

# Seminar on the Problem of Death

## Part 2 of 2

Franklin Merrell-Wolff

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In the further progress while in the *bardo* on the part of the deceased, he comes to a point where there appears before him apparent gods of benevolence and gods of anger. He is here told that these are not real objective entities, but in fact they are part of himself and, thus, actually *projections* in our modern psychological terms. He is directed to reverse his normal reaction with respects to the gods of benevolence and of anger; in other words, not to go toward the gods of benevolence and not to flee away from the gods of anger, but to do just the reverse—go toward the gods of anger and ignore the gods of benevolence. In this way, he asserts his independence of the projections.

Now, here is something that is of interest also. If we turn to the eschatology found in the Theosophical literature, we are told that after the second death, the period where there is the exfoliation, the deceased enters into a state known as *Devachan*, and that here he finds an environment which fits his own ideal of a delightful environment. He will find all of his friends and relatives there, and that the life that seems to be lived there is one of unalloyed delightfulness. The value of this period, it is said, is that it leads to an assimilation of the positive values that were sown as seed during the preceding lifetime, that the period lasts for such time as this may be required to exhaust the development of this seed; then there is the movement outward again and the entering into rebirth. The old ego, the old sense that I am this individual and none other, continues through this time. If you were a Mr. A in the preceding incarnation, you remained a Mr. A throughout this cycle; but, at the point of rebirth, Mr. A terminates and that which is born anew starts with a new sense of self-identity which is the *karmic* consequent of previous lives, not merely the one just preceding, but of all the lives that have been lived throughout the cycle of necessity; that there is then a new ego-sense, which, again, is the resultant of the old ego-sense, but there is a broken continuity. It is in connection with this that I developed the conception of the pseudopodal theory of reincarnation.<sup>1</sup>

Now, in that *devachanic* interlude, which may be short or long, in the case of a life of minimum virtue, it would tend to be short; in a life of extensive virtue, without, however, true knowledge in the sense of *jnana*, it could lead to a very long period in the *devachanic* state as measured by objective time. The state itself, because it is a delightful state, would never seem long, never seem to be boring; for one never is bored in a state of delight. So, when we speak of a length of period, it must be borne in mind, it's not the subjective sense of length of period in the state itself that is referred to, but rather to the time on average as measured by the cosmic clock of external experience. It has been said that the average time between incarnations is on the order of 1,500 years, but some, because of inferior development, may come much earlier, and others, because of great

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<sup>1</sup> See the audio recording "Pseudopodal Theory of Reincarnation."

superiority of development, also may come voluntarily much more quickly, but in general, the life of a saint, who, nonetheless, was deficient in knowledge, in the sense of *jnana*, might abide in a *devachanic* interlude for even the equivalent of a million years.

Now, the point is made in the Theosophical eschatology that the companionship one has in such a state is his idea of his friends, not the actual friends themselves as they are in their own essential nature, and the environment is an ideal projected. Here we find that what is essentially true is that which has been called in modern depth psychology simple, unconscious projection. It is, thus, not in the true sense a state of reality, though it has its value, partly in compensating for the suffering of the preceding life, partly for the assimilation of the values for which the seed had been sown in the preceding life; therefore, a necessary state for all those who have not attained to Enlightenment. So, that here as well as in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, the states of consciousness, the states of the sense of an environment, is seemingly, essentially, what is meant by unconscious projection.

Now, in the case of the *yogin*, or he who is aspiring to adeptship, one of the most important powers to achieve is the power to avoid becoming confused by unconscious projection, to be able to move within the inner domains with a consciousness of them as they are in themselves and not as they appear to be as a result of unconscious projection. To be sure, there may be conscious creativeness, which is something very different, because where creativeness is conscious and therefore known to be an act on the part of the subject, so long as this is not forgotten, there is no problem of becoming caught in a state of unconscious projection. For the *sadhaka*, therefore, the problem of meeting unconscious projection is one of critical importance, and here we will have to consider the elements involved in this problem at some length.

I direct your attention to the two states known as waking and dreaming consciousness, and let us submit these two to analysis. First of all, with respect to the dreaming consciousness, it would appear that here we're moving in a state where the environment is unconsciously projected; and note what is true of the subject in this case. Things happen to him. He is not determining, subjectively, his course of action. He is not steering his boat of life, but events just happen. It may be said in this connection that he as an entity is an object, not a true subject. He is cognizing, to be sure, a series of events of one sort or another—they may be pleasant or unpleasant—but he makes no selection. They just happen.

Now, let us direct our attention to what we call waking consciousness, perhaps in an exceptionally mature form. Characteristic of the waking consciousness is this fact: that although we live in an environment of the mountains, the trees, the streets, the buildings, and the people, and so forth, which are not a result of our producing them, but are given, as it were, yet we do select courses of action. We do feel preferences and move with respect to a selection rather than merely having things happen. You'll note that characteristic of this consciousness is a more or less developed state of discernment, judgment, discrimination, reasoning, and memory of the past—all of which are lacking in the dream consciousness where events simply happen. Thus, the subject in waking consciousness is a true subject, not simply an object of the forces that play upon him. His consciousness is not exclusively an effect. There is choice. There is decision. There is evaluation—quite consciously—whereas, in the dreaming state, there is no choice, or

decision, or evaluation—the subject is something simply acted upon. Whereas, in the waking state, the subject, to a greater or lesser degree, chooses and determines. In other words, he is a self-determined object in some measure. To be sure, this varies with the evolution of the individual. At the level of the primitive, the self-determination may be minimal; whereas, at the level of the advanced *yogin*, it may be maximal—and with all sorts of grades between. Young souls, therefore, even in outward life, are moving in something very much akin to the dream state. Mature souls, are living in a domain of self-determination which stands in the strongest possible contrast to the dream state. My estimate would be that the bulk of humanity lies predominantly in that level of waking consciousness which is most akin to a dreamlike consciousness.

Now, the problem before us is this: that when—apparently from what we can learn of the subject—when we enter into the state known as the *bardo*, the state after the transition known as death, we have paralleled the movement that takes place nearly every day when we go to sleep; and that just as when we go to sleep, the dreamlike consciousness tends to take possession of us, so it may well be that in the normal case, or the average case, after death one enters into a state akin to that of the dream state, in the sense that we do not carry with us judgment, discernment, discrimination, reason, and memory, or do so only in the imperfect degree. The problem then for him who would be truly awake and in command in the *bardo*, or in such domains that may exist within the hierarchy of *lokas*, is the same as the problem of being able to wake up while in the midst of an ordinary dream.

I've had this experience, so I can report something of its nature and submit it to some analysis. On an occasion of dreaming, I once woke up without opening my eyes—by waking up I mean that I then had in my consciousness the power of discernment, judgment, discrimination, reason, and memory, which did not exist there before the moment of waking up. I managed to wake up without stopping the dream. Then I proceeded to manipulate the dream, and it took the course which I chose it to take. This combined state of dreaming and waking, I was unable to hold for any length of time, for presently the waking consciousness became so dominant that the dream ceased. What is required, obviously, is a subtle combination of dreaming consciousness and waking consciousness without either one becoming exclusively dominant. Now, what we're dealing with here is something referred to in the literature as a state of considerable importance known as waking-dreaming consciousness—a state in which these five qualities of which I mentioned still function without destroying the dream.

Now, there's another experience that has a bearing on this problem. Once while asleep, I awoke when I heard my name called, and I had the strong impression that I should respond. And though I had had no training in the process, I seemed to know how to depart from the physical body. Whether it was a body that departed or not, I do not know; but I do know that the consciousness seemed to depart from this organism by a step involving a squeezing out of it in the region of the chest, and that I shot up in that consciousness to some height, which I do not know. I then proceeded in—or it seemed to proceed in a westward direction over a vast ocean. I seemed to be but a short distance above the waves of the ocean—I could see them clearly below me—and I seemed to be moving rather rapidly in a westward direction and came to a land; and I was moving over and above this land in a area that had considerable vegetation and seemed to be parklike.

Then a foolish notion came into my mind, suppose I were seen here by the dwellers in this land, would the police take after me? No sooner thought, than just exactly that happened; and a policeman spied me and took after me, and I ceased to float above the land and found myself running on the ground away from a policeman, and then woke up.

Now, the important features in this experience are this: that when I woke up, I awakened from a dreamlike quality of consciousness, where I was no longer self-determinant, no longer carrying the qualities of discernment, judgment, discrimination, reason, and memory with respect to outer consciousness, but merely an acted upon entity who experienced a certain environment; yet, I had entered into the state consciously and with all of these qualities. That meant that when passing over the ocean, I could remember the past of this objective life. I could form judgments. I was interestedly observing what was happening in order to produce, you might say, a scientific evaluation. But the state from which I awoke had lost all of that. Now, this would appear like an impingement of the two states in which the dreaming state conquered the waking state, the reverse of what happened in the instance where I awoke in a dream, and the waking consciousness soon dissolved the dream. In this case, the dreaming consciousness dissolved the waking consciousness.

Now, this presents to us a critical problem. It would appear that each type of consciousness—dreaming and waking—is hostile to the other and has a tendency to dissolve the other. If one is growing dominant, such as the waking consciousness in the dream, it dissolves the dream. If the dreaming consciousness becomes dominant, it dissolves the waking state. The problem, then, would be how to maintain a balance between the two; and this, I would say, is very difficult because it is so subtle. If one exerts the objective, external will strongly, it dissolves the dreaming consciousness. If he does not exert it strongly enough, the dreaming consciousness acts to dissolve the waking consciousness. So, it's a matter of maintaining a subtle balance; and apparently just about as difficult as the balance suggested by the Tibetan figure of a person putting a pencil, balancing it upon a string, and having the pencil roll down the string without falling off. It is a subtle and difficult balance. Nonetheless, I suspect that this is the key to a conscious transition through the *bardo*.

Now, in the volume *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, either in the main text or in the footnotes, it is pointed out that the environment experienced is the objectification of one's thoughts. Now, this brings us into some rather complex problems. It has already been pointed out that the benevolent gods and the gods of wrath were projections from one's own consciousness, that they were not authentic, objective existences in the same sense that we would speak of other persons seen and otherwise sensed here in this world as objective. The statement implies that not only the gods of benevolence and of wrath are seen, but that the environment in general consists of an objectification of our thoughts.

Now, it is not difficult to see how images could be objectified as external existences, apparently, in the same sense that the apparent gods are objective. But thought involves a good deal more than that. And so it occurred to me if my thought were  $e^{\pi i} = -1$ , how would that be objectified? In fact, this question intrigues me so greatly that I think it would be worthwhile dying with that thought in one's mind to see just how it would be objectified. Here we're not dealing with an image thought, the kind of thinking that deals with percepts, but a very subtle, and advanced, and intricate abstract conception. Let me

say something about it. It involves a combination of two very important transcendental numbers, namely,  $e$  and  $\pi$ , and the conception of the imaginary number  $\sqrt{-1}$  in such a combination that they become equal to a very simple conception, namely, that of  $-1$ . Now, the proof of this exists. I've gone over the proof myself, and therefore know that if the assumptions underlying our algebra, geometry, and differential calculus are assumed as valid, then this is true; and the assumptions underlying these disciplines is valid enough to give us, through this kind of mathematics, the command that makes our technology possible. So, there is a certain objective proof, if you please, in the empiric sense, of the validity of these assumptions. All it requires is perhaps the first half year of differential calculus to follow the proof. It involves an acquaintance with Maclaurin's theorem for the expansion of functions involving one variable, and that is all.

So, one knows it is true, but that is a very different matter from understanding it. What in the world does it mean? Consider that  $e$  is equal to the limiting value as  $n$  approaches infinity of  $(1 + 1/n)^n$ . It gives you a number 2, decimal point, and then a non-terminating decimal. It is a very important number. It is the base of the natural system of logarithms, and it is a number that appears in all formula connected with any living organism—plant, animal, government, corporation, or whatnot; a very strange fact. And then bear in mind that  $\pi$ , most commonly known to us as the ratio between the diameter and the circumference of the circle, and a number that has been quite important in the demonstration shown in the relationships of the Great Pyramid, and a figure to be found in a anagramic rearrangement of the numerical values of the word Elohim, as written in the Hebrew. It is the sum of certain converging infinite series and of certain non-terminating decimals, and is a number involved in all formula dealing with probability. And then the conception of the imaginary number  $i$  or  $\sqrt{-1}$  has its own subtleties. And the question of whether these things are real or not is one that can intrigue one immensely. There is no doubt about their importance in applied mathematics. They are, thus, not airy unrelated conceptions that stand above the field of practical application, but when they enter into this combination  $e^{\pi i}$ , they result in an answer which is as simple as  $-1$ . So, one finds here a great mystery far more intriguing than the ancient problem of the squaring of the circle—actually a problem which is now resolved. What does it mean?

So, if every thought that one has is objectified when he goes into the *bardo*, what sort of form would this thought take? I find it quite intriguing. But is that the kind of thought they're referring to? I don't know. It is strictly conceptual. I can see how a perceptual image could become objectified as though external to one. If a conceptual thought can be so objectified, this one would be very interesting indeed. It would be worthwhile dying, in fact, in order to see what that could appear to be.

There's another thought in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, it is said that the benevolent gods are a projection from the heart, the feeling side of the consciousness; whereas, the gods of wrath are projections from the head, or the intellectual mind. This is something that is not at all clear, for manifestly both benevolence and wrath are affects, affectional states, and thus would appear to properly belong to the feeling side of man in both cases. A conception such as  $e^{\pi i} = -1$  is a cool conception in which there is notably an absence of affect, a something that is above the duality of benevolence or wrath, a simple orientation to truth *per se*. That obviously is from the head, but I can see no

ground whatsoever how that could be projected in terms of wrath. There is no wrath in it. It is an intriguing element in the nature of ultimate truth. What does it mean?

There is another consideration in connection with the dying process which may prove to be of considerable importance. It is a familiar teaching in the Oriental literature that death has two steps, namely, a motor death and a sensory death; and it is there affirmed that the motor death precedes the sensory death. Our Western tests of death cover only the motor phase, and here is a reason why the handling of the corpse too soon after the motor death might impose a serious hardship upon the individual concerned.

I had an experience in 1927, which may well tend to confirm the idea that motor death does precede sensory death. At that time I had dug into an ancient grave in the southwest area hoping to find a skull. I did inhale a considerable amount of an impalpable dust which smelt very much like a very dirty chicken house. The next day I came down with certain symptoms. First, there was an extreme form of coryza, followed later in the day by an experience of extraordinary weakness.

We were camped at the time at the shores of a lake in Utah, namely Fish Lake. There was in our party a physician and his wife. My wife and Jim Briggs and the physician had gone out on the lake in a boat to try their luck at some fishing. I had remained to gather some wood for a campfire that evening. And the wife of the doctor had retired to her tent. I found it very difficult to gather the wood. I had the impression that if I ever gone fully down to the ground in picking it up, I would not be able to rise again. So I simply squatted in the act of gathering the wood, and, after having gathered it, I retired to the backseat of our car and was resting there. Everything seemed comfortable. I was fully aware of the environment. But after a time I decided to leave the car, go into the tent to lie down. I put forth the normal willed effort to get up out of the seat, but nothing happened. I increased the willed effort. Still nothing happened. I raised the pitch of will three or four times, and only when I used every ounce of willed force that I could employ was I able to move that body. I did get out of the car, walked to the tent, and lay down. In a few minutes, the party returned. My wife saw that something was wrong. She called the doctor. He tested the pulse; moved very quickly to get a small emergency case from which he gave me a small pellet which he said consisted of nitroglycerine, strychnine, and digitalis; continued to feel the pulse, which he said was unlike any other pulse he had ever felt; advised the use of black coffee throughout the night.

Now, this condition gradually disappeared and after two weeks there was no more weakness. But it so happened later when we were at our home that we had the radio on. This was in the days before television was general, if it existed at all. It so happened that at that time the one man in the group who had opened up the grave of Tutankhamen in Egypt, the one man of that group who had survived was speaking on the radio and gave a resume of the symptoms which he had. Apparently he had an attack of the same thing that had been fatal with all of the rest of the party, and it was a dead ringer for the symptoms which I had experienced. It is possible, therefore, although I did not realize this at the time, that I was in the midst of the dying process and had advanced to a degree in the motor phase of it; but if so, the psychical or conscious phase of the process, the cognitive phase, had not developed at all, for I was as fully conscious of the environment and of the organism as at any other time so far as I could tell. If this was, then, an early

stage in the dying process, then it confirms, as far as it goes, the Oriental conception that motor death precedes cognitive death.

Now, assuming that this is indeed the case, then certain consequences follow, namely, that the organism should be left undisturbed for such time as is necessary until the sensory death or cognitive death has had an opportunity to be completed, for, indeed, if the cognizing entity is still within that body, then the experience of autopsy, of embalming, of cremation, or of being buried in the ground, could be somewhat less than agreeable.

The question then arises, how long a period should intervene between the evidence of motor death and the handling of the corpse? The opinions which I have gathered vary quite widely from twelve hours, to twenty-four hours, to seventy-two hours, and in the case of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, the figure is even longer, namely, up to eighty-four or ninety-six hours. Here is an ambiguity which should be cleared up, for I do not imagine that anyone would enjoy being a witness of the final handling of his own corpse.

An interesting question has arisen in the form, is there such a thing as a natural death? Sir John Woodroffe, in his "Introduction" to *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* states that all primitive people regard death as abnormal, as due to some unfortunate circumstance. And there are others who question whether death is really normal. Actually, nearly all human beings pass over to the other side because of a lesion or malady. It would seem that lesion and malady is something which in a healthy society should not exist. Is there then any record in medical literature of death where there was no lesion or malady? This I do not know. Natural death would be a sort of running out of the life-stream, a normal coming to a terminus with no illness whatsoever. How long would life be if that were the case? There are statements that occur in Oriental literature that indicate that the cycle of life should be on the order of 200 years. Apparently this should be 210 which is the least common multiple of three cycles, namely, 3, 7, and 10; that the implication being that the normal course of life would be of such a length. The reason why then three score years and ten in the common span conceived to be normal would grow, then, out of the fact that it is a critical point, a sort of node where the least common multiple of the two cycles 7 and 10 come together. If, then, one could without lesion or malady pass this critical point there is a certain presumption he might conceivably live on to something on the order of 210 years before the life-energy ran down, and that would be a truly normal death.

Now, a problem arises, if we had an instance of normal death, the individual would not be ill. He would have no lesion or malady. He therefore would presumptively not be under the care of a physician and death would then take place without a death certificate from a competent witness. The legal situation is such that in such an instance autopsy would be required, and in the light of the probable truth that motor death precedes sensory death, we could have very unpleasant consequences for the individual himself. Thought should be given to this possibility.

Another question has occurred to me, what circumstances would be most favorable for an ideal transition? My own impression, which I hold quite strongly, is that it would be most ideal to make the transition in the midst of the psychosphere that one

has himself built up or in a psychosphere which he finds harmonious. This would imply that the hospital, which has a radically confusing psychosphere because of the presence of many people, many individuals of quite various temperaments and states of a psychical nature, could very well produce a condition most unfavorable for a favorable transition. I think this is a point of perhaps premier importance. To be sure, in the conditions of a hospital life may be drawn out a little longer, but it is my guess that a favorable transition is more important for the total cycle of the individual than a few more days of what might well be a highly crippled consciousness in a most inadequate body. Merely keeping an entity alive in a physical body is no sufficient medical objective. The aim is the destiny of the conscious entity, and a continuation of life in a greatly crippled and mayhap totally inadequate physical organism might have an injurious effect upon the total cycle of consciousness of that individual. For myself, I would want to face the event with my mind at maximum strength and acuity, and that that would offer the most favorable condition for facing the transition. This is something to think about.

And now I think I've said enough for the present.