

# Meaning of Death

## Part 3 of 3

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In the self-devised yogic discipline which I had worked out during the years of searching, there were three elements: one was philosophic orientation, this was material that would be found in *The Secret Doctrine* and most particularly in the philosophy of Sri Shankaracharya; second, the self-analysis which Shankara has developed so thoroughly; and third, aspiration. All other elements of methodology played no part in it, although I had experimented to some extent with them—such as breath culture and trying to take the postures. But I abandoned this, for I found no value coming from them.

The self-analysis consists in this—and this is the critical part of the process: a search for what I really am, I, the Self, really am. What is my true identity? I easily saw, first of all, that I most emphatically am not this physical body, this empiric entity that moves upon this plane of being. I saw clearly that it was merely a vehicle. Equally easily, I saw it was not the vital being, the subtle processes of life itself. Third, also easily, that it was not the sensuous being. I had some difficulty in breaking the identification with the conceptual being, the intellectual entity, the thinker; but I saw, without too great difficulty, that indeed I witnessed thought rather than was the thinker. There was a considerable difficulty breaking the identification with the concrete personal ego, that which says, I am I and none other. Here I was stalled for a time until I finally realized that I am that which is never an object before consciousness. I am the true Self or the *Atman* which can never be placed before consciousness, but is present in all awareness whatsoever, the pure subject which never is an object. That effected the breakthrough. The stripping down to the pure subject is equivalent to reducing it to a bare point as a center around which the whole universe of objects and of consciousness states revolves. This I called the “point-I.”

Now at this level, the experiment begins. A movement was induced which may be called an ascension in consciousness. The ascension proceeded for a distance and then there was a break in the continuity, something like a point of discontinuity, where there was a momentary blackout, and I found myself not as identified with a bare point, but with an illimitable sphere which embraced the whole universe of objects, and that means the whole cosmos both subtle and gross. I was identical with this sphere. And the sense here is so strong of a universal inclusion that I found that I was no longer, while in this state, identified with a particular personality, the particular entity that was known as Franklin Wolff, but that I was equally close to all entities whatsoever. A thought even crossed my mind: will I again find myself identified with that particular entity? I did, but I don't know how that happened because of the sense of being so close to all entities whatsoever. Then there was a return from this state of consciousness to the state in which I was a bare point center with an environment of objects around me,

which witnessed not only objects but states of consciousness such as the various wishes or the various affections.

Now, when in the state where I was identical with a sphere that embraced the whole cosmos, the previous state of being a point, a bare point surrounded by a universe of objects, seemed quite unreal; but, when I returned back to that state, the state of being identical with an all inclusive illimitable sphere also seemed unreal. Nonetheless, this did not control my judgment as to the relative reality of the two states. The feeling was strong, but I was able to discount it. I knew that the state of the illimitable sphere was the more ultimate even though when returned to the point-I state it seemed to be unreal. Because the relative consciousness was on the sidelines witnessing all this, I was enabled to embrace the two states in my process of evaluation. If it had not been on the sidelines, I might have been controlled by the impression of unreality which was felt when in one state with respect to the other state. All this tends to confirm the statement in *The Secret Doctrine*.<sup>1</sup>

As a sort of footnote, there are some features concerning this experience, or imperience, which I would like to discuss here. I've spoken of a *point of discontinuity* in the movement from what I called "the shift from point-I to Space-I."<sup>2</sup> The term 'discontinuity' is derived from mathematics. In most curves with which we operate, the development is in the form of a continuum, which implies that a small change in the value of  $x$  has corresponding to it a small change in the value of  $y$  or a small change in the differential coefficient; but at a point of discontinuity the curve has a break in it, a sudden break in direction or a sudden lapse in space, and here a small change in the value of the  $x$  may result in a radical difference in the value of  $y$  or of the differential coefficient. Only a few of you will be able to follow this, but it was a bit of knowledge that was very helpful to me in the interpretation of this event. Moving from the point-I to the Space-I involved a discontinuity analogous to that of taking the reciprocal of zero, which is infinity, or contrawise the reciprocal of infinity, which is zero. There is not a continuous process here, but rather a sudden break from one orientation to a very different orientation. This may be taken into connection with certain statements of Shankara, particularly in his *Crest Jewel*. In the *Crest Jewel* he says that the *Atman* is the status of the *Brahman* in creatures. The *Brahman* is the all in all from which all of the apparent universe is derived. It is the ultimate reality with respect to which the whole universe of objects, and of all of the modes of feeling and so forth, are only appearances. Now, a fundamental Realization often regarded as the ultimate Realization, but in point of fact is not, is the Realization that I am the *Atman*. There is also reported other Realization in the form of the *Atman* is the *Brahman*. We get two terms in a syllogism here: the "I am the *Atman*," the "*Atman* is the *Brahman*," therefore, "I am the *Brahman*." This also can be known from Realization directly and it is so reported in the literature that the *Atman* is the *Brahman*, and vice-versa. Therefore, when one realizes the *Brahman*, it is the all embracer. When he realizes the *Atman*, it is the bare point in an environment of all objects. The two are tied together. I, in *Pathways*, spoke of the illimitable sphere as Space-I, but I could logically just as

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<sup>1</sup> H. P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine* vol. 1 (Wheaton, Ill.: The Theosophical Press, 1893, 71-72).

<sup>2</sup> For the definition of 'imperience', see the audio recordings "General Discourse on the Subject of My Philosophy," part 10, and "On My Philosophy: Extemporaneous Statement." In speaking of introceptual knowledge, Wolff says, "The third function therefore gives you imperience, not experience. It is akin to sense perception in the sense of being immediate, but is not sensuous."

well say the illimitable sphere, which contains not only all the objective universe, but all subtle differentiation that there may be, is the *Brahman*. He who knows himself as the *Atman*, by implication is also the *Brahman*, and it merely requires a further advance in the hierarchy of Realizations to know this directly.

At this point I would like to make a parenthetical statement concerning a possible error. One could, with the Realization of “I am *Brahman*” have something like a massive inflation, and that would imply that the Realization was imperfect. There is an Indian story that bears upon this and to which I have referred at other times. In the story there was a certain *chela* under the direction of a guru. It is said he attained the Realization of his identity with the *Brahman* and was enjoying the glow of that imperience. The two, at a certain time, were walking along a trail in the woods when an elephant with a *mahout* on his back approached them in the same trail. The guru stepped aside; the *chela* remained on the trail. The *mahout* called to him to step off the trail so the elephant could pass. He did not do so. Then when the elephant came up to him, the elephant lifted him by means of the trunk off of the trail; and then the *chela* was very downcast. He said to his guru, how is it that though I realized that I was *Brahman*, yet the elephant was able to lift me off of the trail, since the *Brahman* is that which underlies all things including the elephant? And the guru said, you did not listen to the *Brahman* that spoke to you through the words of the *mahout*, and so the *Brahman*, in the appearance of an elephant, lifted you off of the trail. The *chela* had made the error of exclusive identification. The full experience, or imperience, of the Realization “I am *Brahman*” implies also *tat tvam asi*, so art thou. In other words, it is a universal reality and does not give to the one who has the Realization the exclusive position of being the *Brahman* while all other creatures are other than *Brahman*, but rather that he, along with all other creatures, are part and parcel of the *Brahman*. And in that case, there is no inflation. In the West it would be equivalent to saying, “I am God.” A statement, which if taken with the right meaning, is true, but can be taken in a false meaning and lead to an inflation that could become even quite dangerous. This is just a note along the way.

In my perusal of Buddhistic literature, I have come across the statement that when the Blessed One died, he entered *Paranirvana*. The death is referred to as the attainment of *Paranirvana*. This I found to be a very thought provoking statement, assuming of course its basic validity. The first impression one has when he runs across the concept of a *Paranirvana*, a higher sort of *Nirvana*, that it would be a more profound withdrawal from consciousness of the *sangsaric* domain. But further study reveals this: that *Paranirvana* is not a movement in the same direction as the *nirvanic* consciousness, but rather a state which embraces both the *nirvanic* and the *sangsaric*, that it is therefore not a deeper withdrawal from the *sangsaric*, but a more inclusive state of consciousness, so that one becomes, as it were, a free mover between the *nirvanic* and *sangsaric*. This is probably the highest state of which we have reference, and certainly would be a state of supreme power. The conception of a fixed and a non-fixed *Nirvana* is to be found in the Buddhistic *sutras*. The non-fixed *Nirvana* would seem to be a state corresponding to that which is called *Paranirvana*. The entity who has reached this condition would be capable of moving either way and embrace both in his consciousness—no doubt an exalted state. But there is an implication here that is of very great importance. The suggestion from the literature is that the state of *Paranirvana* was not attained at the Enlightenment under the

Bodhi tree, but at death when the physical body was dropped, and this in turn implies that the total possibility, the highest possibility of Realization is culminated at the time of physical death, provided there has been an enlightening Realization during lifetime. It implies a possibility at the time of physical death, not necessarily that the process is automatic; therefore, the ability to achieve the highest possibility at the time of physical death is a matter of supreme importance. Physical death for some, a very few, may be the moment of the highest achievement of all, yet there's every reason to believe that this is a step of utmost difficulty. It means, however, that there is nothing more important in life than a preparation for that event which men call death in order that it may be realized as a supreme initiation.

In *The Mahatma Letters* the one known to us as Koot Hoomi has made the statement that man is the only free entity in nature, and he is a free entity because of his reason.<sup>3</sup> Other creatures are dominated by autonomous consciousness, and are therefore not free. It would seem that this freedom is a quality or a condition of supreme value. To be sure, the freedom may be misused, and man, by such misuse, may effect his own fall to an inferior condition, but on the other side, by the appropriate use of this freedom he may rise high and attain possibilities that are not the result of automatic process.

Not all that one reads about in the field of yoga gives a high place to the rational capacity, as in the case of the Zen Buddhism. Here it would seem that rational capacity, the use of discriminative and judging thought, is given an inferior position and is discouraged. Now, I would grant that if the end envisaged as of the yoga path is simply *nirvanic* withdrawal, a complete separation from the *Sangsara* and the evolution, then there is no need for the rational capacity. One could withdraw in a purely exalted, autonomous consciousness. But if, on the other hand, the end is viewed as becoming a Master in nature, one who can work with nature, not only to effect the liberation of those who are bound in *sangsaric* consciousness, but also to facilitate the evolution as a process that has valid purpose behind it and is not merely something like a great mistake. If so, then retention of the power to reason and to use the rational faculties would be an essential part of mastery, and is a power that should be retained. This would mean that the journey through the *sangsaric* experience out here in this life is a matter of major importance. To be sure, this life is for the most part painful. There is much in it that is less than desirable; nonetheless, in the struggle, more or less difficult, which we have when in embodied consciousness, serves to bring forth a power of major importance—the power to be a free agent, because one has become a rational entity, and then to become ultimately a Master working with nature, working consciously and voluntarily in the advancing of the purposes underlying the development of all manifestation. Therefore, I would say the journey through life is not something to be undervalued. To be sure, it involves an obscuration of consciousness in a certain sense; and, to be sure, it involves the meeting with suffering, and involves also the possibility of failure. But, on the other hand, it makes possible the attainment of free, rational capacity which may become a permanent acquisition for the movement of consciousness thereafter. I submit that mastery, not *nirvanic* withdrawal, is the supreme achievement which lies before man.

This is my final word in this tape.

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<sup>3</sup> A. T. Barker, ed., *The Mahatma Letters* (Adyar: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1923), 57.

## Postscript

I find that I was too precipitous in saying that the last statement I made was my final word for this tape, since the meditations have continued.

There's a thought that occurred to me in connection with certain developments in our subatomic physics. It has been found that in connection with the process of increasing the energy potential of an atom, that the electrons, which are conceived of as rotating about the nucleus, take at a certain point a jump to a larger orbit. Now, as I remember the physics, the process appears to be of this sort: that the electrons can take only certain orbits, not any kind of orbit, around the nucleus; that when the energy is increased, the electron jumps from a smaller orbit to a specific larger orbit that has a certain numerical relationship to the earlier orbit; that in this jump it has taken no time, but is instantaneous and does not pass over the space between the two orbits. This involves a break in continuity, and what is called a "quantum jump." The same thing is found to be true, apparently, of the phenomenon of light. Light seems to be in the form of photons, such that there is not a continuous increase in light intensity, but a series of jumps—one photon, to two photons, to three photons, and so on, or to 1,000 photons, or 1,001 photons. There is no such thing as a photon and a half or any fractional addition, but actual integral additions. This violates the principle of the continuum and introduces an element of "jumps," as it is called, or sudden leaps from one level to another.

The similarity of this process that has been discovered in this century in physical research to the relationship that seems to hold between the planes of consciousness and being is impressive and very suggestive. It would seem that the movement from one plane of consciousness to another involves something like a photon jump—an absence of a continuum of development in consciousness between the two planes. We do not move from plane *A* to plane *B* by a gradual process, but by a sudden leap. This is where the difficulty arises. We are on one plane and then on the other with a lapse of continuity between. And because of this, we find it difficult to achieve an integration between the different planes of consciousness. I have suggested that a method, which somehow or other I was able to apply, could be successfully employed in the various cases of these jumps, namely, a division in the consciousness so that one consciousness stood upon the sidelines while another consciousness made the jump from one plane to the other through a momentary blackout. How far this method can be applied, I do not know. If one could apply it to the process of dying, keeping one consciousness, the relative consciousness, on the sidelines, as it were, unbroken when the leap from objective consciousness to the inner consciousness beyond the transition of death, then one could have the experience of dying and knowing that he had passed within. I've used the word 'death' here with the meaning of transit or transition. Perhaps these two terms would be better. It is the critical point because of the break in the continuum that is afforded. If we can make the transition and know that we are making it, knowing that we are leaving one level and passing to another, then we have achieved a certain kind of mastery in this process.

A lifetime here may be likened unto a class in school, possibly even a class in a university. The death that comes at the end of the life may be viewed as a final examination. If one succeeds in accepting the Clear Light at its highest level, he has

become a *Dharmakaya*, and has graduated from that class. He no longer faces obligatory reincarnation. If he does incarnate, it is a voluntary act. But if he fails to so qualify, but succeeds in taking the Clear Light at a lower level, he may qualify as a *Sambhogakaya*. In the first case he would get a grade of A+. In the second case, a grade of B, or so, and he still would have to incarnate until he can qualify by taking the Clear Light at its highest level. But failing so to qualify in these two cases, he may still succeed in accepting the Clear Light at a still lower level and become a *Nirmanakaya*; in other words, with a low grade but not a failure. He still would have to reincarnate until he fully qualified as a *Dharmakaya*. But failing all this, he gets a non-passing grade, and so is forced to continue his incarnations. He does this a hundred times, a thousand times, ten thousand times, a hundred thousand times—taking the same class over again, and again, until the time will come when he can fully compete the mastery of the experiences and the problems which life brings to him, and is fulfilled as a *Dharmakaya* or complete Buddha. That is the goal which lies before us, and we will have to return here again, and again, and again, until we are able to pass at last.