

Purpose, Method, and Policy of this Work

Part 5 of 15

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Proceeding now with the process given in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* when there is someone who is dying, the first step is this: if it is possible, a lama or spiritual preceptor who is acquainted with the dying one should be present, and he repeats aloud to the dying one the facts and processes given in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* for the purpose of reminding him. It is there stated that in the dying process it is difficult to keep the mind fixed, and the reminding done by the preceptor is to reinforce the consciousness of the individual. This we can see is something that would tend to prevent the dying one from going into a dreamlike state where he would lose contact with the functions of discernment, judgment, discrimination, reason, and memory; but effects a reinforcing of that mind as the death process continues. This I can imagine would be a very valuable treatment of the process. Now, as the dying one enters into what is called the *bardo*, which may be regarded as a sort of vestibule state from which other destinations may follow, he enters first into the highest stage of all. This is contrary to the usual view in the West where we use the process of building up to a climax starting with a lower state and rising up gradually to a highest. It is given in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, in the anticlimactic order. The very first possibility is the highest possibility which the dying one has presented to him. At the moment of death, in the *Chikhai*, he is faced with that which is called the Clear Light, and he is admonished to accept the Clear Light, to enter into it, and become one with it if he has the power to do so. If he so succeeds in accepting the Clear Light and becoming one with it, he then and there acquires the state of the *Dharmakaya*, the full enrobement of a Buddha.

There is a second opportunity to achieve this same objective at a somewhat lower level, but if he fails to take it, the Clear Light, in either of these first two cases, then he has an opportunity at a somewhat lower level in the *Chonyid*, to take the Clear Light of a different color and quality; and if he can accept this Clear Light at this somewhat lower level and remain in it and function in it, he becomes a *Sambhogakaya*. But failing this, then at a still lower level, the name of which I have forgotten,¹ he has presented to him a less brilliant form of the Clear Light, and if this he can accept, then he becomes a *Nirmanakaya*. But failing in all of these three major opportunities, he proceeds through the normal processes of death, which the vast majority of people pass through.

In certain of these stages, he is said to have presented before him entities, some of which are like divine beings, and some of which are like malefic beings. He is told not to be attracted by the divine beings, and not to be repelled by the apparently malefic beings, but to reverse his natural impulse, ignore the divine beings and go toward the

¹ W. Y. Evans-Wentz, ed., *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 2: "These stages are known as *Chikhai*; second, *Chonyid*; and third, *Sidpa*."

apparently malefic beings. These are said not to be truly objective realities, but projections from himself done unconsciously. If he moves contrary to his natural impulse and goes toward the apparently malefic beings, he breaks the automatic condition of normal death and begins to have some command over the process. Failing in all of this, he enters into a zone from which he may proceed to various *lokas*—among them hellish worlds, which, nonetheless, if he is of the appropriate disposition, may attract him to worlds of other entities like *Devas*, and to heaven worlds. And beyond this, he enters into a state where he is drawn to potential future parents who are in the state of sexual union, and then enters the womb and proceeds to a new birth in the physical world. Such is a brief abstract of the picture.

There are important philosophic discussions of two fundamentally different forms of consciousness in this text. The two forms of importance are: *Rig-pa*, which is a consciousness not concerned with phenomena, not the consciousness of a self, not, therefore, a relative consciousness; but associated with it is another consciousness called *shes-rig*, which is a consciousness that can be aware of phenomena, that is subject-object consciousness, the common consciousness which we know as relative consciousness. If these two forms of consciousness can be fused, then the dying one becomes a *Dharmakaya* then and there and no longer is subject to involuntary rebirth.

When one compares the eschatology of Theosophy with the eschatology presented in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, the first impression is that they are incompatible, and one might be led to question their respective authenticities. But deeper study of the subject shows that a reconciliation is possible. The fact is that the eschatology of Theosophy is oriented to the experience of the ordinary non-adept and non-potentially adept individual who goes through the ordinary process either to a heaven world or a hellish world. In the case, however, of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, the primary emphasis is upon the acceptance of the Clear Light in at least one or another of its various levels, and all the rest is given only minor attention. The reconciliation is obvious when one bears in mind that the eschatology of the Theosophist is oriented to the experiences of the man in the world, the non-adept, and the one who is not yet seeking Fundamental Realization, and that therefore this is the normal experience either to pass through a *devachanic* state or, in the case of those of monumental evil, to pass into certain hellish domains of experience. On the other hand, in the case of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, the primary orientation is to those who are oriented to adeptship, and this makes a very important difference. The Clear Light is not within the range of acceptance of the unprepared individual, though according to *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, the opportunity is presented to all, possibly even to all creatures, but it is a possibility that is not practically available except to a very few who have been properly prepared.

What is the Clear Light? Dr. Carl G. Jung has given an answer which is of help here, namely, that light is always a symbol of consciousness. In other words, the Clear Light is nothing other than the consciousness which is called *Rig-pa*, a Consciousness which is not the consciousness of a self aware of an object, but pure, unborn Consciousness itself. This is to be found discussed in a minor degree in *The Secret Doctrine* under the heading “Absolute Consciousness,” but it is not presented in connection with the eschatology. This Consciousness is a consciousness that is not easily maintained, not easily recognized as consciousness, unless the preparation of the pilgrim

through many lives has been adequate. This is a Consciousness which might be called Field Consciousness, as it is not the consciousness of an entity nor a consciousness concerned with contents. But upon its breast, as it were, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* affirms that it supports another kind of consciousness called *shes-rig*, which is a consciousness aware of phenomena and thus a kind which we may call subject-object consciousness. Now, the difficulty in accepting this kind of Consciousness and dwelling in it is that it calls for a state of a very subtle and difficult balance. In the symbolism used by the Tibetans, the suggestion is given in this way: that to maintain this state is akin to balancing a pencil upon a thread which slopes downward, and have the pencil roll down that thread balanced all the way and not falling off the thread until it reaches the bottom—a matter of supreme difficulty as is obvious. To maintain this subtle balance one must be extremely still, unmoved, unaffected by any affect, any craving, any discrimination whatsoever until this becomes a normal condition in the background of our consciousness; and then, with great gentleness, the discriminating consciousness of *shes-rig* can begin to function without disturbing this fundamental Consciousness; and then step-by-step, the *sadhaka* can become fully active without destroying the ultimate steadiness in the background of his functioning consciousness. But this is not easy, and is a supreme accomplishment. To achieve it, is to become a full Buddha.

The *Tibetan Book of the Dead* does give some attention to the stages through which the ordinary human being passes—those that are good, indifferent, and bad. They may enter into different subjective domains corresponding to their desserts, their merits and demerits, and such as fall within the range of their understanding. Among these it mentions heaven worlds, and in the heaven worlds, there would be room for that which is called *Devachan* in the Theosophic eschatology. Thus, I find no essential incompatibility with the two treatments of this subject matter.

Let us now turn to the third source, namely, that contained in the essay called “The ‘Elixir of Life’.”² This is a very special subject matter. The material was written by one who went through part of the discipline but could not achieve the whole objective of the discipline, but, it is said, was given permission to formulate what he knew of the subject. The formulation, however, is explicitly incomplete and is of limited applicability. Nonetheless, since it was given, it must be assumed that there is a possibility for us here in this objective world to derive some value from it and to apply its principles at least to some degree; and for that reason, it is worth our while to give at least some attention to this among the various possibilities connected with that universal event called death.

The article called, “The ‘Elixir of Life’ ” appeared, as I have already said, in the early numbers of *The Theosophist* and was written by one, so it is said, who had entered upon the discipline but failed to qualify for its completion, but nonetheless was permitted to give a public statement of what he knew of the subject. The material given in the essay is manifestly incomplete, that the total knowledge required for carrying out this discipline is much larger than the material given; nonetheless, in view of the fact that he was

² G. M. (Godolphin Mitford?), “The ‘Elixir of Life’,” parts 1 and 2, *The Theosophist* 3, no. 6 (March 1882): 140-142 and no. 7 (April 1882): 168-171.

permitted to give this material public exposition, it is implied that it can be of use to him who reads of this material, or at least to some of those who read this material.

Three elements are emphasized in this discipline. The first and most important is to supplement the *autonomous will to live* of the organism by a *conscious will to live*. The autonomous will to live may be taken in the sense in which Schopenhauer uses such a term, that there is in the process of life itself a something that we may call a “natural will” which tends to preserve that life as far as may be. This goes on in spite of us, in spite of our conscious attitudes. It continues in all creatures, human, animal, and vegetable; and we may assume that it also so continues in the form of life which is manifest in the rocks themselves. But supplementing this by a conscious will to live is deliberately to *will* that I shall continue to live in this body and to maintain that determination unbroken as long as one can.

The second requirement is that during the period of the discipline, until there is a successful outcome, the individual withdraws from all public life, from the espousal of any particular causes, such as the advancement of the *Dharma*, and concentrates his effort upon the accomplishment of an expansion of life beyond the normal cycle of death—the idea being that having once accomplished that, there would then be a much increased period in which one could devote himself to causes, such as the redemption of mankind and all creatures, for a much longer period of time.

The third requirement is that one should strive to densen his next more interior vehicle—this presumptively being that which is commonly called the *astral body*, or more correctly the *linga sharira*. It is said that this can be so far densened that instead of being invisible to ordinary sight, it can be rendered objective to ordinary physical sight so that it could be made to appear as objective and visible as the gross physical body itself. It is intimated in the essay that there is more to the discipline than this, but the material that is involved beyond this point is held as esoteric. Nonetheless, we may assume that there was a serious purpose for presenting so much of this material, that it was not merely a matter of an intellectual curiosity, but rather that it was intended for such individuals as may be moved to attempt to apply so much of the discipline as is feasible. I have myself drawn the conclusion long ago that it was appropriate for any of us to apply this conscious will to live, as superimposed upon the autonomous will to live, as long as we could. I have indeed applied it myself for at least the last 35 years. It means that you determine to live whether living is attractive or not, whether it is painful or not, but hold the will to live unbroken as far as you possibly can and in so doing, presumptively, even though one may not be able to achieve the result of the full discipline, he may increase the span of his life and the period of his conscious working.

A fundamental principle is propounded in the essay to the effect that so long as an individual maintains the will to live consciously, he cannot die. He may lapse, and lapsing even briefly, he might die; but so long as the will to live is maintained, death is impossible. But to do this might very well result in his having to maintain that will in the face of grave physical suffering and in the face, also, of a distaste for outer physical life; to maintain it, thus, against wish and inclination and to keep it unbroken. When the essay says that so long as this will is maintained death is impossible, there are some problems involved. One can see situations in which the physical body would certainly be destroyed, as for instance being immersed in fire, or as being subjected to the massive

explosion of nitroglycerin which would pulverize it into microscopic portions, or by being submerged in an avalanche or a rock slide, or a fall from a cliff. Destruction of the gross physical in such a case seems to be inevitable; but suppose the will to live is maintained, there would be something that would not die, and this I suggest is, in terms of that which I have enunciated before, the preservation of discernment, judgment, discrimination, reason, and memory, and that so long as one holds this, he does not really die. However, apart from such extreme situations as I have just outlined, the implication is that the body does not die in the ordinary sense, but there is this modified statement in the essay. Meanwhile, having densened the next subtle vehicle, presumptively the astral, to the point where it has become visible, the gross physical body, in spite of everything, begins to slough off, and in its place there appears a replica of it which is a densened astral vehicle—one that can appear among men with the same appearance as it had before in the gross physical body; an entity that wears clothes and, I am told, is capable of eating our kind of food; an entity that can move among men, apparent to men just as the gross physical had been before, but still not a true gross physical body.

Now, this introduces a possibility of an enormous extension of the total life cycle, which, let me remind you, means a continuation of one's self as the John Smith that was born at a certain time and at a certain point in space and with a certain group of experiences that have been remembered, with a continuation and continuity of discernment, judgment, discrimination, reason, and memory, that he continues without a break in this continuum—a very important point and indeed that constitutes the essence of an extended lifetime. The period of normal life in a gross physical body as given in this essay is considerably more than that which we currently experience. As everyone will be remembered, in the Christian bible the statement is made that the normal cycle of life is threescore and ten years, and it is about that length of time that most of us live who have not been submitted to killing disease or accidents of any sort—a period of about 70 years plus or minus 20 years or so. But the essay gives as the normal period which we should be living, apart from this discipline, as on the order of 200 years. What appears to be involved here is this, that it is a least common multiple of three cycles, namely, the cycles 3, 7, and 10. The implication is that at nodal points of these cycles, there is a critical place where continuation of life becomes difficult. The critical point which is called the threescore and ten is the least common multiple of cycles 7 and 10. If a third cycle comes into the picture of the order of 3, the least common multiple would be 210 years, and we might have a critical point at the second place where we get the least common multiple of 7 and 10, or 140 years. There is some evidence that among those people who live in certain places of the earth and who attain an unusual extension in the life cycle, that it may well be that they even reach this second critical point. One, who is the oldest known, is said to have died just a few years ago at the age of 168. But the end of the discipline, so the essay maintains, is to increase the cycle of life well beyond 210 years; in fact, into something on the order of 1000 years or more, when there is another critical period to pass which would call for a further effort.

I have some general remarks to add upon the subject of death which I think are of premier importance. First, we'll consider certain statements made by Dr. Carl G. Jung, who had a very interesting experience with respect to the after-death states wherein he finally succeeded in returning in answer to a demand. He makes, in the end, this general observation: that on the surface, as seen from the outside, death is brutal. It is brutal for

the reason that it separates the individual from his beloved, who may live in this world; the inanimate corpse no longer carries that consciousness and those qualities which may have made it a valued entity in the world. The separation is a painful break from this point of view. But viewed from the other side, Dr. Jung points out it's like a mystic marriage, an experience of the most extreme delightfulness. There's another side to the story of death.

Now, there are certain considerations that I'd like to bring in here that may seem like going far afield. In the contrast between what we know of this other consciousness, that which we contact in sleep and apparently contact in death on one side, and the forms of consciousness which we know upon this side, my reflections have led me into the distinction between the thoughts that think themselves and the thoughts that are the result of the most intense, concentrated, directed thinking.

In the dream it appears, as the result of my study of it, that the distinction between thought and action no longer exists, thought and action seem to be one, events just happen. Whereas, in our waking consciousness, if we are dealing with a problem of some construction or some activity, we can distinguish a body of thought which considers various alternatives and finally chooses to effectuate one or another of these alternatives by the appropriate outer action of the body. The thinking is in one domain and the acting in another. I think, I choose, and then act. But it is not so in the dream. Here we are dealing in waking consciousness with directed thinking and then a willed action chosen by that thought.

Now, beyond this, dealing in the field of thought alone, there is a thinking that thinks itself and there is a thinking that leads to the most difficult kind of effort—effort that is consciously willed and may require the highest willed concentration which one is able to achieve. I have known this, and I may give a report of the experience to present the issue.

On two occasions in my academic career, I had problems presented to me that constituted, essentially, the examination for a course: one was to write up the transcendental and metaphysical deduction of the categories in Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*; and the other was in a course dealing with the foundations of geometry, and involved a problem of substantial difficulty. In preparing in each case for the handling of the problem presented to me, I first read over the material at ordinary concentration and derived no understanding whatsoever; then I pitched up my will, drove the mind to the intensest concentration that I could manage. In each case, I broke down the problem, produced a result that earned an A grade, thus proving that it was correctly resolved. Now, the effort involved resistance on the part of the organism. It tried to escape from the effort. It acted as though it actually suffered as a result of the effort. In fact, in each case there was an experience of a sharp pain in the center of the head, as it seemed. It took everything I could master to make the results come forth. There was no slightest appearance here of thoughts thinking themselves, but rather of a thought that required conscious, willed effort of the intensest sort.

Now, what we have here is a contrast between two kinds of thinking. Aurobindo, for instance, affirms that thoughts essentially come of themselves, that "I" do not think, that the Self does not think, but rather simply selects the thoughts—

selects, accepts, and rejects without effort; and the thoughts that are rejected disappear and the thoughts that are accepted go on to fulfill their normal destiny. I am familiar with this process also, but it was not that involved in breaking down these problems that belong to the academic days.

The contrast between these two kinds of thinking is brought out in connection with my two principal published works. In the case of *Pathways Through to Space*, the thinking was all easy, largely moving of itself, dealing with a material that seemed utterly simple and obvious. In fact, it seemed to be dealing with an obviousness that usually escapes our attention. On the other hand, when I wrote *The Philosophy of Consciousness Without an Object*, I aimed it at the professional thinker. And here a point must be made. It was, as I found later, not understandable by *any* professional reader, but only by the philosophically trained professional reader. The other professionals are apt to have just as much difficulty as the layman, so I found out later. In this book there appears the “Aphorisms of Consciousness Without an Object.” When I wrote these aphorisms, the writing was perhaps the easiest of any I have ever performed. They wrote themselves. There was a sense of vision and of order that governed the writing, and they seemed completely clear. But I realized that they did not meet the canons of philosophic discourse, and so I wrote a series of commentaries upon these aphorisms, and they proved to be among the most difficult writing I ever undertook. It involved, here, directed thinking and thinking that often was very difficult to consummate. There thus is represented here two ways of thought very clearly.

The thought that thinks itself has certain qualities that distinguish it. It reaches, for one thing, from the banal and the simplistic up to the highest reaches of metaphysical insight capable of comprehension by a human kind of mind. But in all cases there is a sense of ease of comprehension, a sense of assurance, a sense of knowing rather than of seeking to understand. It is as though one stood upon the peak of understanding itself and was seeking to translate that understanding downward into the ordinary consciousness.

It has dawned upon me that here is an example of the ancient problem known as the squaring of the circle. This is not simply to be understood in the narrow geometric sense—in that sense the problem has been solved—but rather in the symbolic sense of the word. We find that the problem has been of supreme importance among the ancients; and in fact, it is known that the Great Pyramid of Giza is really a monument based upon this problem. Now, what is suggested here is that when one moves in that level of consciousness which is symbolized by the circle, we have this spontaneous comprehension and understanding where everything seems clear within its own domain. Here thought is spontaneous and easy, and understanding is very clear indeed. In fact, one feels that he’s dealing with the utterly obvious. Then, there is the problem consisting of how to render this manifest objectively. That is symbolized by the squaring of the circle. The squaring is rendering it measurable, in other words, conceptually comprehensible. But the relationship between the circle and the square involves the transcendental number π , which involves a non-terminating, non-repeating decimal, and that in turn means that a representation in square terms, or clear conceptual terms, can never be made with complete definition. The process of translation from the circle to the square calls for laborious thought. It’s the movement from the unmanifest to the manifest, from the subjective to the objective. In the purely

subjective order, all is simple, clear, and obvious; but in rendering it manifest, one faces the supreme difficulties, and for that reason the thought is the directed, laborious thought.

Now, if one upon death after having reached the threshold of *Nirvana*, there would be no need for the development of the objective thought at all if one accepted the *nirvanic* withdrawal. But if, on the other hand, one rejected the *nirvanic* withdrawal, for the reasons given in *The Voice of the Silence* and the Kwan-Yin vow, then the effort to manifest becomes important and the labor of the directed thought must be accepted. It is not enough for one to withdraw into the Transcendent himself. It is necessary that all creatures should participate in that withdrawal. And beyond this, is there a reason, a valid profound reason, for the manifestation of the unmanifest, or has all of the production of a manifestation been something like a divine mistake and that the end of religion is the correction of a divine error? I do not hold this latter view. I hold rather to the view that the manifestation serves some fundamental purpose and that therefore the labor of rendering manifest is a valid labor and should be undertaken.

The relevance of the discussion concerning the two kinds of thinking with respect to the subject matter of death lies in this: that the movement which leads to the thought which thinks itself is the movement towards the mystic death, which leads to an immediate rebirth in another kind of consciousness. The ordinary death is an analogue of this, but it does not reach so far. It is in each case a movement in the direction of deep introversion, but the introversion of the mystic death is by far the deeper of the two. The ultimate goal of the mystic death is the *nirvanic* withdrawal, taken by itself. It is the entering into the ultimate glory. The ordinary death is a partial, deeply downgraded replica of this; and still further, the falling to sleep is a still lesser manifestation of the same event. He who dies enters a more interior kingdom. He who dies in the mystic sense enters into the ultimate domain of inmost awareness, of the completely sweet and fulfilling. The door of death is greater than the door which we call birth to this outer domain. We should reverse our valuations. Birth here is death to that which lies beyond; and birth here is an initiation into labors in a narrowed consciousness. Ordinary death is another door to the fulfillments of those labors in outer consciousness, be they noble or be they ignoble. But the mystic death is the great birth into the Eternal. We see here only the outer fact of death, not its inner fact. Death is to be valued as really being the greater birth. The inner world is the ultimate world of peace, delight, understanding, and fulfillment.

We proceed now to the consideration of the tenth postulate, which runs this way: creation of an existent out of absolute nothingness is also an impossibility. This means simply that law rules and not the arbitrary fiats of a god. And this implies that man can depend upon the power resident in this universal whole. He may know that the fruits of his action will be according to law and that arbitrariness does not govern. There is no miracle, but law rules all. There are subtle sides we may well believe, or even know, in the action of the law, so that he who knows the law in its deeper ramifications may produce that which to the ordinary individual is an impossibility, but there is no miracle here—a miracle being defined as an action outside the law. Part of the meaning of the word '*Dharma*' is just this, that the law is dependable and is supreme—not a law arbitrarily legislated by a divinity, but a law which governs all beings, those of the stature of gods as well as all lesser creatures.

In our common parlance, two meanings are attached to the word 'law', one is the legislative meaning, the other is the meaning attached to the word by natural science. In the case of legislated law, there is an entity or group of entities who'd fabricated the law. The law as I use the term is not to be understood in this sense. The law is rather to be understood in the sense of natural law as the scientists use the term. A legislated law may be violated; a natural law cannot be violated. Whatever action or thought or motivation governs in an individual, brings its consequences according to the law whatever they may be. This all implies that we have ruling this universe a principle of complete dependability.