phrase which is said to describe these shades quite accurately. Purification restores the true colors and beauty of the astral body.

³ “Or ever the silver cord be loosed...the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.”

In the theosophical system, each of these planes, or fields, is said to have seven sub-divisions or (to keep in mind the fact that these can with equal accuracy be termed energies or grades of matter) slightly varying frequencies or velocities of the same general character. The lower mental body is composed of the lower subdivisions of the mental plane, the causal body being the vehicle of consciousness in the three higher subdivisions. The concrete thoughts of man are expressed through the mental body, which penetrates and extends beyond the astral and physical bodies. By means of thought and study, by the exercise of the higher emotions and nobler aspirations, man refines this vehicle and makes it an ever more sensitive instrument for his progress. When the mental body is in use, it vibrates rapidly and temporarily increases in size. Prolonged thought makes the increase permanent, so it might be said that the mental body is literally built day by day through the right use of thought power. As the quality of the astral or emotional body is dependent on the habitual emotional attitudes of the individual, so the quality and luminosity of the lower mental body depend upon his characteristic thinking. Since there is seldom emotion without some kind of thought, or thought without emotion, and since the two bodies interpenetrate, it is not incorrect to speak of the characteristic types of thought-emotion, each of which is said to reflect in the bodies with its own special color. Pride is seen by clairvoyants expressing itself in orange, fear in livid gray, irritability in scarlet, while thought-feelings of unselfish affection bring a glow of a pale rose color, intellectual endeavor a pure yellow, devotion a clear blue, sympathy a bright green, and high spirituality a beautiful lilac blue or lavender.

The causal body, which is the vehicle through which the ego or soul of man makes contact with his denser bodies, surrounds the other bodies and extends some distance beyond them. Only the good, the true, and the beautiful thoughts can penetrate into this body because its vibrations are of so peculiarly fine a nature that there is nothing to respond to that which is coarse, crude, or "evil." In the early stages of a "young soul" or primitive man, the causal body is said to be small and almost colorless, resembling a bubble or a delicate film. As the individual evolves, however, and the residue of good from his thoughts, feelings, and actions gradually becomes registered there, it takes on greater color and grows in size. Since it is at the level of abstract thought, it grows very slowly until the individual reaches the stage of unselfish or impersonal thought and emotion and the ability to deal with ideas and ideals. Then these rates of vibration show themselves to clairvoyant sight as beautiful colors, so that the causal body becomes a shining globe of light, full of radiating rays of love and helpfulness.

body The The causal body continues life after life, while the mental, astral, and physical bodies are renewed in each incarnation. When the experiences and lessons of a previous incarnation have been absorbed and transmuted into added strength and increased powers and capacities, the desire and the need for more experience draw the ego into incarnation again. It then attracts about itself first a mental, then an emotional, body of the same general characteristics as those which is sloughed off at the close of its last incarnation, although not necessarily of the same sex, and it will be its task further to develop and refine these as the new incarnation proceeds. The ego comes to birth in a new physical body built on the pattern it has established for itself within the law of cause and effect. After each life experience, it again sheds the three lower bodies and prepares to add new treasure to its storehouse.

This is the path of evolution. The rate of progress is up to the individual, depending upon his effectiveness in accumulating right experience and on the measure of control he manages to achieve over his lower bodies, which is to say the true maturity to which he attains in dealing with his life's lessons. Thus, many births and deaths are necessary for each ego on its aeonic journey toward the goal.

Before concluding this lesson, it might be of interest to elaborate briefly on the term "fields", which has been used interchangeably with that of "planes" and "bodies" (the latter being localized fields within larger general fields) in this course. Mention was made in Lesson 1 of the theosophical hypothesis concerning other fields than those yet postulated by science, and this lesson has discussed some of these.

Man exists in a physical encasement which is subject to the laws of the gravitational field, of which mass is the principal characteristic and where his growth is in linear time. He knows that this physical body came from protoplasm, that mysterious substance which appears the same under the microscope whether a man or a grasshopper is to develop from it. It holds within it however, the determining and positive factor, or pattern, of what is to become. It is not by any means an inert substance. It is a streaming mass, in constant flowing motion, and seeming to demonstrate intelligence in its behavior. It is postulated by some biologists that what appears as basic and primordial purposiveness in this fundamental stuff of life is manifested later in the psyche of man as conscious, directed purpose, in other words, that the thread of life is continuous at whatever level it may be manifesting, a concept in complete harmony with theosophical ideas.

According to the theosophical hypothesis, the etheric double, the astral body, and the lower mental body (constituting what psychologists call the psyche) function in the "psychodynamic field", a term implying the dynamic nature of the forces of which it is composed. These forces are in continuous motion,

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the incessant streaming of protoplasm at the physical level. Constant radiance and constant motion are the characteristics of the psychodynamic field, as mass is a characteristic of the gravitational field. Here the monad draws to a focus, or localizes, the forces needed for experience in the realm of mind-emotion. It is the domain of personal power, of consciousness and of what, in Jungian psychology, is termed the personal unconscious. But here, also, the personal unconscious merges with the collective unconscious, so that the influences from this vast ocean of psychic forces are constantly playing into personality. Other and “higher” fields, or frequencies, are postulated as essential components of this theory, but with these this lesson is not concerned.

It can readily be seen that these “bodies,” or localized fields of force, are excellent servants but can be tyrannical masters if the individual fails to bring them under control. The most effective attitude which he can take toward them is beautifully described in the little theosophical classic, At the Feet of the Master:

“The body is your animal, the horse upon which you ride. Therefore, you must treat it well, and take good care of it; you must not overwork it, you must feed it properly on pure food and drink only, and keep it strictly clean always, even from the minutest speck of dirt. For without a perfectly clean and healthy body you cannot do the arduous work of preparation, you cannot bear its ceaseless strain. But it must always be you who controls that body, not it that controls you.

“The astral body has its desires, dozens of them; it wants you to be angry, to say sharp words, to feel jealous, to be greedy for money, to envy other people their possessions, to yield yourself to depression. All these things it wants, and many more, not because it wishes to harm you, but because it likes violent vibrations and likes to change them constantly. But you want none of these things, and therefore you must discriminate between your wants and your body’s.

“Your mental body wishes to think itself proudly separate, to think much of itself and little of others. Even when you have turned it away from worldly things, it still tries to calculate for self, to make you think of your own progress instead of thinking of the Master’s work and of helping others. When you meditate, it will try to make you think of many different things it wants instead of the one thing which you want. You are not this mind, but it is yours to use; so here again discrimination is necessary. You must watch unceasingly, or you will fail. The attached diagram III may be helpful in studying this lesson. It shows in symbolic form the different planes or fields of force, including the densest ones in which man appears. It should be remembered that these are

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matter and therefore this diagram should not be taken literally; the different planes are shown separately with the densest at the bottom for simplification in studying them, but they are all closely related and inter-related. The word “atomic” is used to designate the highest sub-plane of each plane and refers in occult literature to the basic matter of each plane. It should not be confused with the meaning of the word “atom” as used in physical science.

References for Supplementary Reading:

Man and His Bodies, Annie Besant
Space, Time and Self, E. Norman Person, Section 4
A Way to Self Discovery, I.K. Taimni
Man, God and the Universe, I.K. Taimni, Chapter 30
The Etheric Body of Man, Laurence and Phoebe Bendit
The Wisdom of the Vedas, J.C. Chatterji, pages 15-20
The Key to Theosophy, H.P. Blavatsky, Section 6

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. What is the relationship of your body to yourself?
2. What is the purpose for having material forms?
3. Name the three perishable bodies of man and state the function of each.
4. Briefly describe the emotional and mental bodies of man.
5. What is the etheric double? What is its function? Is it a true body?
6. What is the name given in Theosophy to the permanent body of man? Why is it so defined?
7. Explain the significance of color in thought and feeling, and indicate the meanings of some of the colors.
8. What kind of material is worked into the causal body?
9. Explain why the bodies seem to tempt the soul or ego to give way to undesirable thoughts, desires and actions.
10. What should be a person’s attitude toward his bodies?