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THE METAPHYSICAL VIEW OF DEATH AND LIFE AFTER DEATH

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INTRODUCTION

Humanity throughout the ages have seen death as something loathsome and gruesome; something dreadful, something preferable to avoid at all cost--that is, if a choice were given--but without any other option, are forced to succumb for lack of any power over its occurrence. Anticipating the termination of life at an unexpected moment and the possible prospect of annihilation of self-identity, humanity views death as a state or condition to be feared. This fear is sustained when all around, most of the dying are seen to seemingly suffer in anguish and in agony in the death process. The fear of death is actually man's fear of the unknown, and it indicates man's bondage to his ignorance which ultimately grows into superstitious expressions. Because of the underlying fear, man attempts laboriously to postpone death through medicine and other means; medical science has, however, not yet found a way to prolong life indefinitely--or to ease one's fears, to offer solace, or to answer profound questions regarding this ancient mystery. Knowing the true nature of death releases man from his bondage to his fears and to the clinging of his varied superstitions pertaining to it. Such knowledge based upon personal experience may be acquired--beliefs to the contrary places an illusory boundary upon the unfolding soul. Alice Bailey, writing for the Tibetan in "A Treatise on White Magic," refers to man's fears regarding death :

"The mind of man is so little developed that fear of the unknown, terrors of the unfamiliar, and attachment to form have brought a situation where one of the most beneficent occurrences in the life cycle of an incarnating Son of God is looked upon as something to be avoided and postponed for as long a time as possible." (1972:494)

We can see from her statement that one of the factors that causes man to struggle against death, is the attachment to form. The identification of the Self with the physical form misleads one into thinking that the dissolution of the physical body results in the annihilation of the Self. Sri Sankaracharya, the eminent exponent of Advaita Vedanta, taught that the deluded mind with its beliefs in the reality of form causes bondage to Maya, or Cosmic Illusion. Philosophically speaking, this is the state of duality, and unless man perceives the One Reality underlying the dualistic worlds, and as his true nature, he lives in fear and in a state of slavery. What is Real cannot be destroyed, what is unreal does not exist apart from our false perception and understanding. This is avidya, or ignorance. To apprehend the true state of things is to be truly liberated from death. One's consciousness is expanded and raised to a divine estate when Reality is known and death seen for what it really is. What Bailey does not mention is that the soul-process of "death" may be experienced in the meditative state. Mystics call this "dying while living," and advanced mystics have reached a state where they may predetermine and trigger the time and process of their physical and mystical deaths--these are executed with divine permission. Mystical deaths offers one the opportunity to acquire the beautiful vision called *Marifatullah* by Islamic gnostics. We will not dwell on this mystical aspect in this paper but focus more on the physical side of death and dying.

Before continuing further, let us first provide a definition of the branch of study dealing with death. The study is properly termed, "Thanatology" (from Greek thanatos, "death"). The Encyclopedia Britannica explains it thus :

". . . the description or study of death and dying and the psychological mechanisms of dealing with them. Thanatology is concerned with the notion of death as popularly perceived and especially with the reactions of the dying, from whom it is felt much can be learned about dealing with death's approach . . . Generally, psychologists have agreed that there are two overall concepts concerning death that help in understanding the simultaneous processes of living and dying. The "my death versus your death" concept emphasizes the irrational belief that while "your death" is a certainty, an exemption may be made in "my case." The second concept, "partial deaths versus total extinction" stresses the belief that by experiencing the bereavement following the deaths of friends and relatives, a person is brought as close as possible to realizing "partial death." These experiences colour the individual's attitude toward greater personal losses, culminating with the ultimate loss, life itself.

"Thanatology also examines attitudes toward death, the meaning and behaviours of bereavement and grief, and the moral and ethical questions of euthanasia, organ transplants, and life support."

Thanatology deals with death from various perspectives, from the cultural and anthropological standpoint, the clinical, biological, religious, metaphysical, etc. Death itself is defined in dictionaries as "an extinction of life," the "ceasing to be."

Ordinarily, the average person would avoid talking or thinking about death. When chosen as a topic for discussion, for instance, the subject is frequently and promptly relegated to the background of life's many "evil" necessities and often spoken in hushed tones. Death has always been a taboo subject in unenlightened social circles. Man's present negative attitude and understanding of the

nature of death may cause self-inflicted suffering, torment, and pain. Man's lack of understanding of the truth of death is mainly the result of a deficiency in the knowledge of spiritual verities, and in an absence of spiritual awareness. Religious doctrines and materialistically-oriented educational systems have inadvertently encouraged man's negative attitude towards death. They paint horrible conditions of the after-death state, ranging from eternal punishment and torture in fashions exceeding the cruelties and atrocities of the Inquisition, to the materialistic view of nihilism and annihilation. Religion and the academic institutions offer no real comfort or solace to those whose loved ones have faced the great change. The only recourse for individuals seeking a greater understanding of death is by acquiring metaphysical knowledge concerning its nature and by developing a greater awareness of multi-dimensional life; for life simply is, it cannot cease to be. Life is Real and eternal for it is not compounded. Forms are compounded, therefore, they are evanescent. Clinging and being attached to what is temporal, and from the point of view of the Absolute as "illusory," makes one often feel threatened to life's varied circumstances.

In order to be relieved from suffering in the form of bereavement and anguish, humanity as a whole would have to be re-educated as to the true nature of death, its value, its process, and regarding the state of life after the great transition. One's frame of reference for personal existence has to be expanded to include multi-dimensional worlds, to one's immortal aspect, and not circumscribed to physical matter. Concomitant to this cleansing process of the mind of its false beliefs and notions concerning death--both the result of social conditioning and brainwashing--there should also be a search, an investigation into the true purpose of life. For to pass through transition not knowing the purpose of one's personal existence is to have lived in vain. It is said that to die well we must first learn to live well, and this is true, for our negative karma and our wrong attitudes and apprehension of death causally leads us to pain and suffering in the bardo, the death process--of which we will deal in later chapters. For this reason it is incumbent upon us all to embark upon the study of thanatology--the science of death, as understood by metaphysics, to live a worthwhile life, to relieve the sense of suffering, and to efface our misgivings regarding death and the after-death state. Death is simply a transformation, a process analogous to a caterpillar-turned-butterfly through metamorphosis.

Our "fate" and experiences in the afterlife and in the death process are both determined largely by our karma, beliefs, knowledge (or lack of it), purity, righteousness, and understanding of the mission and purpose of our sojourn in the physical plane. Life in this physical dimension should be seen as an opportunity to mature and to liberate oneself from all mortal restrictions even though functioning through an organic vessel. Some people experiencing the vicissitudes and hardships of life often complain that it was not their wish to be born, implying that it was not their wish to live or to be here in this physical world, and yet, in this they contradict themselves by expressing a fear of death, saying that they do not wish to die--implying that they wish to live. Such inconsistencies reflect the state of non-awareness of spiritual realities and verities. Death should be perceived as an initiation into the higher mysteries of Nature. It is thus one of the most important events in one's spiritual journey. Mastery of one's life, of one's lower self, and service to the Higher Intelligences, is the wise preparation for this great initiatory experience.

In ancient cultures, the existence of the afterlife was taken for granted. In former eras there have been concepts or beliefs in the afterlife such as the "Happy Hunting Grounds" "Olympus" and the "Elysian Fields." The spiritual instincts of early and modern man have always rebelled against the idea of death, and rightly so, for death in reality is non-existent, but the average person is normally unaware and ignorant of this truth, or he chooses to ignore it for some unknown reason. Death should not be looked upon as an ultimate chapter or conclusion of one's life, for death is simply a change, a passing, a transition to a different plane of consciousness, a different dimensional activity. Orthodox, or conservative scientists in conformity with Einstein's equation, " $E=mc^2$," tell us that nothing in the universe can be destroyed, that there can only be a transformation, a change or conversion of the

patterns of energy-fields; this is the economy of life which is acknowledged as a law of the Cosmos; and yet, although furnished with this scientific theorem and understanding, these same scientists are skeptical concerning the survival of the personal consciousness or "awareness-principle," as Tibetan Buddhists designate it. Mainstream science, although faced with many positive data concerning the survival of the consciousness acquired by researchers in the paranormal and related fields, still express incredulity as to its reality. Why is it that the life-force, soul, and consciousness are not seen by these scientists as energy-fields, just as all objects down to their minuscule component, the electrons, protons and neutrons are known to be such? More succinctly, why do scientists not recognize the soul? Is it, perhaps, because of the unconscious opposition and antagonism towards Religion that has long persecuted Science in the centuries past? From the occult point of view, group minds form living entities or currents of energy with certain qualities in accord with the thoughts and feelings generated by the originators or individuals of the same group-mind. This is called an egregore. Such egregores may have an indefinite life span, living for centuries, and influencing all that comes within its mental and emotional force fields. It is through these egregores that an individual, a scientist, for instance, living in the distant past may influence a scientist living in the present. Prejudicial feelings toward Religion and its tenets, such as its declaration of the living soul that survives the dissolution of the physical body, may therefore, be carried from the past to the present. As can be understood from the above, the antagonism of scientists may not be truly directed to the concept of the afterlife, or soul-survival, but towards religion as a whole, and this discord is an unconscious feeling--the result of centuries of maltreatment in the hands of Religion--executed in the name of the Almighty.

Investigators and exponents of mainstream science, however, have not proved in their laboratories the cessation of life, and the non-survival of consciousness after death. On the contrary, they are very close to discovering and proving its reality and validity. It would seem that the Veil of Isis is thinning; nevertheless, the question of the survival of consciousness, we feel, can only be satisfactorily and adequately answered to us by personal experience--through phenomena such as NDEs (Near Death Experience) and the projection of one's consciousness and subtle bodies. Without personal experience there would be an element of doubt, the truth would elude our comprehension, and the false delude our understanding. Knowledge pertaining to the the truth of death eliminates fear, pain and sorrow. When one understands the nature and mechanism of life and death, one begins to lead a philosophical and mystical life, open to spiritual verities and impressions. One commences to live in harmony with the forces and laws of Nature, in accord with the purposes of the Divine Plan. Scientists would have to become philosophers and mystics in order to break through any bias constraining their minds from the truth of life after death.

It is a fallacy to think that the nature of death and the afterlife state cannot be known while one is embodied and functioning in the three-dimensional sphere. Religious fundamentalism, in general, would have us believe this. Man dies temporarily every night during the sleep-state, and he calls his activities during such a state as "dreams." Man practices death every time he enters the delta-theta state. Poor recollection of one's nocturnal activities results in an inadequate comprehension of the nature and relationship between sleep and death. Spiritual development improves the recollection of astral activities and the awareness of the "no-dream" state. Refinement of the soul disperses the etheric web at the crown chakra and forms a link between the brain and higher mind allowing for free movement of the personal-consciousness to higher dimensions without a break in awareness. Fundamentally, the only difference between death and the sleep-state is that death is the permanent evacuation of the awareness-principle from the physical body, whereas in sleep it is merely a temporary condition. In death the sutratma, or silver cord, snaps, and the personal-consciousness leaves the physical body to disintegrate and return to the ground from whence it came. In the sleep state, this cord which connects the physical body to the subtle bodies is maintained. Essentially, death is an illusion. Death is actually an interval between two states or planes of consciousness. It

eventuates in the return of every component of the microcosm to its proper place. This truth is embodied in the poetic verse of Ovid :

*"Four things of man there are: spirit, soul, ghost, flesh;
These four, four places keep and do possess,
The earth covers flesh, the ghost hovers o'er the grave,
Orcus has the soul, stars do the spirit crave."*

Man has the divine ability to be aware of his being as existing independently of the physical vehicle. This is accomplished in what has come to be called lucid dreaming and astral projection, or "OBE" (out-of-the-body experience) as a modern designation for the phenomenon. Like St. Paul, it is possible for all of us to say that we "knew a man who went to the third heaven," and hear of things not suitable for the non-initiate. Death is a change of focus of our consciousness, from one plane to another. This is also accomplished through the above means. Astral projection is an ability that all metaphysicians should seek to acquire--for it is educational and it opens-up avenues of services that one may render. Most, if not all mystical traditions teach of this occult ability. The practitioner of Taoist Yoga, for instance, learns in the course of his studies how to separate the soul and spirit from the physical body. Advance mystics and occultists are all able to function in full awareness in the physical, astral and mental worlds. Such individuals are not concerned with the arguments of materialists--arguments stating the non-survival of self, for every mystic knows the truth of the matter through personal experience.

Dying, to the initiate, is a science and an art. The technique of death is known to the inter-dimensional consciousness-traveller. The psychonaut is familiar with the many phases of the bardo that leads to one of the "six realms," or to liberation from the cycle of reincarnation. It is the reality of reincarnation that proves to us that we are no stranger to death. We incarnate and pass through the change of death repeatedly until we emancipate ourselves from the wheel of birth and rebirth. We have all met the angel of death countless times and shall meet that specter once again in the future. All religions refer to this life-death cycle, though some metaphorically.

Every metaphysician should be familiar with the subject of death, as understood in the esoteric sense, and as to its occult process. In the course of one's metaphysical ministry, one would often meet individuals suffering from anguish and bereavement. The metaphysician should be able to offer the kind of solace that goes beyond the service of the burial ceremony and the pronouncement of the words, "ashes to ashes, dust to dust . . ." To the dying, and those newly passed-on, the advanced metaphysician should act as a guide to the inner levels of being. He should play the role of Anubis, guiding the departed soul to its proper place. This should be an integral part to any last rites or sacraments given. There is much superstition, fear and ignorance regarding the nature of death among the masses. It, therefore, behooves the metaphysical counselor to play his or her part in enlightening society; and this ministrations would benefit humanity as a whole. We feel that this paper should be written to remind metaphysicians of the importance of conveying the truths to the masses regarding the continuity of life, personal identity, and consciousness. One's professional image is enhanced when well-equipped with the requisite knowledge. Even though much has been written on the subject of death, with much invaluable information given, we take this opportunity to add some of our own insights and experiences to enrich the existing literature and the storehouse of humanity's learning.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

When a Sadguru, or spiritual master first receives a novice or a candidate seeking Truth, one of the first steps that the master would assure himself is the sincerity and the purity of motive of the candidate requesting initiation into the mysteries. In order to augment or instill this sincerity and pure

motive when absent, the master would speak to the candidate regarding death. The master would advise the candidate to contemplate upon the meaning of death and the opportunity that life provides. The master would refer to the fact that death often comes, stealth-like, at an unannounced moment; that to be engrossed with trivialities is to waste one's life; that there are no guarantees in life except for death. The chela is made to ask, "what is the purpose of life if death cuts us down at our prime, leaving us with ambitions, aspirations and unfulfilled dreams? What is the purpose of life--and death, if we are not able to take along with us through the portals of death our prized possessions, our titles, our fame, our temporal power?" The spiritual master would be quick to point out that the true purpose of life has very little to do with the earthly, evanescent riches or power that we acquire, it has more to do with the immaterial wealth that we take along with us--our knowledge; our memories; our improved karma, habits and character; and our spiritual and psychic development. Earthly acquisitions fail to offer any help to the one undergoing transition. We each face death alone; and in death, stripped of all mundane superficialities, we come to realize our own true worth. And so, the chela, with perhaps impure motives at the outset, comes to understand after some spiritual guidance, and a prolonged contemplation and analysis of death--as related to life--that the aim, purpose, importance and goal of personal existence in this physical sphere with its many opportunities are for gaining freedom, perfection, salvation, enlightenment, and the ascension.

We should all be aware that death may come to us at any moment, this will motivate us to direct our minds into proper perspectives, and to get our priorities straight. To eat, drink, and be merry as advertisements tell us, as the philosophies of the *fallen angels* would have us learn, is to be sidetracked from occupying ourselves with our "Father's business."

Like the disciple referred to above, in this paper it is our intention to delve into the nature of death and its process so that we will come to know a greater life, and appreciate its intrinsic value. We will also consider the nature of certain aspects of life after transition, for this expands our spiritual horizon, and it offers us a glimpse into man's glorious future. Our main themes in this paper will be related to the following :

- 1) The survival of personal consciousness.
- 2) The process of transition.
- 3) The nature of life after so-called death.

The Survival of Personal Consciousness

The average person often wonders if consciousness survives death. We have commented and alluded previously on the indestructible nature of energy. There can, therefore, be no dissolution of the essence of Soul, or rather Spirit--not even through the process of transition. The forms, the structured energy-fields that the Spirit and Soul indwell and embody may change, but the essence, the spiritual aspect of the microcosm, the Monad, the SELF, is immortal. Religion, mysticism, and psychicism, refers to this verity. If a person is to know this particular truth of the survival of consciousness, he or she must learn to expand the consciousness and to spiritualize his or her mind in order to be aware and function consciously in the higher planes. Failure to realize spiritual verities label us as "dead"--a term referred to by the Piscean Master in the gospel narratives to people who are closed to the higher worlds and spiritual truths. People suffering from spiritual myopia live in physical tombs and not temples; such persons do not care much about the higher worlds and their relation to them; these individuals limit their awareness and deaden their consciousness in a three-dimensional slumber. Individuals with limited minds do not see the whole picture of life's purpose.

The writer of this paper firmly believes, or is convinced in the ability of consciousness to exist apart from the physical body. We had, personally, experienced many spontaneous astral projections, and

many lucid dreams. Although experiences of astral projections may not objectively prove the survival of consciousness after death, it does give us some inkling of what it may be like to exist independently of the physical form; it also provides us with some reason for accepting the possibility and the high probability of the survival of consciousness. The reality and proof of the survival of personal consciousness itself may be acquired through one's personal interaction and relationship with the so-called dead. This normally occurs unconsciously in one's sleep and dreams, however, it may occur with full astral awareness or in the awaking consciousness. Lucid dreams are typical of the former type, whereas visitations or psychic materializations are of the latter. If we are able to contact the so-called dead who once were people living in the physical world and resume relationships with them, is this not proof that personal consciousness survives transition? Although this rhetorical-question is simplistic in form and incapable of offering positive proof regarding the survival of consciousness, being subjective in nature, and which does not carry any weight under scientific scrutiny, it does imply that some materialistically-oriented individuals are unwilling to attend to the reality experienced by others because of prejudice, pride, fear and cultural conditioning. How does the average man view death, what does he actually believe about it? Society has various beliefs concerning death, and what it entails, below are just some of these beliefs :

- 1) The cessation of consciousness and the annihilation of Self.
- 2) The termination of human relationships, and the loss of loved ones.
- 3) The termination of physical activities, of goals, ambitions and aspirations.
- 4) The passage into an unknown world or state of consciousness.
- 5) The facing of the Judgment and the accountability of one's sins--the fear of eternal punishment in an everlasting hell, or in contrast, pleasure, rest and idleness in Paradise.
- 6) Physical, emotional, and mental agony in the death process.

As we will see in later chapters, all of these beliefs are unfounded. The nature of life after transition is only unknown to those who do not seek to know. There is also no true severance of human relationships; and an eternal hell is non-existent, although a certain degree of pain and scorching may be experienced when impure substances present in the astral and mental bodies are removed by a purifying fire. Death is not the end of anything; it is a continuation of what has gone on before. Rumi, the Sufi poet, speaks of this truth in the following oft-quoted verse :

*"I died a mineral and became a plant;
I died a plant and rose an animal.
I died an animal and I was a man.
Why should I fear? When was I less by dying?
Yet once more I shall die as man, so to soar
With blessed angels; even from angelhood
I must pass on . . .
When I have sacrificed my angel soul,
I shall become that which no mind conceived."*

The Process of Transition

Transition is not simply the cessation of the intake of the breath or the circulation of the life-force. It is a process that involves the evacuation of the occult components within man's physical anatomy. These occult components for simplicity sake, may be called the soul, however, for the metaphysical student, a deeper understanding of the constitution of the soul must be acquired. The relationship and interaction between the immaterial aspect of man and the physical body must be known. How the spiritual components dissociate themselves from the physical body through the process of transition

should be understood. It is the very presence of man's invisible forms and forces within the physical being that maintains the integrity and coherence of the particles forming the physical body. The absence of the magnetism, the electrical-force, and the energy-fields of the subtle bodies causes the dissolution of the physical form.

Psychologically, during the separation of the material and immaterial bodies, certain visions arise in the psyche. The nature of these visions are dependent upon the degree of man's inner purity. According to Tibetan Buddhists, how man responds or reacts to these visions determines the place of his abode in the higher realms. Man's moral character is the deciding factor of his place in the universal scheme. The fear of death and dying hampers the smooth transition into the higher worlds. Attachment to the world and earthly possessions causes an unnecessary prolonged struggle in the death process, and this delays soul release. Suffering and pain are expressions of this struggle. Man should learn to be detached from all mundane affairs and relationships during transition and think about spiritual matters--not because of the unimportance of the former, but because occupying the mind at the time of transition with spiritual aspirations and hope assists the soul-consciousness to release itself from some of the harsh phenomena experienced in the bardo. Passing over into a new realm is like being born into the physical world. The process is somewhat similar, and this is in accord with the law of correspondence and the Hermetic axiom, "as above, so below." When one is born into this physical world one goes through the birth canal; during transition one experiences a "tunnel-like" effect, a wormhole. During birth we are greeted by smiling relatives, likewise, the birth into a higher world surrounds us with people whom we love and who loves us.

Passing over is no panacea for the suffering soul who resorts to suicide to end its earth life. Suicide does not solve our emotional and mental problems, for wherever we may be, we take along with us our inner world, our thoughts and feelings. Our outer world reflects our inner mental and emotional state. Problems unfaced, will have to be confronted once again in another incarnation, this is to teach the soul certain lessons that it requires for its evolution, its spiritual growth. One's attitudes, reactions and responses to problems are the main thing and not the problems themselves.

The Spirit of man will not be cheated of its forces. Lessons to be learnt by the soul will repeat themselves until their essence has been assimilated, understood and wisdom gained. Suicide, therefore, should not be resorted to as an escape, for it causes spiritual stagnation. Suicides are treated as mental cases in the subtle worlds. According to psychic Donald Barrie, insane persons were suicides in past lives. Suicidal persons in the death process, like those who lived depraved, iniquitous and wicked lives, often encounter some of the most alarming visions in the bardo which includes the Judgment scene, where the conscience sits as prosecutor, judge, jury and executioner.

Death is a personal experience. Through it we come to know our true evolutionary status as a soul, and all of our glammers and delusions concerning personal glory would fail to aid us at the time of our transition. Our poverty or wealth of our spirit is seen and known to us and others on the Other Side.

The Nature of Life After So-Called Death

Humanity's concept of heaven is wrought with distortions of the true nature of the subtle worlds. There are many ideas concerning heaven that are disproved through the personal experiences of advanced psychics and mystics. It is, therefore, appropriate that people be informed and prepared for life in the other worlds, that they may know what to expect, that they may know how to function harmoniously therein, and the sort of activities that they may engage in. The higher worlds are worlds of activity. There is no rest there, unless we desire rest. Real rest is dependent upon the giving of another vehicle of the microcosm an opportunity for expressing itself. Overthere, we shall have the

opportunity to be occupied with soul-improving activities. Laziness and idleness Overthere are treated as illnesses. Individuals expressing those states are directed to special classes to learn the purposes of life, that they be motivated to engage in some worthy endeavour.

There is not just one heaven or dimension in the higher worlds, there are many, and these are the "mansions" of Jesus' statement "in my Father's house there are many mansions." (John 14:2). St. Paul in his epistles mentions a third heaven; the Islamic tradition presents the Prophet Muhammad as visiting the seventh on a mythical creature--no doubt a symbolic description of the subtle body. Several "alams" or worlds are discussed in Islamic literature. Theosophy speaks of seven planes with seven sub-planes each, all of which constituting a cosmic plane. Hinduism also refers to the "lokas," to the many heavens as described in their scriptures. Swedenborg substantiates this truth in his spiritual works.

People will be disappointed if they think that the afterdeath state will provide them what they lack here and now. This is not to say that their dreams will not occur to some degree, or that their happiness may not be derived from some longed-for pleasures that Almighty God might manifest for them; what we are putting forth here is that the contents and quality of one's heart and mind determines strongly one's experiences in the heavenly world that one will live in. Purity in body, mind and soul begets a joyful experience in the higher heavens. Conversely, immorality and wickedness result in a life of misery in the lower astral realms. We carry our inner life to wherever we may find ourselves. There is no spiritual being to reward or punish us, we do this to ourselves by violating or living harmoniously with cosmic laws. To know where one would go, or to which heaven or plane one would reside, it is only necessary to look into one's mind and emotions, into one's character and personality, and there look for signs.

In the chapters ahead we will be discussing in more detail of the nature of life in the higher worlds. We feel that this subject is of some importance to metaphysicians, as they are often asked by individuals seeking information on the spiritual dimensions.

The Four Perspectives

Although there are various perspectives that death and the process of transition may be discussed such as the clinical, the cultural, etc. We will be dealing with the aforementioned themes from the following perspectives :

- 1) Religion/Mythology
- 2) Occult teachings in general
- 3) Lamaism, or Tibetan Buddhism
- 4) Parapsychology and modern research

Religion, generally speaking, offers us some information concerning the after death state with, regrettably, very little of the death process. However, it is important when dealing with religious concepts regarding death and the afterlife to be discerning and discriminative--to sift through fanciful ideas--of the many erroneous theological dogmas and concepts that had crept into the original teachings. Many statements in scriptures are not meant to be taken in a literal manner. Embodied within them are spiritual ideas that have to be intuited with the higher mind. Followers or devotees of religions often fail to understand this principle. They believe in the letter of the law without considering the underlying spiritual principle. The immortality of the soul has long been an essential tenet in almost all religious belief-structures. The ancient Egyptians, for instance, believed in it; they accepted that the heart-soul, the ka, the ba, and other components of the microcosm outlived the

physical form for a longer duration, if not indefinitely. Thus mummification was instituted to preserve the body for the return of the incorporeal aspects of man.

Myths are allegories or parables containing spiritual wisdom. They often deal with the fall of the soul into matter, its resurrection, the manner of its redemption, and the nature of the higher planes. In the ancient Mystery Schools of Greece, such as the Eluesinian, Cosmic laws and principles were personified and enacted in dramas. The *mystae*, or the candidate to the mysteries who witnessed these dramas was urged by the accompanying guide to discern the Cosmic laws and truths embodied within them. Often in such initiatory schools, candidates were put into trance-like conditions where they acquired personal experiences of the externalization of their awareness-principle. Thus, those candidates to the Mysteries came to know the reality of their soul and its independence of the physical body through empirical knowledge.

Our treatment of mythology in this paper will be supportive in nature, emphasizing or stressing certain main points of our themes where needed. Regrettably, it is beyond the scope of this work to treat the subject exhaustively and completely in a satisfactory manner.

Occultism as a whole, offers us a great wealth of knowledge concerning the death process and the nature of the post-mortem states. There have been many eminent clairvoyants in the past such as Swedenborg and Andrew Jackson Davis who wrote about their experiences concerning transition and the astral planes as seen through their inner senses--not to mention their communications and interactions with the inhabitants therein. In the opening pages of his work, *Heaven and Hell*, Swedenborg declares:

" . . . it has been granted to me to associate with angels and to talk with them as man, also to see the things in the heaven as well as in the hells . . . " (1958:3)

We are, however, indebted to Earlyne Chaney and her Mystery school, Astara, for most of our occult information concerning the mysteries of death. Information derived from her writings would greatly enhance the structure and support of our main themes.

Of all religions, Tibetan Buddhism seems to be the richest source of information concerning the death process. It possesses a unique conception regarding transition. It is for this reason that we will consider it separately, apart from the general view of religion, giving it a category of its own. From the religious viewpoint, we have, therefore, chosen to treat the subject of the process of death in a detailed manner from the Lamaistic perspective. The esoteric science of death, it should be known, is one of the secret traditions of Tibetan Buddhism. Our main source of information on Tibetan thanatology and eschatology, is derived from the "Bardo Thodol," or "The Tibetan Book of the Dead"--as translated and edited by Evans-Wentz and his Tibetan colleague. We will also be appropriating the teachings and commentaries of various Lamas to supplement and give form to our main themes. Tibetans consider dying to be an art, just as the spiritual teachers of the Middle Ages did, calling it "ars moriendi." To the Tibetan Buddhists, the training of dying commences in the meditative life. This is the preparation of the awareness-principle for the bardos that it will undergo or the possible attainment of the "Clear Light" resulting in enlightenment. Aside from considering the role that the bardos play in the death process, we will, therefore, also comment in passing of this mystical art, of the preparation required for liberation in the bardo.

Although there have been many modern, scientific researchers delving into the mysteries of death such as Raymond Moody and Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, our principal sources of information will be derived from the works of Michael Newton, Ian Currie, and Filippo Liverziani as representative of the modern scientific approach. Investigations into psychic phenomena began way back in the last

century when mediumistic activities began to flourish. Although many mediums and their displays of phenomena were found to be deceptions, a small percentage of occurrences were enough to convince psychic investigators of the survival of the personal-consciousness and in the reality of man's inherent psychic powers. Notwithstanding the findings of past investigators, however, we will, concentrate more fully on the research discoveries of the writers mentioned above, as they offer the appropriate support for our main themes.

FINDINGS

In this chapter we will consider the four perspectives in greater detail. We will look into the dying process and the nature of life in the higher planes, as seen through the eyes of Western and Eastern occultism. Analysis of the religious concepts anent death, dying and the after-death state will offer us a clearer picture of what is commonly believed by the average person. We will deal with religious concepts not from the perspective of any particular religion, but from an overall, general view. The findings of modern researchers of the paranormal will greatly enhance our comprehension of nature's laws, while Tibetan teachings concerning death will offer us a better insight into the purposes of life and the liberating nature of the death process. We will discuss these various perspectives with a metaphysical understanding.

The metaphysician is a seeker of empirical and pragmatic truths--truths and laws that are applicable and relevant to one's life. The metaphysician, as a healer of man's souls, is a searcher for not merely theoretical, but practical, factual, and experiential knowledge. Such knowledge, as an accumulation of relevant data, offers the material required to gain wisdom, insight and understanding of God's plan, and the privilege of participating in the creative work of the universe. Knowledge of the death process and the purposes of life offers us a certain power to pre-determine our fate in the higher worlds and in subsequent incarnations with the exercise of our God-given gift of free-choice and the divine-will of our Higher Self.

Religious Beliefs

Followers of religions have viewed death, or the passing over to a new dimension, in contradictory terms. On one hand, there is a lively anticipation and hope for a glorious future-state in a heavenly paradise, and on the other, a pronounced fear of eternal damnation and torture in an everlasting burning hell. The concepts of heaven and hell are common to most religions, and from the occult point of view, there is a basis for these ideas; however, heaven and hell as understood by the masses and unenlightened clergymen are a distortion of the reality underlying those states.

Hell, according to religious ideas, is a place in the afterlife for the punishment of wicked, immoral and sinful men and women. It is described to be a place of eternal torture, a place filled with fire and brimstone, a place of horror and terror, a locality where one suffers pain and misery indefinitely. Judaism refers to this hell as Sheol and Gehenna, while the ancient Greeks called it Hades and Tartarus. In Buddhism, the hell-state is known as Avitchi. Hell has been described in literature as the Inferno, the Abyss, the Pit, the Darkness, Limbo etc. In *Paradise Lost*, Milton called the capital of Hell, Pandemonium, which figuratively, refers to a state of chaos, lawlessness and anarchy. In the Gospel stories the Piscean Master referred to a pit outside the walls of Jerusalem--a pit utilized as a garbage incinerator. This burning pit was used as an illustration, in a metaphorical and symbolical manner, of the nature of Gehenna. Not understanding the symbolism, followers of Christ have accepted the Master's explanation in a literal sense. It should also be noted that ancient mystics considered this earth plane to be one of the hell regions.

In the scriptures we are told that God is a consuming fire. This fire is synonymous with the fires and flames of hell; to the soul, higher vibrations are always fiery in nature. What do the flames of God consume? They consume temporarily the manifestation of the false ego with its expressions of pride, hatred and cruelty. They cleanse the subtle bodies of psychic dross. In the alchemical tradition, fire has been a symbol of the processes of transmutation and purification. In the same esoteric sense, the fiery stimulus of hell causes a purification and transmutation of the soul which results in soul-awakening. Once the soul realizes its mortal errors and repents, it rises from the fires of hell and enters into the planes of "purgatory" for the next phase of the purification process. From another perspective, the flames of hell may symbolize a soul's lust for the physical world--its ungratified consuming desire, and rage or resentment towards all that opposes its egoistic will. Freedom from such a hell is a simple matter of extinguishing lowly desires and the acquisition of humility. Sufferings one experience in hell, aside from the above conditions could also be the result of remorseful feelings for one's past negative deeds, one's "sins" of omission and commission; or the result of one's anger and displeasure for not possessing the ability to resume the life-style one had previously known. This often cause what is called an "earth-bound spirit."

The concept of purgatory was first formulated by Pope Gregory I, who lived in the sixth century AD. Although turned into a dogma in some Christian sects, this particular doctrine is based on reality, as it is validated by the experiences of psychics and mystics. Purgatory is an intermediate plane between heaven and hell; however, in actuality, all planes are purgatorial in nature. Purgatory, in a specific sense, is a plane of consciousness, a dimension where souls sojourn temporarily to cast off material and carnal habits, attitudes and feelings. It is a realm of purification of one's thoughts, emotions and desires. Purgatory is where one also commences the assimilation of experiences of one's incarnated life. Once this purification has taken place, the soul goes to one of the heavenly regions appropriate for its expression. This occurs automatically without any authoritarian decree or overseeing.

To believe that a loving, kind and merciful God would banish and exile wayward souls to eternal condemnation and punishment is a sacrilegious attitude and feeling, and an injustice towards our Creator. The loving Omniversal Mind of the Cosmos would never have conceived of such an idea. God does not punish. The many hell regions were not created by God but by man's guilty conscience, by man's evil tendencies and propensities, by man's willful disobedience and violation of the Cosmic Law of Harmony. This is not to say that hell and its tortures do not exist. They do exist, but as an illusion of maya. They are tangible but are phantasmagorias. Hell is an inner state of darkness within the consciousness projected and objectified onto astral substances. Hell is a state of mind and consciousness externalized and reflected in one's astral, or even physical environment. Sojourners of hell unconsciously build, share, and experience a collective thoughtform.

Religion in the collective sense, paints hell in frightful forms and images. In actuality though, most of the devils and demons torturing souls in hell are mere phantasms arising from the psyche. The wrathful deities, creatures and demons found in hell, such as Satan, Beelzebub, Ashtaroth, Mara, the Raksasas, the Furies, the Harpies, the Erinyes, Chimaeras, Cerberus and Hydras, are all negative thoughts and feelings within one's soul externalized in an illusory, hallucinatory sense to torment oneself for one's past misqualification of soul-energies. Aside from hell, these gruesome and grotesque images are also seen and experienced at a certain phase of the bardo. These terrifying demons are mere symbols of negative human behaviour. The guilty conscience of men and women evilly-inclined erupts from the unconscious to manifest as horrible illusions. Simply put, a bad conscience and temperament creates the experience of hell. Cornelius Agrippa, the eminent occultist of the 16th century, referring to the illusory nature of hell as experienced by hell-sojourners says that souls,

". . . are most cruelly tortured in the irascible faculty with the hatred of an imaginary evil, into the perturbations whereof, as also false suspicions, and most horrible phantasms they then fall, and they are represented to them sad representations; sometimes of the heaven falling upon their head, sometimes of being swallowed up into the earth . . . and sometimes of being taken, and tormented by devils." (1995:596)

In the Gathas, one of the holy scriptures of Zoroastrianism, hell is described as the place of the worst thought, and as the House of Lies. The people of Ahura Mazda believed and still believe that in hell one is tormented by the daena, or conscience; however, they do not propose this to be construed and considered as a permanent state--a concept expounded by theologians of many other living faiths. Eternal punishment is illogical, senseless, and without purpose, and goes against all spiritual principles and values. It would be more realistic to view a merciful God ending soul-identity and consciousness rather than to picture the Almighty banishing and gloating at the sufferings and miseries of wayward souls. Hence, the purpose of hell is not that of punishment but to awaken the soul of its spiritual poverty, of its need to turn towards the Divine Light. Here we emphasize the concept of hell from the perspective of Zoroastrianism for it has greatly influenced the Semitic religions which somehow distorted the transmission of esoteric knowledge.

Hell should not be seen as an eternal state. It exists for the soul only for as long as the soul refuses to acknowledge and face the Light of God, of Truth, and give up its resentments, hatreds, and other negative feelings. Not all souls sojourn in hell or purgatory. Lofty, pure souls bypass the lower worlds to head straight for their place in the heavenly regions. Every soul goes to the plane most appropriate for its nature. This process or procedure is not directed arbitrarily by any being, there is no one to coerce and force us to be in any realm. This is all executed according to the Law of Correspondence. Man's spiritual attainment or lack of it determines where he would go. It is a matter of frequencies. One's personal frequency attunes one into the appropriate dimension vibrating at the corresponding wavelength. Imagine if you will, a wicked sinner obtaining forgiveness at the last hour and goes to the heavenly worlds. The very presence of the sinner would transform heaven into hell, for his innate wickedness, his negative character, would pollute the surrounding environment. Death does not transmute our character. We carry our same personality, character, minds and emotions wherever we go. If we are in constant discord with our environment, with our many relationships here on this earth plane, we would express no differently in the subtle worlds. The presence of negativity causes the soul, the astro-mental bodies, to assume a certain density in its energy-structures and fields, a certain atomic weight which binds it to the lower regions of hell or purgatory. Heaven is thus protected from trouble-makers. Whether in hell or purgatory, the soul suffers all of its misqualified and misspent energies alone. The length of time that one sojourns in hell or purgatory is dependent upon one's self, upon one's own inner desire to improve one's character, upon one's desire to be free, the desire to forgive self and others--to *request* forgiveness from those wronged, and the desire to serve others.

Concerning heaven, Christians have long visualized it to be a magnificent city with streets paved in gold and ornamented with precious stones. The book of Revelations has done much to mould Christian beliefs regarding this matter. What is not known to the average Christian is that the apocalypse in Revelations is symbolical and that it is a work written by great initiates for lesser initiates studying the mysteries of God, and that to interpret it literally is to deceive and mislead oneself. It takes a great deal of familiarity with the occult, the Qaballah, and the initiatory teachings of the ancients to properly interpret the real significance of its spiritual contents.

Heaven, generally, is believed to be a place of rewards, of eternal rest. Ancient Greeks called heaven the Elysian Fields or Olympus. Followers of Zoroaster describe it as the House of Suns, and the abode of the best thought--a place where the sun never ceases to shine--no doubt alluding to the

luminous nature of the plane. To Hindus, heaven is *Surga*, and it lies in the higher lokas. Theosophists call heaven "Devachan." Ancient Egyptians referred to it as Sekhet-hetepet. To Scandinavians it is Asgard; and spiritualists call it Summerland. Heaven as an abode of peace, happiness, and abundance is a fundamental religious belief in every culture, ancient and modern. As hell is believed to be a place of punishment, so heaven is believed to be a realm of rewards due to the virtuous, the "poor in spirit" and to those who serve God faithfully.

Like hell, followers of religion have likewise misunderstood and misconceived the nature of heaven. In their theology, most religions lay too much stress on externals without considering the mystical nature of their teachings; this applies most specifically to such concepts as heaven and hell. The Bahá'í faith, as an exception, believes heaven and hell to be spiritual conditions, and not mere places. In their theological teachings, heaven is defined as the proximity of the consciousness to the throne of God, and hell as a remoteness from the heavenly Godhead. This is in accord with the words of the Nazarene that the kingdom of God is within. Eventhough the concept of paradise among Christians has a different meaning from the kingdom of God as enunciated by the Master--the former believing it to be a place--it could indeed be considered as such, as a place or places reflecting the inner state of the soul, just like hell--eventhough we apparently contradict our previous statement concerning Christian emphasis upon externals. As mentioned before, heaven and hell as places have been substantiated by the discoveries and experiences of mystics and psychics. However, we have to realize that the external protean reality is but a reflection of the inner state or condition of the mind. We have considered this before, but it is necessary to reiterate because of its importance.

Although heaven is as beautiful and glorious as described by religions, it is not a place of eternal rest. A heaven of ease and idleness is a static state. Inertia does not exist in the universe. All is in motion and in a continuous flux. The Greek philosopher, Heraclitus, said that "everything is becoming." All Sparks, or creatures of God are forever evolving. Everything is in a dynamic state moving towards a higher expression and manifestation. Heaven as experienced and understood by mystics, is a state of intense activity. Heaven is not a place where one sings hymns and play on the harp all day long (unless that is what gives us pleasure), it is a place of continued education for the evolving soul, where the mysteries of the universe, and Cosmic laws are studied. In the higher worlds one learns to exercise one's creativity in myriads of ways. One also spends one's time in heaven serving the whole of creation in various capacities, in accord with one's innate abilities and talents. In the heavenly regions, there are no angels ornated with wings and halos, as represented by painters in their artwork. In heaven, angelic beings are adorned with their purity, love and other positive virtues. What are supposed to be wings are simply magnetic radiations streaming from their persons.

One of the salient features of religious beliefs is that during transition, before one passes over to heaven or hell, one has to undergo a judgment. The Ancient Egyptians, Tibetans, Christians, Muslims and many others all have and had their judgment scenes in their theological concepts. This is ingrained in the eschatology of religion and has, as a matter of fact, a basis of truth which we shall see later as we consider the bardos. It will suffice here to describe certain aspects of the Judgment scene.

The Judgment scene of almost every religion consists of a judge, a weigher of the scales, a scribe, and of course, the soul being judged. To Ancient Egyptians, Osiris was the judge of the soul, Anubis the weigher of the scales, while Thoth was the scribe. The human soul was often depicted as hawk-headed. In Zoroastrianism, Mithras or sometimes Zoroaster sits on the judgment seat, with Rashnu acting as weigher and Sraosha as recorder. Tibetans called their magistrate Dharmaraja and their scribe Shinje--the monkey-headed one. Christians believe that Jesus would be the one to judge the "quick and the dead," with angelic personnel acting as his amanuensis.

In the Judgment scene, as conceived by the ancient Egyptians, the Ab, or heart of the soul is weighed against Maat, or Truth, symbolised by a feather. The deceased makes a long confession, affirming his or her goodly works. The negative works of the soul goes unstated and unproclaimed--the soul hoping that its past sinful deeds are overlooked and not revealed. But then comes the weighing of the scales, where the statements of the soul are gauged of its truth. When found not to measure up to its honesty, the soul is led to hell to be tormented by Typhon, who is one of the presiding demons; otherwise, it is shown the way to paradise. The Judgment scene of all religions follows more or less along similar lines.

According to some religious and cultural beliefs, prior to the Judgment or the entry into the underworld, the soul had to cross a river or rivers, before passing on to its destination. The soul is usually led across the river in a boat or by using certain bridges. Ancient people used these symbols to signify the processes of transition. Muslims call the bridge "Sirat," while followers of Zoroaster call it "Chivat." Ancient Greeks called the underworld rivers Styx, Acheron, Cocytus, and Phlegethon. These named rivers correspond to the four streams of the Garden of Eden: Pison, Gihon, Hiddekel, and Phrath. Occultly, they probably refer to the four etheric planes. Scandinavians also believe in a river that souls in the cthonian world had to cross. They call this "Wimur." Ancient Babylonians believed that the soul had to cross the Huber river prior to reaching the "mountain of justice," or the Judgment scene.

Psychologically, rivers, oceans, pools, and lakes all refer to the subconscious element within man. In the depth of the Freudian "id," lurk various monsters--phobias, psychosis, neurosis, and repressions. In an occult sense, these monsters of the psyche are known collectively as the *Dweller on the Threshold*. Crossing rivers in the context of its symbolism, entails encountering these monsters, these repressed images in the death process; and indeed, according to Tibetan thanatology, this is exactly what occurs in the bardo. All religious doctrines teach of the danger that the soul may have to face in the intermediate state.

At times the soul undergoing transition is led across rivers with the aid of an escort. In Greek myths, Charon, the boatman, was assigned the task of guiding souls to the Otherside. Hermes, acting as psychopompos, led deserving souls to Olympus. The ushabtis, or statuettes buried with the dead among ancient Egyptians, could conceivably represent escorts or soul-bearers, aside from the usual interpretation of scholars of them being servants in the afterlife. In other religions, the escort of the soul is the *Angel of Death*, the grim reaper wielding a scythe as depicted in one of the cards of the Major Arcana of the Tarot--although the average Christian sees that being not as an escorter but as an avenger. Muslims call this Angel of Death, "Izrail." There is a possibility that escorts of the soul do not always fetch departing souls from the Otherside. They may, in fact, also come from our physical dimension aiding souls in their transition. What we are intimating is that the mastery of astral projection or lucid dreaming actually gives the mystic or psychic the power to act as psychopompos, or guide of the soul. Our own personal experience may suggest this, as we will relate below, however, we are not implying here that we have personally mastered the art of occult mobilization, or attained a spirituality of a high degree :

We (I, me, myself) once had a dear friend who was a Theosophist. Although there were decades of physical years between us, we were rather close. One day, we received a call informing us of her demise. Her passing was sudden and unexpected. Wondering what her condition was like in the bardo, that night we decided to be by her side to offer assistance. And so with affirmations, intense mind-programming, and a strong desire, we spontaneously attained a projection without strenuously going through the usual steps as taught in occult books and schools. Moments later, we were by her side, leading her to a certain place, to a certain spiritual guide or master with whom in the astral state we were well acquainted with. When we reached our destination, we said to her: "from hereon you

are on your own. We shall meet again." After bidding her farewell, we were once again back in our physical body.

All along the projection, we were lucid and aware--aware that a part of us was asleep in bed; while another aspect, was active in another world. This is one of the signs indicating that the experience was not a dream. Soul-travel as we have mentioned before, is a mystery to the average religious devotee. Eventhough mystics, prophets and saints have alluded to this particular occult ability possessed by man, the average person still remains unconvinced and skeptical as to its reality; or from another perspective they fear it as a satanic gift. However, at least the Bahá'í faith firmly states the possibility for one to experience the afterlife while yet still alive and embodied on earth. Many modern saints such as Padre Pio were adepts of soul-travel.

Soul-travel, or astral travel is a natural mode of rest for the incarnating soul from the vicissitudes of everyday life. This usually occurs through sleep, but may be induced through various means. It is through this occult faculty that knowledge of the various dimensions may be gained. Ancient Greeks were familiar with the art of astral projection. In their myths there are many references to heroes visiting the underworld, such as Hercules, Aeneas, and Odysseus, or sorceresses such as Medea accompanying Jason, the captain of the Argonauts in his adventures--although she in her astral body. These myths probably refer to the astral aspects of the secret initiations of the ancient Mystery Schools.

The Occult Tradition

Before explaining the death process from the occult and metaphysical point of view, we ought to possess some knowledge of man's occult anatomy, for man's hidden structure and physiology play an important role in the release of the soul from its confinement to the form and the disintegration of the physical body and they are, therefore, a pertinent factor to our understanding of transition. It is also of some relevance to know the structure of the various planes or dimensions. We shall, therefore, consider these two essential topics briefly before discussing the process of transition from the occult perspective.

The Microcosm

Man, the microcosm, possesses several bodies, principles, or vehicles. According to Theosophy, these principles/bodies are seven in number: Monad, Atma, Buddhi, Higher Mental/Causal, Lower Mental, Astral Body, and Etheric/Physical. Christianity divides man's components into body, soul and spirit. The concept of man possessing several bodies is also to be found in Hinduism, the Qaballah, and Islam; and is in fact based on the teachings of the Ageless Wisdom; it is to be found underlying all spiritual traditions in one form or another. The Initiates of ancient Egypt, for instance, had a clear understanding of man's subtle anatomy as we can see from the following suggested correspondence with the Theosophical system :

Physical Body - Khat
Etheric Body - Kha-bit (shadow)
Astral Body - Ka (double)
Lower Mental - Ba (heart-soul)
Causal Body - Sahu (spiritual body)
Higher Mental - Ren (name)
Buddhi - Khu/Ab (spiritual soul)
Atma - Sekhem (power)
Monad - Khabs

In average cases, the bodies directly involved in the death process and in the afterdeath state are of the first five--the physical body, etheric, astral, lower mental, and causal. In certain conditions it may involve the first two or three.

Each body or principle has energy-centers fully developed and functioning, or in the process of unfoldment. These energy-centers are called chakras in Hindu occultism and there are seven of major importance. In the physical body the endocrine glands and the plexi correspond to these chakras. The following are the Hindu terms for these chakras as well as their correspondence to the glands and their location :

Muladhara - gonads - base of spine
Svadishtana - spleen/pancreas - naval
Manipura - adrenals - solar plexus
Anahata - thymus - heart
Vishuddha - thyroid - throat
Ajna - pituitary - center of eyebrows
Sahasrara - pineal - crown

Every vehicle of consciousness possesses chakras, some of which are not functioning to its full potential or fully-developed as yet in the average human being. Chakras are channels and transformers of energy. They receive the influx of energies originating from higher spheres and distribute those energies to a lower principle. The frequencies or qualities of these chakras are associated with one's evolutionary development; this account for the many colours attributed to them by various authorities who often seemingly contradict one another. These chakras vibrate at a rate determined by the quality of the indwelling soul. During transition the soul escapes through one of these portals. One's evolutionary development determines where the soul would make its exit. According to occult teachings, it is favorable for the soul to be released through the crown chakra or other higher centers; escape through the lower centers results in a transition to one of the lower worlds. Generally speaking, the average person evacuates the body, in the process of transition, through the solar plexus chakra. This is because the manipura chakra is associated with the qualities of self-centeredness, and is the normal expression and polarization of the average person. Aspirants and servers of humanity often emerge out of the heart chakra, as this chakra is related to an expanding love for all sentient beings. Enlightened, spiritual souls pass out of the physical form through the crown chakra. This major center is associated with pure, lofty thoughts and feelings, with a sense of oneness and identification with all beings. It is this crown chakra that Hopi Indians believed to be the exit of the soul at death. Occultism declares that the point of exit indicates the realm that the indwelling soul would sojourn, whether it be in the lower regions of "hell," or in the upper localities of "heaven."

Connecting the various bodies together, like beads on a string, is the sutratma. This sutratma is sometimes referred to as the "silver cord." This term comes from one of the books of the Old Testament.

"Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern." (Ecclesiastes 12:6)

While the indwelling soul is incarnated in the physical form, the sutratma remains intact, connecting the lower form to the higher principles. It functions primarily as a channel for divine life forces--the energies emanating from the Monad. In sleep and in the astral state, when the awareness-principle roams about in the higher dimensions, this cord serves as a connecting link between the material body and the astral form. So long as this cord exists intact, the soul is bound to the physical body. Once the

cord is severed, as occurs in the death process, the soul loses its connection with the physical body. A person may be in a coma, or in a cataleptic state with a resemblance of death, but so long as the cord endures, it is always possible for life to return--it is possible to "raise the dead," so to speak.

Another point to consider concerning man's occult anatomy which is relevant to our discussion of the process of transition are the seed-atoms. These atoms are vortexes of energies which collectively speaking, may be considered as the records of the unfolding soul, or as the soul's "book of life." They correspond to "Kiramun-i-Kaitibun," the recording angels in sufi teachings. Occultism teaches the existence of three seed-atoms--the mental, astral and the physical seed-atom. These atoms register all of the thoughts, feelings and actions of the incarnated soul. They are records of the quality and nature of the soul, and may be thought of as the memory book of all the experiences of the soul's past incarnated lives. They, therefore, also contain the records of one's karmic history. It should be noted that although Buddhism teaches reincarnation, they do not believe in a "self" that reincarnates. To Buddhists, that which reincarnates are the karmic traits of the awareness-principle. Although we will not consider the question of what survives and reincarnates, it is interesting to know that these "karmic traits" correlate with the contents of the seed-atoms.

The mental seed-atom is associated with the soul's consciousness and mental world of thoughts and ideas. In the physical body it resides in the pineal gland. One's feelings, negative and positive, are registered in the astral seed-atom. The liver is the temporary home of this seed-atom. The physical seed-atom abides in the heart. It is associated with the life-principle within the body. In the death process, the seed-atoms emerge out of the physical body in sequence, as we shall see presently.

According to occultism in general, in the beginning of a manvantara, or cycle of manifestation and creation, the First Cause emanated from Itself streams of energies of varying densities; or Spirit vibrating in a whole spectrum of frequencies. These energies, structured electronically in high and low densities, are the various dimensions, planes, realms, or mansions of the manifested Cosmos. In the Qaballah, these dimensions and planes are referred to as the 4 worlds and the sephiroths. According to theosophical teachings, there are seven planes that concerns man's present evolution. These seven planes are collectively called the cosmic physical plane. Though there are higher planes, we will not consider them, as they have very little to do with man's evolution, and are far beyond our status as human souls.

The seven planes, in theosophical teachings are called: Logoic, Monadic, Atmic, Buddhic, Mental, Astral, and Physical. Certain Sufi teachings refer to these various planes as: "Alam-i-tabi-at," "Alam-i-surat," "Alam-i-ma'na," "Alam-i-malakut," "Alam-i-jabarut," "Alam-i-lahut," and "Alam-i-hahut." Each of the seven planes mentioned are subdivided into seven lesser realms making 49 in all. The various heavens and hells (realms of joy and suffering) which the human soul sojourns and dwells are to be found in the Mental and Astral regions. In the upper regions of the Mental subplanes is to be found what is called the Causal plane. This is paradise proper where most souls go to rest before reincarnating in the physical dimension. Tibetan Buddhism refers to the Physical, Astral and Mental planes as the six worlds: the world of gods (Devaloka), of Titans (Asuraloka), of hungry ghosts (Pretaloka), of hell, of animals, and of humans. These descriptive realms symbolically refer to human behaviour and evolutionary development with a predominating characteristic vice: for instance, pride, envy, greed, hatred, ignorance, and desire. These six worlds are the abodes or heavens--or hell, as the case may be--of souls of varied spiritual development. Below we give the evolutionary level of souls in correlation with the six worlds that they vibrate in harmony with :

Causal-Higher Mental Planes - World of gods - Saints, masters . . .
Lower Mental Planes - World of Asuras - Philosophers, heroes . . .
Higher and Mid-Astral Planes - World of Pretas - Average man

Lower Astral Planes - World of Animals - Purgatory, temporary abode of average man.
Lower Astral Planes - World of Demons - Hell, temporary abode of evil and wicked men.
Physical Plane - World of Humans - Physical world, all types of souls.

Transition and the after death state

We have already discussed the various relevant parts of man's occult anatomy that are directly involved in the death process. We shall now see how they fit together in the soul's birthing process into another realm. It should be noted, however, that there are variations in the death process. We shall be considering the normal process of death for the average person, but before we do, let us consider how occultism advocates the method of assistance to the dying.

Occultism teaches the necessity for absolute quietness surrounding the dying. The moanings and wailings of relatives and friends should be kept at a minimum and away from the presence of the one undergoing transition. The dying's sense of perception is heightened during transition and is focused strongly on the bardo, and, therefore, it is imperative at this stage that nothing disturbs the dying person. To do so would distract the soul from liberating itself in the early stages of the bardo and prevent it from being reborn in a higher realm. It is said that orange light in the room of the dying helps the awareness-principle to maintain consciousness so that it would not miss the Clear Light of the first stage of the bardo. Oneness and identification with the Clear Light is what causes liberation for the soul--liberation from the necessity to reincarnate. Sandalwood incense and chanting of mantras also aid the dying to remain focussed and mentally alert. In the Tibetan tradition, certain guidance is given verbally to the dying pilgrim, that it may recognize the various stages of the bardo and what it should do once they are encountered and experienced. Occultism advocates similar assistance to the dying, since the basic purpose underlying both systems are one and the same, that is, the liberation of the soul from an unfortunate rebirth in one of the lower regions of the cosmos which causes evolutionary stagnation. The techniques for aiding the dying as well as dying fruitfully is well worth knowing--especially to practicing metaphysicians.

What is important to learn is the maintaining of one's mind and consciousness at a lofty level through constant meditation and mental reflection in everyday life. This polarizes the consciousness in the head chakra and facilitates the recognition of the dawning light in the first stage of the bardo. Dying consciously is more advantageous than dying in an unconscious manner for the above reason.

Strangely enough, depending upon our perspective, highly evolved souls are aware of the time and onset of their death. This inner knowing is derived from intuitive impressions from the Oversoul, or Higher Self. Such initiates are knowledgeable of the process of death and they transit in full awareness without a break or a hiatus in their consciousness. Some even attain what is called "the Rainbow Body." This is the transformation or the absorption of physical particles of the body into one's spiritual light during transition, leaving no empty corpse behind. This is alluded to in the biblical passage concerning the prophet Enoch, where it is said that he walked with God "and was not."

Those having seen the Clear Light and have united with it, or acquired the divine gnosis called "marifatullah" in Esoteric Islam encounters various esoteric/exoteric signs months and days prior to the death process :

Countdown

Signs

12 month	Strange unearthly sounds are heard--sounds not heard before.
9 month	A black sun will unexpectedly be seen.

6 month	Water will unexpectedly be seen as reddish in hue and fire will shine darkly.
100 days	All of a sudden one would perceive a vast ocean where some white object resembling a floating corpse would be seen floating on it.
80 days	If one were to place one's hand above one's eyebrows or one's forearm before one's nose they will not be seen at this stage.
70 days	One would no longer be able to move one's ring finger as nimbly as before.
60 days	Suddenly one would perceive the sun as a mirror with one's own reflection (face) therein.
50 days	Unexpectedly a great beautiful light shall appear for a moment and then disappear as quickly as it appeared.
40 days	Certain indications would manifest themselves pertaining to one's sense of hearing or physical ears.
30 days	A void would be felt in one's heart. Problems with memory would occur.
20 days	Certain indications would manifest themselves pertaining to one's sense of seeing or physical eyes.
7 days	Certain indications would manifest themselves pertaining to one's tongue.
3 days	Strange sounds would be heard among them the cry of a newly born-babe.
24 hours	The exhalation of the breath would feel intensely cold while the tongue intensely hot. The nostrils would be more and more constricted. Breathing would be difficult. The pulse of the two feet would decrease in vigor, while the pulse of the heart would beat harder.
12 hours	Breathing would lessen in accord with the slowing down of the thought processes and with only a predominating idea to leave the body and unite once again with one's highest principle in the hereafter.

When the time for transition has come to the incarnated soul--the exact moment of which is determined and initiated by the Higher Self--the physical seed-atom which contains the soul-plan of the Higher Self, releases certain information to the endocrine glands via the blood stream to stimulate the death process. The glands then secrete certain substances that Earlyne Chaney calls the "death hormone." This hormone then circulates around the physical system releasing the immaterial aspect from the physical. The mental, astral and etheric bodies dissociate themselves from the physical body, followed by the seed-atoms. The first to be affected and released is the mental seed-atom. As it leaves the physical body, the mental records of the soul and consciousness goes along with it. This is in fact the commencement of the bardo, of which no soul can avoid experiencing, even in a sudden impact of death. Once the mental seed-atom escapes from the physical system, the physical body falls into a coma. Although the physical body still reacts to external stimuli, there is no registration in the consciousness of the soul through the brain. Next to be liberated from the physical body is the astral seed-atom. With the absence of the astral seed-atom, the physical body lies inert and senseless. The departure of the physical seed-atom marks the beginning of clinical death. Its disappearance from the physical body causes the dissolution and disintegration of the physical form. In the above process no pain is involved, for the absence of the mental seed-atom prevents any sensation to be noted in the consciousness. Also, the "death hormone" anesthetizes the whole physical system. Any death struggle or spasms to be seen in the dying merely reflects the release of the components of the soul and the physical body's straining to prevent its departure. As a person is about to leave the physical, the astral body increases in luminosity, even in the case of sudden deaths.

All of the seed-atoms as they leave the physical body, are transferred to the astral form. With the transference of the mental seed-atom, the consciousness of the soul gradually awakens in the astral state and experiences the bardo. Once the bardo is undergone, the soul, the awareness-principle in average cases, is greeted by advance beings and earth-relatives who have prepared beforehand for the arrival of the soul. This we know personally having had psychic contacts when our dad was undergoing the dying process. The dying are often instilled peace with the help of music played by the disembodied spirits.

The departure of every soul from the physical plane is known by spiritual beings, and preparation is always made for their reception in the astral world. Even while journeying in the bardo the soul is often aided by spiritual guides. Divine guides in the higher planes helping the newly dead is a common belief among ancient Egyptians.

When the physical seed-atom leaves the physical form and transfers itself to the astral body, the sutratma, the silver cord, snaps and recoils to the physical form where it infuses itself into the bones of the body. Imbued with the qualities or magnetism of the personality of the soul, the sutratma, as it recoils to the bones, impregnates the skeletal structure with the vibrations of the soul. The bones, therefore, acquire a magical quality, especially if the departed soul was a mystic or saint of a high caliber. This occult principle is well known among shamans of various cultures who often utilize bones of revered men as implements as ceremonial magicians would use their consecrated wands as tools of their will. We personally possess such a magickal object, a very ancient trisula, part of which is made by a human bone.

During the above process of soul-transference, or transition, the awareness-principle undergoes the bardo, as we have said before. Since we will be considering the bardo at some length in a later section of this paper, we will now deal, instead, with the nature of the after-death state.

Once soul-transference has been completed and the bardo experienced, the astral form drifts to the realm or region in the astral or mental world where it will sojourn for a time. The etheric body, is however, still connected with the physical form through a remnant of the sutratma. It dissolves simultaneously with the physical body. With the absence of the higher principles, the etheric body, like the physical form, is but an empty shell, and it may somehow be galvanized into some resemblance of life by astral entities using the life-force borrowed from incarnated beings. Some forms of vampirism is also related to the etheric body. Corpses remaining fresh in their graves is the result of a vital etheric body animated by some intelligence maintaining subsistence through the act of vampirism.

Possessing some psychological traits and memory of its former occupant, the etheric form is often used by malicious entities to deceive and mislead living relatives and persons through channels, psychics and mediums. It is for this reason that cremation, from the occult point of view, is often seen as a spiritual necessity and a psychically sanitary method for disposing physical remains. It prevents the occurrence of negative phenomena such as obsession and possession. In burial grounds, the etheric body may often be seen as bluish lights hovering buried bodies; these are often mistaken for ghosts or human spirits--the correct term for these are *phantoms*.

In ancient Egypt, the desire for preserving the etheric body may underlie the practice of mummification. Like the bones of a deceased person, the etheric body is also often used for occult and magical purposes--usually necromancy or sciomancy, which are forms of divination. This is usually done with the use of the shedding of blood where it attracts the shades, the etheric forms of the dead used not by its former occupant, but by elemental or elementary spirits. Blood, as a medium of the life-force, is an energy source sought after by malicious or mischievous spirits. With the

presence of blood such spirits find it possible to be fully aware of the physical plane and materialize and converse with material beings; and also possible to satisfy certain base desires.

We mentioned before that the soul, the awareness-principle, gravitates to the realm most suited for it in terms of vibration. Mercy does not automatically lead a soul to heaven. A soul's personality determines where it would go. If the nature of the soul is of a low type, it will find itself in one of the lower astral regions which corresponds to the religious concept of hell. High-natured souls will be drawn to the high astral worlds or to the mental mansions. Swedenborg speaks of this in his book, "Heaven and Hell" :

"It ought to be clearly understood that with the angels [souls] it is their interiors which cause them to be in one heaven or another. For, the more their interiors are open towards the Lord, the more interior is the heaven in which they are." (1958:16)

Here Swedenborg says that souls enter the type of heaven that corresponds with the quality of the inner heaven within them. This spiritual principle is a known law among occultists. Cornelius Agrippa in the Three Books of Occult Philosophy, has this to say about the reward of lofty souls:

"But the spirit of man, which is of a sacred nature, and divine offspring, because it is always faultless, becomes incapable of any punishment; but the soul of it hath done well, rejoiceth together with the spirit, and going forth with its aerial chariot [astral body], passeth freely to the graves of the heroes, or reacheth heaven, where it enjoys all its senses, and powers, a perpetual blessed felicity, a perfect knowledge of all things, as also the divine vision, and possession of the kingdom of heaven, and being made partaker of the divine power bestows freely divers gifts upon these inferiors, as if it were an immortal god . . ." (1995:594)

He goes on to say that the soul of a negative nature is left to the pleasure of the "devil" :

"Wherefore then this soul being void of an intelligible essence and being left to the power of a furious planetary, is ever subjected by the torment of corporeal qualities." (1995:594)

Agrippa alludes here to hell or purgatory. Should there be coarse material in the astral form as a result of negative habits, negative patterns of thoughts and desires, the soul sojourns temporarily in purgatory before transmigrating to its rightful place in the heavenly regions. Purgatory is a transitional plane of human souls of various natures and types; for instance, there are those bound there because of their unrealistic religious concepts, and they linger in purgatory until they accept the truth concerning the spiritual laws governing the higher spheres. There are those also stuck in purgatory until certain habits or desires are overcome. Atheists and intellectuals likewise find themselves in purgatory for a time. Attachment to earthly wealth, position, and power may also be a cause of bondage to purgatory.

In purgatory the soul strives to rid itself of its moral, mental and emotional defects; and also the effects of its physical and sensual indulgences, as well as those sensual desires itself. In Hindu and Buddhist mythology, these souls in purgatory are called Pretas, or "hungry ghosts." Until the astral form has reached the required degree of purification, the soul would find it uncomfortable to live anywhere else in the astral plane. Purgatory is said to resemble the earth plane's slums and ghetto areas.

The author of this paper once had an interesting experience in one of the lower astral regions in which he was directed to counsel souls who were kleptomaniacs. Although not informed as to the nature of the inhabitants of the realm, certain events such as personal objects carried on our astral person at that time which was suddenly amiss made us realize the common problem of those souls living there. Those souls were stuck in purgatory because of their thieving tendencies, and we were there to help them realize and give up their negative habit. Bad habits and desires follow us in the afterlife and they cause us intense suffering--the result of being unable to completely satiate, gratify, or fulfill them. It is for this reason that negative habits and desires should be extinguished, or at least transmuted in the here and now, in the physical plane. Before entering purgatory, a soul may be given a glimpse of the astral heavens so as to awaken its aspirations, its desires to improve its condition and soul-estate. When the soul is dissatisfied with mundane and carnal things in the lower astral and when it aspires for something better, it commences to purify its astral body of the lower particles, and suddenly it finds itself within a higher sphere.

Souls that are psychologically unsound or mentally and emotionally disturbed are brought to healing centers in purgatory for the restoration of harmony among their soul-vehicles. Souls with crystallized minds and are mentally imprisoned by preconceived ideas concerning life after death are likewise brought to healing centers for de-hypnotization, or rehabilitation. Souls that led violent lives fall into suspended animation for a lengthy period of time. This enforced unconsciousness is therapeutic in nature, it is a period of soul-healing. These souls are awakened from time to time to determine its attitude--whether it feels guilt or repents of its negative deeds. If not, it is once again tranquilized.

When ignorant of the existence of the higher spheres, souls in purgatory and in the hell regions are often shown, by guiding souls, of the splendour and glory of the upper regions of the astral and mental worlds. Souls are no more intelligent or knowledgeable in the astral as they were in the physical. Ignorance in the physical concerning Truth and Reality are brought along with them in the discarnate state. Opinions are maintained. Souls, therefore, see and experience what they have learnt to believe. Such "lost souls" are shown the way of ascension to the higher worlds.

The astral body is plastic-like in nature and it normally reflects the nature of the soul within. Souls with negative tendencies and evil traits assume forms with facial features reflective of its nature. They may take on the appearance of misshapen, grotesque, and monstrous forms. Conversely, souls with positive, clean, and pure natures take on angelic forms. The higher the quality and nature of the soul, the more beautiful and scintillating its appearance. Even the clothings worn by souls reflects the inner state. Referring to this principle Swedenborg declares :

". . . all the interior affections appear and shine forth from the face." (1958:22)

He also relates the mystery of soul-appearance of evil persons:

". . . and wonderful to tell, those in hell appear to one another as men, but in the light of heaven they appear as monsters, horrid in face and body, the exact form of their own evil." (1958:66)

Among Chinese and Tibetan beliefs is that souls could reincarnate as animals. Considering the principle mentioned above, we can come to appreciate some truth in this concept. Men with animal characteristics do reflect their animal nature in their astral-forms.

Through death the mind retains the same personality, habits, traits, character and inclinations, and this is known through one's appearance. It is through the facial appearance, the quality of the clothings worn, and the luminosity and colours of the aura of the soul that the degree of evolution of

the soul may be determined. Some beings are so radiant, that it hurts to look at them. We would probably shield our eyes with our hands to protect our sight from the glare--this gesture could almost be interpreted as a salute--a sign of honor and respect to those beings. These souls are bearers of Light, Life and Love. Their presence heals and vitalizes the younger souls. Overthere, in the astral and mental worlds, everyone sees us for what we really are, including ourselves. Though we may be "somebody" in the physical world, in the astral worlds we may be just another "person." In the higher worlds, our true character stands revealed. There is nothing of our private thoughts, feelings and character that we can hide. We are an opened book that reveals our inner selves to others around us. Again quoting Swedenborg:

". . . an angel who excels in wisdom instantly sees the quality of another from his face." (1958:22)

Only virtues, good thoughts, deeds, and a search for Truth confers beauty of appearance. In the higher worlds we will discover the fact that thoughts are things. What we think manifests and affects us almost immediately without any time interval.

Those with pre-conceptions regarding heaven, such as religious devotees, will experience the type of heaven of their expectations. These various heavenly conditions, however, are illusions. They exist temporarily as dramas played on the behalf of the newly-arrived soul for the purpose of teaching spiritual lessons, such as the errors of pre-conceived ideas. The dramas are sometimes played by negative beings with non-benevolent motive. These dramas last until the soul awakens to the fact that its concept of heaven as experienced, hardly reflects the true reality, state, and nature of the mansions of the Cosmos; or conversely, it could entrap him even further. The former condition is brought home when certain events occur in their personal "heaven" which indicates the artificiality of their paradise. For instance, a soul conceiving heaven to be one where its inhabitants wear wings and halos, and play on the harp and sing hymns for all eternity will experience just that . . . until ennui sets in, and voices begin to get hoarse, and harp strings begins to burst, and halos begin to fall, and wings begin to molt . . . In reference to these dramas in the astral dimensions, Torkom Saraydarian comments in *The Science of Meditation* :

"Once you enter into it, you see that many colorful events are rapidly forming and dissolving according to your unnamed urges, aspirations, thoughts, and volitions, which are in continuous change and motion and in various intensities. All you see is the response of your astral substance, which mirrors your desires, urges, dreams, and mental modifications. The comic part of this is that you do not realize that whatever you see or experience is your creation, your own expression, which sometimes becomes the vehicle of astral entities who perform an illusive play or comedy to glamour and trap you even more." (1993:208)

In the various astral and higher planes, the soul occupies some of its time analyzing its past life and the assimilation of its experience. This introspection is often done with the assistance of spiritual guides and group discussions. In the heavenly worlds the soul finds time to do and to learn the things that it always wanted to without being bothered by the necessities of earning a daily living. There are Halls of Wisdom and Temples of Learning in all branches of the arts and sciences, including the science of creation. In these schools the soul learns the purpose of life, the laws of the spiritual planes and how it may function effectively therein in its higher vehicles. The potential and expressions of one's creativity are also taught. Generally, the average soul will spend its time studying and serving others, with intervals of relaxation and play.

In the astral state one discovers that it is unnecessary to eat or to drink to nourish the astral form. Nourishment occurs through spiritual osmosis. The astral form automatically absorbs the life-giving energy-fluid flowing through the astral ethers. This could be done physically as well, but it requires intense spiritual training to reach this level. Streams and fountains of energy are to be found in the higher heavens. Muslims call them *Salsabil*. A dip in them also vitalizes the whole spiritual constitution.

There are several modes of locomotion available to the inhabitants of the heavenly worlds. There are vehicles to convey one from place to place. One may also choose to walk or to use the astral body's innate capability to fly. This latter mode of travel requires some mastery though, however, once mastered, it offers one of the most convenient methods of mobilization. Once settled in the higher astral, the soul does not possess the ability to view or manifest in the earth plane unless it has acquired the occult ability to do so. Generally speaking, it is not possible for the soul to visit the higher worlds beyond its soul-level because of the intense fiery vibrations emanating from those worlds. Journeying to lower worlds, however, is much more easily accomplished.

Communication in the subtle worlds is done mainly through telepathy, although sometimes normal speech is used. The utilization of telepathy means that every soul understands every other soul even though in physical terms there may be a language barrier. For instance, through the means of telepathy it is possible for an Englishman to understand an Italian, and vice versa. One also eventually learns to communicate through colours and sounds, these being universal languages. There is, however, a phenomenon that should be noted and expressed clearly by Swedenborg :

" . . . the angels of a lower heaven cannot speak with those of a higher heaven. In fact when they look towards them, they do not see them, the higher heavens appearing like a mist over their heads. Angels of a higher heaven, however, can see those in a lower heaven . . . " (1958:100)

One of our personal experiences with our deceased friend with whom we related previously would substantiate this principle as described by Swedenborg :

We once decided to visit our friend in the heavenly regions. We had some joyful news that we wanted to convey to her--news that she was waiting to hear while she was alive in the physical. Not knowing where she was or able to directly manifest before her, we were escorted by a guide to a lovely garden with a Greek temple in the midst of it. The garden was empty, or so it seemed. But while adjusting our sight, people appeared everywhere. They did not notice us, however. It was as though we did not exist in their eyes. Our escort went into the building and moments later our friend came out all beaming with joy. "I've been waiting for you," she said. Then she looked more closely at me and commented jocularly, "you are so bright, I could faint." After conveying to her our message we bade farewell. As we were leaving, we noticed that no one was yet aware of our presence; however, a dark-skinned man who was sitting on a bench reached out and touched me to, perhaps, reassure himself of my presence and reality. We smiled at each other.

After a lengthy stay in the astral or lower mental heavens, and when one is about ready to reincarnate through karmic necessity or choice, one first goes to the causal realms for a brief sojourn. Not all souls experience this; however, some incarnate directly from whatever realm they may be. In the causal world the soul experiences bliss and peace, and a real rest as a reward for a soul-mission well done. One of the purposes of this stay in the causal realms is the transference of the positive qualities acquired by the soul and recorded in the seed-atoms, to the causal body where it is stored as one's "treasure in heaven." The positive deeds and virtues of the soul adorn the causal body with a greater glory than its former condition. Every incarnation offers a form of nourishment to the causal body

when its incarnated life ends. This causal body is called in Masonry "the temple not made with hands." Other traditions call it "the Chalice." When the soul is prepared to reincarnate for new soul-experiences, it seeks out the appropriate parents, time and place to be reborn in the physical world. This seeking is done with the help of spiritual guides.

Reincarnation is a law for those not having transcended ignorance and earthly desire. Although some religions do not openly teach reincarnation, the concept or precept does appear in some form in their holy scripture.

Although not exhaustive, the above information is sufficient enough to offer us some idea of the occult knowledge available concerning the after death state that is based on personal experiences of psychics and mystics. In order to know more in a convincing way, one would have to study and master the art of soul-travel. Only in this manner, through personal experience, will we satisfy our thirst for a greater knowledge of God's many dimensions, the Cosmic laws, and the purposes of life.

The Tibetan Tradition

Tibetan Buddhism declares that men are enchained to a world of suffering and pain, of illusion and ignorance. This they call samsara. Samsara refers generally to the condition of the six worlds, but more specifically it refers to the physical plane. To be liberated from samsara one had to awaken to one's true Reality and the Reality of the Cosmos called in Mahayana and Vajrayana literature, the "Clear Light of the Void," "Sunyata," "Dharmakaya," etc. Tibetan Buddhism, or Vajrayana, declares that there are various ways of liberating oneself. One may be liberated--if prepared beforehand through arduous spiritual work--through initiation by a spiritual master where the Clear Light of one's true primordial nature is introduced; or one may be liberated through samadhi or meditation where the Clear Light dawns in the consciousness; liberation may also be achieved through recognizing and merging with the Clear Light during transition in the first phase of the bardo.

Techniques have been formed by lamas and applied at the onset of transition to assist the dying to achieve Liberation. These techniques are called :

- 1) Liberation Through Taste, where consecrated pills are placed in the mouth to assist the soul to sustain consciousness throughout the bardo so that it would recognize the Clear Light when it dawns.
- 2) Liberation Through Contact, where the ashes of burnt talismans are rubbed on the heart for the same purpose as the above.
- 3) Liberation Through Listening, this is by far the most common practice. In this method, a manual-ritual such as the Bardo Thodol is read to the dying to remind the person of what it had previously learnt of the bardo and the way of approaching it.

The Bardo Thodol

The "Bardo Thodol," or the Tibetan Book of the Dead, as Christianized by Evans-Wentz, deals with the phases of the bardo that the soul would undergo and what it should do in order to liberate itself from samsara. It provides a unique psychology of the death process and the attitudes that the soul should assume in order to escape rebirth in the lower realms. Recognition of the Clear Light in the first bardo phase is stressed in the manual, because it is the only means for the soul to save itself from experiencing the subsequent phases of the bardo, which from the viewpoint of Tibetan metaphysics,

lead to rebirth and a prolonged stay in the samsaric worlds. Thus, the Clear Light that dawns in the first phase of the bardo offers a chance for the soul to redeem and free itself from the shackles of samsara. This Clear Light is the grace of God that offers death-bed salvation--salvation from one's so-called "sins," or liberation from karma.

In Tibet there are many manuals composed as guides for the dying or the newly departed soul. The Bardo Thodol is one of the most well-known among them in the Western world. It is said to have been written down in the 8th century by the Precious Guru, Padmasambhava. The teachings and doctrines of the Bardo Thodol as an oral tradition, however, are much older. It is believed that Bon, the indigenous religion of Tibet, transmitted much knowledge to Tibetan Buddhism concerning the death process.

Unlike the Christian forms of prayers of burial-rituals recited on behalf of the newly-departed (and also the living), the Bardo Thodol is more of an instruction manual read to the dying by a spiritual guide, that it may understand the psychological processes that it would undergo through transition. It is of especial value to those who practice and follow Buddhistic doctrines, or teachings similar to it because of certain inherent concepts. The underlying doctrine of Tibetan Buddhism is that man, a slave to samsara--the wheel of birth and rebirth, or reincarnation--is able to liberate himself through being aware of his primordial nature represented by the Clear Light which appears in the early stages of the bardo. Recitation of texts such as the Bardo Thodol reminds the departing soul, the "awareness-principle," what it had previously learnt of the bardo and its liberating potential while still alive in the physical plane.

Although dissociated from the physical body, the awareness-principle still retains its sensory faculties. In the disembodied state its psychic senses are acute and enhanced and is able to register and perceive physical surroundings--to listen to the bardo-guidance and instructions as given by the spiritual guide or lama, for instance. In the death process, as the physical senses grow dull the psychic senses grow more keen.

The recitation of the bardo text to the departed may last for a total of 49 days. This is done at first in the presence of the corpse but later a representation of it. The 49 days is supposed to be the maximum length of days the soul would spend in the bardo. This given figure is probably symbolic, representing as it does the number 7 squared. The number 7 is the mathematical and geometrical principle in which our solar system is based. We have many indications of the number seven as creative manifestations, for instance, the seven colours of the light spectrum, and the seven notes in an octave. Forty-nine days of the bardo may also refer to soul-progression and evolution within the 49 realms of the cosmic physical plane. In Indonesia, 40 days is referred to as the period it takes for the soul to complete its wandering in the borderland between the physical and higher worlds before settling in its destined home in the subtle spheres. In other traditions, three days and three nights after transition are considered to be of some importance to the soul. For instance, the *Hadhokht Nask*, one of the scriptures of Zoroastrianism, declares that the soul remains near its body for such a period. This 3-day lingering is probably based on the occult fact that sometimes the sutratma may still be connected to the body after the pronouncement of "death," meaning that the so-called corpse is actually in a comatose state and that revival may occur.

Being symbolic, in reality the 40 or 49 days may take just a few moments or several days. Should the spiritual guide be unable to attend to the dying for reasons of physical distance, an effigy is usually made to represent the one undergoing transition with personal effects surrounding it to attract by magnetic attunement the awareness-principle of the dying pilgrim. The instructions of the Bardo Thodol may thus telepathically be heard by the dying soul.

It is well worth quoting the fundamental doctrines of the Bardo Thodol as summed-up by Evans-Wentz in the Tibetan Book of the Dead, as this will help us understand the bardo as well as give us some insight into Buddhistic beliefs :

- 1) That all possible conditions, or states, or realms of sangsaric existence, heavens, hells, and worlds, are entirely dependent upon phenomena, or in other worlds, are naught but phenomena.*
- 2) That all phenomena are transitory, are unreal, and non-existent save in the sangsaric mind perceiving them.*
- 3) That in reality there are no such beings anywhere as gods, or demons, or spirits, or sentient creatures--all alike being phenomena dependent upon a cause;*
- 4) That this cause is a yearning or thirsting after sensations, after the unstable sangsaric existence;*
- 5) That so long as this cause is not overcome by Enlightenment, death follows birth and birth death unceasingly--even as the wise Socrates believed.*
- 6) That the after-death existence is but a continuation, under changed conditions, of the phenomena-born existence of the human world--both states alike being karmic.*
- 7) That the nature of the existence intervening between death and rebirth in this or any other world is determined by antecedent actions;*
- 8) That, psychologically speaking, it is a prolonged dream-like state, in what may be called the fourth dimension of space, filled with hallucinatory visions directly resultant from the mental-content of the percipient, happy and heaven-like if the karma be good, miserable and hell-like if the karma be bad;*
- 9) That, unless Enlightenment be won, rebirth in the human world, directly from the Bardo-world or from any other world or from any paradise or hell to which karma has led, is inevitable.*
- 10) That Enlightenment results from realizing the unreality of sangsara, of existence;*
- 11) That such realizing is possible in the human world, or at the important moment of death in the human world, or during the whole of the after-death or Bardo-state, or in certain of the non-human realm;*
- 12) That training in yoga, i.e. in control of the training process so as to be able to concentrate the mind in an effort to reach Right Knowledge, is essential.*
- 13) That such training can best be had under a human guru, or teacher.*
- 14) That the Greatest of Gurus known to mankind in this cycle of time is Gautama the Buddha.*
- 15) That this doctrine is not unique, but is the same doctrine which has been proclaimed in the human world for the gaining of salvation, for the Deliverance from the Cycle of Rebirth and Death, for the Crossing of the Ocean of Sangsara, for the Realization of Nirvana, since immemorial time, by a long and illustrious dynasty of Buddhas, who were Gautama's Predecessors.*
- 16) That lesser spiritually enlightened beings, Bodhisattvas and gurus, in this world or in other worlds, though still not freed from the Net of illusion, can nevertheless, bestow divine grace and power upon the sishya [student] who is less advanced upon the Path than themselves.*
- 17) That the Goal is and can only be Emancipation from Sangsara.*
- 18) That such Emancipation comes from the Realization of Nirvana.*
- 19) That Nirvana is non-sangsaric, being beyond all paradises, heavens, hells, and worlds.*
- 20) That it is the ending of Sorrow.*
- 21) That it is Reality" (1975:66-68)*

Man, in general, is ignorant of his divinity. His mind and consciousness are veiled by the false light of Maya. Maya is the way we perceive and interpret Reality. It translates in our consciousness cosmic vibrations into forms, colours and sensations--a world of appearance. We perceive not what is, but what we believe to be. Maya produces a deceiving state of duality, of object and subject. All appearances in the mind and consciousness as a product of Maya are illusory and unreal. The mind, not understanding the nature of Maya, is indeed the slayer of the Real, as stated by Helena Blavatsky. This ignorance of Reality causes man's prolonged stay in samsara. Recognition of the Clear Light, of Reality, of the Unity of Being, releases man from his spiritual bondage. Tibetan Buddhism believe that the six worlds are transitory and that rebirth into any one of them is undesirable and should be avoided. Man's loftiest aspiration should be directed to the awakening to Reality as the highest religious goal, and this illumination naturally terminates the ceaseless rounds of birth and rebirth in the samsaric worlds. In Christian terms, this is the attainment of salvation where the true follower of Christian principles is made into a pillar in the kingdom of heaven and "goes no more out."

Tibetan Buddhism is not the only religion that possesses manuals to be read to the dying. To the Hindus, the *Garuda Purana* fulfills the same purpose. Ancient Egyptians, too, had their death-manuals such as the one translated by Wallis Budge, the *Book of the Dead*, or "The Coming Forth From Day," to give its original title. This title suggests the acquaintance of the ancient Egyptians with the Clear Light of the bardo. In this manual, taken from hieroglyphical murals painted in tombs, says that death is followed by the soul's entry into the "clear light of day." Experience of the bardo is universal and fundamental to the human psyche, therefore, manuals such as the Bardo Thodol or the Book of the Dead that possesses keys to spiritual portals, are relevant to human psychological and spiritual integration. The relevance of such texts are not to be confined to its place of origin in time or in space. Adaptations may be made for western society with its world-wide influence. The phenomenon of the Clear Light with its inherent nature of spiritual grace is for all human beings regardless of race, sex or creed. In one sense, this Clear Light may be seen as the "comforter" promised by the Piscean Master to his followers.

The Bardos and Tibetan Practices Related to Dying

Before continuing, it is appropriate that we define here the word "bardo." Bardo is often translated as "intermediate state," an interval, or a period between two conditions, planes, or states of consciousness in the samsaric worlds. Basically, it refers to the following four states:

- 1) Between two states of consciousness
- 2) Transitional state
- 3) Uncertain state
- 4) Twilight state

Tibetan teachings refer to these 4 states as the psychological nature of the following six bardos:

- 1) Bardo of Life (Kye Ne Bardo)
- 2) Bardo of Dreams (Milam Bardo)
- 3) Bardo of Meditation (Samten Bardo)
- 4) Bardo of the Transition Process (Chikai Bardo)
- 5) Bardo of State After Death (Chonyid Bardo)
- 6) Bardo of Rebirth into Samsara (Sidpa Bardo)

The word Bardo, as is commonly used and understood, refers to the general framework of the death process. In this section we will be considering the nature of the last three bardos listed above. But before we do, however, it would be interesting to note certain practices related to the art of dying and

the psycho-somatic processes of dying as occultly observed by spiritual practitioners of Lamaism throughout the centuries.

Physiologically speaking, when one undergoes a natural death the physical senses fail one by one. First the sense of vision blurs, then the sense of hearing is impaired, next the sense of smell fails; this is followed by the deterioration of the sense of taste and touch. There is also a feeling or sensation of pressure, followed by coldness, heat, and a sense of being blown to bits. Dissolution of the senses and its varied sensations are symbolically described in Tibetan Buddhism as the merging of the elements one into the other until it sinks into the primal substance. This is the process of *Thimrim*. To describe the illustrative process above in symbolical detail :

First, "earth sinks into water;" second, "water sinks into fire;" third, "fire sinks into air;" fourth, "air sinks into space."

As for the external signs of the approach of death that may be observed by an outsider, they may include sagging facial muscles, coldness in the extremities, blueness beneath the nails, difficulty in breathing, and glazed eyes.

This merging of the elements are accompanied by internal and external phenomena or signs which the dying is taught to recognize. Tulku Ugyen Rinpoche explains certain inner signs as cited in the Bardo Guidebook:

"First the earth element starts to disintegrate. One feels very heavy. That's when people say 'Please lift me up, raise me up. I feel like I'm sinking.' When the water element dissolves then one feels very cold and says, 'Please warm me up. It's too cold in here.' When the fire element dissolves one feels very thirsty and wants water, one's lips are drying up. When the wind element dissolves one feels as if one is floating at the brink of an abyss, not anchored anywhere. When consciousness dissolves into space it means that everything grows very big and completely ungrounded. The outer breath has stopped but the inner breathing is still taking place." (1991:93)

Dissolution of the physical form causes a release of the awareness-principle from the body and expands the consciousness to enfold a higher state. The absorption of the four elements are spiritually related to the activities of their subtle counterpart personified as goddesses :

- 1) Buddhalocana - Earth
- 2) Mamaki - Water
- 3) Pandaravasini - Fire
- 4) Samayatara - Air

After the absorption of the elements, what is called the "Three Paths" commences. Whereas the above is known as the "gross dissolution," the Three Paths is known as the "subtle dissolution." The Three Paths is associated with inner processes called by lamas the stages of "appearance," "increase" and "attainment." They are associated with the three "tigle," or "bindu." The tiges are described as being the essences of one's parents and possessing certain colours related to the male and female seed. The male tige is white in colour and resides at the top of the head. It represents "skillful means." It is also related to the nirmanakaya--one of the three bodies often referred to in Mahayana Buddhism. The female tige is red in colour and has its abode at the base of the spine. It represents "wisdom," and is related to the sambhogakaya. The third tige is a neutral essence, it is a combination of both male-female tiges when they meet in the heart; it results in the black tige. This tige is related to the dharmakaya. The movements of the three tiges in the physical body result in the stages of one's

realization of "emptiness," or the Clear Light of the Void, which in the average person goes unrecognized. During the death process the white tige descends into the heart center followed by the ascent of the red tige into the same locality. These are the stages of "appearance" and "increase." The stage of "attainment" or the "black path" occurs when both male and female bindus meet in the heart center to form the black tige and give rise to the actual moment of death. The appearance of the Clear Light follows at that precise moment. In the black stage the average person usually falls unconscious, the Buddhist initiate of such teachings as Dzogchen or Mahamudra, however, is able to maintain awareness and recognize the Clear Light as it appears. Concerning the nature and movements of the tiges, Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche in the Bardo Guidebook comments :

"Whiteness or appearance is due to the descent of the white element, obtained from one's father at the moment of conception. At that time there is a white shimmering light like moonshine. The outer sign is similar to the moon descending or rising. The inner sign is that one's consciousness feels hazy like a mirage. This should be acknowledged as the experience of the whiteness.

"The experience of redness involving the ascent of the red element obtained from one's mother at conception is like sunshine in a place filled with dust so that the sun appears very red. The outer sign is a red sun either rising or setting. The inner sign is scintillating sparks that appear and disappear like fireflies. The experience of blackness is like the darkness of the night sky. At this point one's consciousness alternates between being clear and hazy." (1991:92-93)

The phenomena of the three tiges should be considered symbolic. They represent psychological processes that purifies, as much as possible, the psyche from emotional and mental stains. Our primordial nature is the Clear Light of the Void, in Christian terms this corresponds to one's "Father" in heaven or *Nur Illahi*, as muslims would call it.. This shining divine spark within is clouded by negative emotional and mental qualities, recognized by muslim mystics as the "hijab" or veil. Once freed from those negative toxins of the psyche, one's true nature may be easily apperceived. The "movements" of the tiges facilitates this process. In the Bardo Guidebook the author refers to the psychological cessation of thoughts related to sensual desire, anger and delusions and in connection with the stages of the three tiges :

"During the white experience the thirty-three thought states caused by anger cease. During the red experience the forty thought states caused by passions cease. When the two essences meet, the seven thought states caused by stupidity cease." (1991:12)

And once freed from the above negative, deluded thoughts of anger, passion and stupidity, what remains is the Clear Light of the Dharmakaya--one's divine nature.

When the dying's last expiration is about to cease, lamas make it a practice to turn the pilgrim's dying body over to the right side. This they call the "Lying Posture of the Lion." The carotid arteries of the left and right side of the throat are pressed simultaneously. By such a practice it is hoped that the "awareness-principle" would emerge from the crown chakra. By pressing the arteries the remaining life-force in the body no longer re-circulates within the physical system--it is forced out through the crown portal. Pressure on the arteries prevents the soul, or awareness-principle from falling unconscious, or into the death-swoon. It also triggers the experience of the Clear Light of the first phase of the Bardo and the hoped-for recognition of it. Incidentally, it is likewise believed that the arterial pressure stimulates kundalini, or the serpent-force lying at the base of the spine, just as the death-hormone is believed to by Chaney. This occult writer also believes that kundalini is an active cause of the appearances of the bardos. Kundalini as it rises to the dying brain via sushumna, or the

subtle spinal nerve, is believed by lamas to be an important factor in manifesting the Clear Light of the Void. The pressure on the carotid arteries is maintained for about six minutes after the last breath--the time that it takes for the Clear Light to dawn. We are also advised by Bardo teachings not to touch a corpse for at least an hour after death, for, it is said, that the awareness-principle is attracted to the area being touched. This would only cause the mind of the soul to be distracted and to wander away from the important bardo experiences.

Although soul-emergence out of the crown chakra is the desire of every well-informed Tibetan, the incarnated soul may also exit, according to Lamas, through any of the other eight different openings of the body, the route of which, it is said, determines the place of abode of one's awareness-principle in the after-life. Below we give the nine portals of exit and their associated realms :

Anus - Hell realm
Genital - Animal realm
Mouth - Hungry ghost realm
Nose - Human realm
Navel - Desire-gods realm
Ears - Asura/Titan realm
Eyes - Form realms of the gods
Top of head - Formless realms of the gods
Crown of head - Devachan

We shall now consider the three bardos, or the three phases of the Bardo--the Chikai, Chonyid, and Sidpa. Below we give the bardo-phases and stages, and the approximate number of days that the soul may linger in them:

- 1) Chikai Bardo, first stage - First to third day
- 2) Chikai Bardo, second stage - Third to fourth day
- 3) Chonyid Bardo, first stage - Fourth to eleventh day
- 4) Chonyid Bardo, second stage - Eleventh to nineteenth day
- 5) Sidpa Bardo, first stage - Nineteenth to fortieth day
- 6) Sidpa Bardo, second stage - Fortieth to forty-ninth day

It should be noted that not all of these bardos may be experienced by the one undergoing transition. Liberation and illumination may occur in the first or second phase making the undergoing of the succeeding stages unnecessary; it all depends upon the purity, the spirituality, and the karma of the dying pilgrim. Each succeeding stage makes it more improbable that liberation be gained; however, with the correct faith, humility, knowledge, attitude, behaviour, and awareness, the grace of the Cosmos may pour upon the one experiencing the bardo and offer attainment of the long sought-for salvation. Our understanding, awareness and reactions in the Bardo determines whether we attain enlightenment or prolong our existence in samsara.

Chikai Bardo, First Stage

In this first stage of the bardo the Clear Light of the Void dawns upon the consciousness or awareness-principle. In Vajrayana teachings this Clear Light is none other than the dharmakaya, the highest principle within the microcosmic being of man. In Theosophy, this is the Monad; or the "I AM Presence," as some esoteric schools of thought would call it; or "Yechidah" in the Qaballa, the oral tradition of Judaism.

The Clear Light is like a mirror that reflects our Divine Self, our true Buddha nature. This Clear Light is said to be resplendent and scintillating, of a brightness that surpasses a thousand suns. Recognizing, being aware, and merging with one's true nature confers upon one a new spiritual status. The experience expands one's consciousness, not unlike the "Cosmic Consciousness" of Richard M. Bucke. Fundamentally, the Clear Light is experienced when one abides in one's true primordial nature in stillness without being moved by thoughts or emotions. This usually occurs in a deep state of meditation. Experiencing the Clear Light in full awareness liberates oneself from samsara, from Maya, and the dualistic state of mind and conception. The Clear Light and liberation implies a non-dual state, a non-thought-formation, and an abidance in one's Divine nature.

According to Vajrayana teachings, the Chikai stage is the first opportunity given to us to be free from the world of birth and rebirth, of the cycle of reincarnation with its concomitant sufferings and pain. Our main problem here is maintaining consciousness while undergoing the process of soul-release and recognizing the Clear Light when it appears. Most people pass through this stage unconsciously, in a state of slumber. Various factors causes the awareness-principle to fall into a stupor and not recognize its true nature as represented by the Clear Light. Impurity of thoughts and emotions, guilt, unforgiveness, attachment to the world of form and possessions, ignorance of the bardo states and its liberating potential, karmic stains, and the influence of drugs are just some of the many causes that prevents the soul from achieving salvation in the Clear Light. Earlyne Chaney in her book, "The Mysteries of Death & Dying" comments on why the Light may not be seen :

"If there is darkness within the consciousness, it is reflected on the mirror of your mind and the mirror cannot then reflect the radiance of the Clear Light itself. At this moment when the Clear Light dawns, the mind is like a mirror and only when it is cleared of karmic obstacles can the mind reflect the ultimate light of reality. This is why it is so difficult for most of us to imagine that we may merge with the Clear Light, because the mind must be completely cleared of all karmic darkness." (1989:70)

In order to prepare oneself for the Clear Light experience, we are advised by lamas to meditate daily, and to undergo certain purifying, detoxifying processes--mental, emotional, physical and spiritual--that clears the skandhas, the aggregates of the lower constitution of the microcosm, from all psycho-physical dross that hangs like a veil over the Clear Light preventing its shimmering brilliance from emerging and contacting the soul-in-transition. The more karmic stains in the skandhas, the less we see of the Clear Light. Purifying practices such as the *Heruka Vajrasattva sadhana*, for instance, are often resorted to, to clear one's mental and emotional continuum of karmic stains. The necessity for purity in one's nature in order to see the Clear Light is also to be found in Christian teachings where it is said that only the pure shall see "God." *Surat An-Nur* of the Quran alludes poetically to the Clear Light, to Nur Illahi and how it is perceived.

Basically, one has to be detached from the five skhandas (essence of form, sensation, volition, consciousness, and deluded perception) in order to recognize the Clear Light and its transformative qualities. It takes a perfectly detached mind and a pure awareness, free from karmic stains to merge with the high energies of the Divine flame of the Clear Light of the Void. Only then is one free from all mortal states and is born into a realm beyond the laws of change, of becoming. Immortality is attained in such a manner. Bokar Rinpoche, in the book *Death & the Art of Dying* tells us the significance of the consummation of one's mergence with the Clear Light :

"Recognizing this fundamental Clear Light means 'becoming' Buddha in the absolute body at the moment of death! It is said that it also means 'being liberated as a Buddha in the first Bardo.' When awakening is attained, the bardo no longer continues." (1993:19-20)

Chikai Bardo, Second Stage

While the first stage of Chikai occurs in the swoon state approaching death, this second stage occurs after clinical death--usually half an hour after the occurrence. From the occult point of view, it occurs after the heart seed-atom departs from the physical body and the severance of the sutratma. The duration of this stage is a little longer than the previous one. In this stage the Clear Light seemingly reduces its intensity to some degree. It actually does so because of the obscurations of one's ignorance and karma. Although the Clear Light may not be recognized in the primary stage, there is still a chance for the awareness-principle, when awakened from its stupor or dream-like state to take notice of the Clear Light in this secondary phase of the Chikai. This is usually done with the assistance of the presiding guide, the Reciter of the "death manual," or the Bardo Thodol. The bardo ritual also helps awaken the deceased person to recognize the fact that it had passed through the portal of death and that it should now pay attention to the subsequent psychological phenomena. In the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, the awareness-principle in the Chikai stage is advised to recognize its own primordial Self :

"O nobly-born, when the body and mind were separating, thou must have experienced a glimpse of the Pure Truth, subtly, sparkling, bright, dazzling, glorious, and radiantly awesome, in appearance like a mirage moving across a landscape in spring-time in one continuous stream of vibrations. Be not daunted thereby, nor terrified, nor awed. This is the radiance of thine own true nature. Recognize it." (1975:104)

Like the first stage, liberation is also offered here as a gift of the Divine Intelligence; it is, however, an incomplete liberation, not as totally or as fully as the liberation of the first stage. To ensure the attainment of liberation, as said before, it is necessary to practice meditation every day where a glimpse of the Clear Light may be seen and experienced in an altered-state of awareness in order to aid us to recognize its full power in the Chikai. Experience of the Clear Light in the meditative state help us to experience it in the Chikai state. Spiritual exercises such as visualizing one's physical body and aura surrounded with white light assists us greatly to recognize the Clear Light when it emerges from the depth of our being. Recollection of teachings pertaining to the bardo also increases considerably the chances that the soul would realize the Clear Light and to know the manner of correct approach toward the following bardos. The *marifat* or gnostic techniques of Islamic and Hindu mystics allows the practitioner to evoke the presence of the Clear Light, as does the techniques of Dzogchen.

The intensity of the Clear Light that appears to one's consciousness is dependent upon the quality of light within one's own consciousness. An impure consciousness taints the Clear Light of the Void. Normally, the average person would not experience or recognize the Clear Light of the Chikai stage; and those who experience violent deaths go through the first stages of the bardos very quickly, likewise without recognizing the Clear Light.

While experiencing the Chikai stage, it is possible for the awareness-principle to be distracted from the Clear Light by loud physical noises, or the lamenting of relatives and friends. It is for this reason that the room of the dying one should be free from any conditions that may disturb its mental focus.

Should one successfully recognize the Clear Light, one should merge into it, or absorb its radiance. This will lead one to the Buddhic or higher worlds. Otherwise, if unsuccessful in recognizing and merging with the Clear Light, one would simply fall into slumber and awaken to the subsequent bardos. It is to be noted that in this Secondary Light of the Chikai that the deceased may often catch a glimpse of awaiting relatives and friends on the Otherside, or see their presiding deity or guru, or

even hear heavenly music. This phenomena is substantiated in Near-Death Experiences as recorded by doctors and researchers of the paranormal.

Chonyid Bardo, First Stage

As the awareness-principle sink deeper into the depths of the bardo--because of lack of spiritual attainment--the Clear Light of the Void lessens its shining brilliance, or to be more accurate, heavier veils enshroud it. In the previous Chikai stage, the Clear Light was a manifestation of the dharmakaya. In this Chonyid stage, the Bardo of Dharmata, the Light filters through the sambogakaya, which may be interpreted to mean the causal body. In terms of psychology, this sambogakaya may correspond to the superconsciousness, whereas the former corresponds to Cosmic Consciousness. One's consciousness at this stage sees the refracted Clear Light of the sambogakaya as coloured rays which are moulded according to the nature of the spiritual side of our psychic contents. What one sees in the Chonyid are, basically, hallucinations.

In this phase and stage one's mental and subconscious contents of a spiritual nature are projected externally onto the sambogakaya lights as psychic images. These images may take the form of gods, devas, masters, or angels--anything that reflects our spiritual conscious state. Teachings of Tibetan Buddhism refer to this stage as the appearance of the "42 peaceful deities," or the appearance of karmic illusions of a spiritual nature. It is said that these peaceful deities emanate from the heart center. The spiritual forms of these deities usually appear in the guise of the being that we often pray to and seek spiritual refuge. It is, however, important to realize that all forms that appear in the Chonyid and Sidpa are mental creations, and are, therefore, unreal. Concerning the nature of these deities, Tsele Rangrol in *The Mirror of Mindfulness* says that,

"... the deities are an expression of one's spontaneously present wakefulness; they are automatically there, inherent in one's nature." (1993:10)

Visions within this and the following bardos are reflections of our habitual thought patterns. The spiritual inclined will see spiritual images at this stage, while the mind with habitual carnal thoughts would probably bypass this bardo stage as it would have done so with the previous Chikai stage and go onto the next to see visions of its based thoughts. The primary aim in this and in the following stages is to realize the "emptiness" of these images, and to grasp their real essence as being that of the Clear Light. In this manner we transform our consciousness by realizing the true basis of these visions and integrating them into our own being. Failure to do so simply results in a rebirth in one of the lower six realms. Not recognizing the psychic images as one's own thoughtforms in this bardo and in the next results in a continued existence in samsara.

In the Chonyid one has to exercise *Vairagya* and *Viveka*, or detachment and discrimination--detachment as to what is seen, and discrimination as to what is real and unreal in the unfolding panorama. One has to overcome one's attraction to the images of beauty in this first Chonyid stage as well as to overcome one's repulsion to wrathful and awesome images in the following Chonyid phase. One has to embrace every appearance as a reflection of one's own pure primordial nature. Forms should be seen as illusory, their inner essence, however, should be realized as the essence of Reality. Tsele Rangrol explains it in this way:

"The key point in the Bardo of dharmata is simply to rest in awareness, no matter what happens, and to be able to embrace everything with the mindfulness of awareness-wisdom, without losing the continuity of that awareness." (1993:7)

Aside from psychic images that one perceives in the Chonyid, one may also see coloured-lights, either bright and dazzling or dull. The bright coloured-lights originate from the five "Dhyani Buddhas" of the spiritual planes, whereas the dull coloured-lights emanate from the 6 lower realms of becoming. Like the psychic images that one may see in the Chonyid, the coloured-lights are also a manifestation of one's mind. Their appearance may continue all the way through Sidpa bardo. In the following we list the realms with their associated coloured-lights together with the Dhyani Buddhas and their corresponding colour rays :

World	Light	Dhyani Buddha	Light
Deva Loka	Dull white light	Vairocana	Blue light
Asura Loka	Dull green light	Vajrasattva	White light
Human Loka	Dull yellow light	Ratnasambhava	Yellow light
Animal Loka	Dull blue light	Amitabha	Red light
Preta Loka	Dull red light	Amoghasiddhi	Green light
Naraka Loka	Smoke-coloured light		

Generally speaking, one has to distance oneself and not be attracted to the dull lights as they lead one to a rebirth in a lower world. Conversely, bright coloured-lights lead us to a more fortunate rebirth in the spiritual worlds. When encountered, therefore, one has to abide in the dazzling coloured-lights and allow them to guide one to a higher state. Detlef Lauf in the *Secret Doctrines of the Book of the Dead*, tells us what would occur if we were to be attracted to dull lights :

"If thou art frightened by the pure radiances of Wisdom and attracted by the impure lights of the 6 lokas, then thou will assume a body in any of the 6 Lokas and suffer sangsaric miseries . . ." (1989:125)

Chonyid Bardo, Second Stage

This stage is a continuation of the previous stage. Should the awareness-principle still be unliberated from the bardo in the previous experience, this stage dawns to reflect the darker side of one's psyche for immediate reaction--or response. When the images of one's spiritual aspect exhausts itself from one's psyche, what remains are the negative side with images called by Tibetan teachings "the 58 wrathful deities." Like the images of the peaceful deities, these wrathful images are mere illusions, thoughtforms, hallucinations, or mirages. They are simply projections of one's negative thoughts, feelings and karmic stains. It is therefore imperative that the soul grasp the true nature of these images and not be repulsed, frightened or alarmed by them. Nothing can hurt one's primordial nature, one's Divine Self--"the Real cannot be threatened"--and this is a lesson that one has to learn even now while incarnated in the physical form. A calm abiding in one's pure awareness without any dualistic thought of "I" and "thou" or any sense of separation should be cultivated and maintained. There should only be a feeling of unity, of oneness, of integration with All That Is, which is one's Divine Self. Understandably, such an awareness may not come automatically while one is facing terrifying images. It is for this reason that there should be a reasonable amount of spiritual practice while one is still yet alive on the physical plane. Referring to the images perceived in the bardo and a possible emancipation through right understanding and awareness as well as the result of wrong apprehension, Detlef Lauf comments :

"If all the temptations of deceptive visionary images, which are continually referred to in the texts [Bardo Thodol] as hostile forms of the intellect, can be recognized as empty creations of one's mind and can be immediately penetrated, one will attain liberation. These images dissolve away and the awareness reaches the peaceful and imageless release of nirvana. Every fleeing from these fearsome and terrifying bardo images and every feeling of being seduced by certain colours and visionary apparitions is a step into the ambivalence of the feelings of hatred and desire and is attachment to the opposites of divine consciousness. It is therefore a step back into ignorance, for the antagonistic forces of desire and aversion prevent salvation and unity of awareness in the state of liberation." (1989:69)

One of the reasons that one slips into this bardo from the former stage is that the anxiety, and the terror engendered by the fear of the unknown, and augmented by the appearance of holy images which often stimulates guilt feelings, causes the awareness-principle to evoke the negative side of its subconscious content, thus resulting in the appearance of wrathful images. What one experiences in the bardo is the direct result of one's karma and the nature of one's psyche, whether it be spiritual or carnal. The images of peaceful or terrifying deities, or other frightening forms are there to purify the awareness of ignorance and to offer an opportunity for the awareness-principle to grasp their inner nature. Should the soul react negatively to these images, it passes on to the next bardo. A positive response offers release. One's negative reaction is due to one's karma and lack of spiritual unfoldment.

Should one fail to gain liberation in the Chikai or in the former stage of Chonyid because of one's negative karma and negative mental and emotional traits, there is still hope to liberate oneself at this stage; not from samsara, however, but from rebirth in one of the lower planes of the six worlds. Liberation at this stage also emancipates the awareness-principle from having to undergo the "Judgment" in Sidpa bardo. A soul gains liberation, totally or partially, at whatever stage his karma allows. As said before, preparation beforehand through spiritual practices is an indispensable task to be undertaken by those seeking a better soul-life. Chokyi Nyima, the author of *The Bardo Guidebook*, advises this succinctly:

"The Buddhas very kindly gave many teachings and methods of practicing, but all these different systems converge at one point: right now, while you are alive, get used to the non-conceptual wakefulness called luminous dharmata, the state free from concepts, beyond a meditation of mental fabrication . . . Accustom yourself to non-conceptual wakefulness now so at the time of death you will not have to go through the remaining bardos [Chonyid and Sidpa] to a new rebirth. Resting in non-conceptual wakefulness is enough to cover all aspects of practice . . ." (1991:137)

In Chonyid bardo one's psychic senses are enhanced, and one acquires a certain degree of clairvoyance. The pilgrim of the bardo is somewhat aware at this stage of the surroundings related to its physical form and its newly-terminated incarnated life. The soul may hear and see its relatives and friends grieving and lamenting, but they do not perceive the astral form of its awareness-principle. The awareness-principle may or may not realize at this stage that it has permanently severed connections with its physical form. The incapability of offering comfort and solace to beloved ones at this point frustrates the soul. Bombarded by frightening sounds and coloured-lights likewise make this an exhausting period for the soul.

Sidpa Bardo, First Stage

Here, in Sidpa bardo, the lights, sounds, and images assume a sight more ghastly than the previous bardo. The psychic motion within one's consciousness is intensified to the utmost degree and it projects out with a centrifugal force all of one's inner negative qualities that takes on forms that corresponds to those qualities. It is in this bardo that one's negative karmic deeds play strongly upon one's conscience. In Sidpa, the feelings of guilt, of hatreds, greed, anger and other egoic expressions seemingly assume terrifying phantasms--demon-like, to torture one's consciousness of all of the misqualifications of one's personal energy. As the peaceful deities are said to emanate from the heart-center, so the terrifying images that one experiences in the bardo are said to emanate from the head-centers. One's main objective and natural inclination at this state as in previous ones, is to escape, to flee from these frightening, awesome and gruesome images. This is a mistake of the dualistic mind, however, that requires a reiterated warning: all that is experienced in the bardo are mental projections, and are, therefore, unreal. The bardo experience is subjective and is but a mental journey with an alchemical purpose. To acknowledge mental projections as real and to be deluded by them causes the awareness-principle to further entrap itself in the snare of Maya. This is spiritual death to the consciousness which is referred to by the Piscean Master when he advised his disciples to "let the dead bury the dead."

Should one by any chance, however slim, attain a partial liberation in the Sidpa, one obtains the Nirmanakaya--a pure emanation of the Dharmakaya, the Monad. Eventhough with this attainment, the awareness-principle is still subjected to the wheel of birth and rebirth. However, the next birth may be in more fortunate circumstances and surroundings, conducive to spiritual growth, unfoldment and awakening.

We should reiterate here that the Bardo, not being a place or a realm, but an inner experience, is different for every soul making its transition. Every form, image, figure, or symbol making an appearance on the screen of consciousness simply reflects one's own subconscious content. They are one's personal conscious and subconscious fantasy assuming a virtual reality. All of the forms that appear corresponds to one's sublime or carnal thoughts, feelings, passions and impulses. One's habitual pattern of thoughts and feelings are the most potent in expressing themselves in the bardo. The average soul may succumb in a negative way to these protean forms and changing scenes, the spiritually inclined would, however, transform these images into more pleasant ones with the power of thought. Recognizing the underlying reality of the bardo forms, one may go through it quickly. Amidst the dark thought-forms of Sidpa bardo, there still lurks the Clear Light of the Void. Therefore, reaching out to the greatest light perceivable hidden in and around the monstrous forms one may discover a "saviour" that leads one away from experiencing the Judgment in the latter half of the Sidpa bardo.

At every stage masterful beings watch intently the souls experiencing the bardo--to give subtle aid when necessary, or when a plea for help is made. The nature of that aid is dependent upon the soul's own personal karma. Such saviours when recognized amidst the psychedelic and surrealistic images will free one from further doings in the bardo.

Sidpa bardo is often called the "bardo of becoming," because at this stage it is almost certain that one would be reborn in one of the 6 realms, in one of the phenomenal world of change. In Sidpa the awareness-principle is made aware through certain signs and indications that it is deceased. With such an awareness it may desire to be quickly reborn; it does so by seeking the lights emanating from the human realm--as though drawn to it. These lights play upon the psychic senses, swirling and twirling together as though a human couple were in the act of copulation. Other lights from the other lower realms also play about in one's vision. The light that the soul is attracted to and merges with determines the realm of its rebirth. This may occur before or after the judgment--normally after.

One now comes to the Judgment with which almost all religions teach. After undergoing the previous bardos without being released from it, the soul, the awareness-principle, hallucinates a judgment scene. In this judgment, all of the actors--the judge, the prosecutor, the defender, the scribe and others--are all aspects of one's being participating in a drama that directs the attention of the soul to all of its misdeeds in thought, words, and action--whether of omission or commission--in the physical life that it had just passed. It is a period of soul-review, reflection, introspection and self-examination. Regarding this soul-review, Helena Blavatsky, the co-founder of the Theosophical Society remarks :

"At the solemn moment of death every man, even when death is sudden, sees the whole of his past life marshalled before him, in its minutest details. For one short instant the person becomes one with the individual and all knowing Ego. But this instant is enough to show him the whole chain of causes which have been at work during his life. He sees and now understands himself as he is, unadorned by flattery or self-deception. He reads his life, remaining as a spectator looking down into the arena he is quitting; he feels and knows the justice of all the sufferings that has overtaken him."
(cf Cosmos in Man 1983:180)

In this judgment one's past life is relived and viewed as though one were watching a movie. One is enforced here to realize the significance of one's misdeeds and made aware of one's error. Every misdeed the soul has to account for, and motives are scrutinized by one's conscience represented by Dharmaraja, the Judge, literally, "king of the law." This is the event where the saying "God is not mocked," is seen explicitly. All of the persons that the soul had harmed or done wrong in any way, seemingly appear to accuse the soul of its violation of truth and righteousness. Their sufferings and pain are somewhat felt by the soul being judged, that it may acquire an understanding of the effect of its evil actions. One's reaction here may determine one's "placement" in the subtle realms, whether it be in one of the hell regions or in purgatory. Should the soul be filled with remorse and shame, acknowledge its error, sincerely repent and ask forgiveness, it may be granted a reprieve and sent to the purgatorial worlds; otherwise, if it is filled with hate and anger for God and man and hardens its heart, it would be isolated in hell where it has illusory visions of being tortured by demons, or even literally feel the effects of the flames. This punishment in reality is self-imposed, for none condemns the soul but its own self. The low vibrations that it generates with its negative feelings simply anchors it down to the mire of the astral worlds.

The results of one's judgment are recorded in the seed-atoms and in the subconsciousness of the soul, and this has a great influence upon its subsequent lives in the physical plane; and while still imprinted fresh in its mind in the subtle realms, it provides food for thought and consideration which may evolve into a conscience of a higher standard. In the judgment of Sidpa the soul sees itself for what it really is and not what it believes itself to be or what others believe itself to be.

Parapsychological Findings

In this section we will deal with some of the phenomena relevant to our discussion on the subject of death as probed into by researchers on the paranormal. Two of the most interesting of these phenomena that have been researched into in recent years by scientists of varied disciplines and which indicates the plausibility, and perhaps proof of the survival of consciousness from the scientific angle, are the "Out-of-the-Body Experience" (OBE) and "Near Death Experience" (NDE). These two phenomena are just two of the many ways that the afterdeath state or the survival of the consciousness may be known. Other methods of the occult tradition, however, may include meditation, and spiritualism, or channeling. Psychic phenomena that indicate life after death are those

of apparitions, hauntings, possessions, and reincarnation claims. In this section we will specifically discuss OBEs and NDEs and their association with the after-death state; aside from these we will also briefly look into the practice of hypnotherapy, where it is used as a tool to successfully regress patients to the pre-natal state to uncover their life experiences in the higher planes prior to birth. These experiences of subjects describe in some detail of the nature and life in the higher dimensions, or subtle realms. The findings of hypnotherapy substantiate certain long held assertions and claims of psychics, occultists and metaphysicians concerning the nature of "death." In addition to OBEs and NDEs, we will, therefore, consider what hypnotherapy has uncovered through the practice of regression, as the findings are surprisingly similar to the occult tradition. Parapsychological phenomena offer us a glimpse of what contemporary scientists are discovering about the nature and survival of the human psyche through the "great initiation," as death is often called among initiates of Mystery schools. The survival of the soul through the change called death is on the verge of being openly acknowledged by scientists and scholars of academic circles. Why, there have even been scientists that declared that the soul weighs 2 grams!

NDEs

Although NDEs are laboriously researched into in modern times, this phenomenon was known centuries ago by savants such as Henry Cornelius Agrippa, and even scholars of the ancient Greek period. Agrippa remarks in his *Three Books of Occult Philosophy* that Plato was well familiar with the subject of NDEs and even recorded one such NDE case in his work, "The Republic," where he relates the story of a certain individual named Phereus of Pamphilia who was slain in battle and laid with the dead for several days in a comatose state until he returned to tell the tale of his wanderings in the netherworld. The phenomenon of NDEs is likewise no stranger to Eastern cultures. Tibetans, for instance, are well familiar with this psychological anomaly. They call such a person who returns from the threshold of death, "Delog." Tibetan delogs relate experiences remarkably similar to their western counterparts eventhough coloured by their cultural framework.

NDEs were probably first brought to the attention to the scientific community and society in general by medical doctors and nurses. There are literally hundreds of cases on medical record where dying patients were clinically pronounced "dead," only to revive moments later in a spontaneous manner or resuscitated with the aid of medical instruments. Clinical death is where the consciousness, reflexes, respiration and cardiac activities are suspended; it differs from biological death where the organism begins to deteriorate gradually on the cellular level. This activity of dissolution is, however, counterbalanced with a form of nourishment to certain parts of the body, and this accounts for the phenomena of the growth of hair and nails found on those who were long dead and buried but exhumed for certain reasons.

Delogs of both eastern and western cultures, testify of their visions and encounters with beings, and experiences of certain conditions or events that their soul was going through in the transition state as it left the physical body before being redrawn into physical consciousness. In NDEs, the transition in progress is always somehow interrupted for one reason or another enforcing the soul's return to the physical world. Although some scientists are skeptical as to the nature of these experiences, these "deathbed" visions, labelling them as "hallucinations," there are others who are convinced that delogs do in fact relate actual events occurring in different dimensional spheres. Skeptics, nevertheless, are adamant in attributing NDEs to various physical causes such as mental illnesses, anoxia, brain fever, stress, chemical or hormonal imbalance, temporal lobe seizures, drugs, anesthetics, etc. Such skeptics even attribute consciousness or the awareness-principle to chemical action and reaction in the brain. Notwithstanding these assertions of skeptics, however, it should be acknowledged that hallucinations through drugs do indicate a similarity in imagery as that of the bardo; and in a sense, certain things seen in the afterdeath state are indeed hallucinations. From the occult point of view, drugs, like the

process of transition, trigger the release of subconscious images and project them onto the screen of consciousness. The images in both cases are hallucinations, but the experiences are genuine. In both cases the survival of consciousness is not disproved. Skeptics are not able to prove the annihilation of consciousness through the great change. When the matter is investigated with any seriousness though, skeptics are often instead faced with indications pointing to the possibility and plausibility of the immortality of the awareness-principle. Concerning the nature of deathbed visions, Ian Currie, paranormal researcher and author of "You Cannot Die" comments :

"Our efforts to `explain' deathbed experiences by finding normal, ordinary causes for them have ended in complete failure. They cannot be explained by the medical condition of the dying person nor by the state of his mind, nor by his religion or cultural background . . . the only remaining possibility is that they are genuine psychic experiences" (1995:175)

The majority of NDEs share common elements. A common characteristic of the experiences of delogs, for instance, is their sense of soul-transition as something joyful and idyllic. Resuscitated subjects claim that the dying process is a blissful or a beautiful experience. Some report of even strongly fighting the urge to return to the physical form because of the strong attachment to the dying experience. There are other common characteristics of NDE that researchers have found to be impressive such as a sense of peace, painlessness and weightlessness; a sense of being discarnated and dead but alive in a euphoric sense; a perception of oneself being surrounded by deceased friends and relatives, or a spiritual being of light waiting to receive or greet the soul; a tunnel experience where one sees a white brilliance at the distance; a life-review and a sense of ascending towards the heavens; a sense of mental lucidity; a heightened psychic awareness where one perceives grieving friends and relatives; a sense of being conveyed by a guide or a current of energy to one's soul destination in the subtle spheres; visions of beautiful landscapes and sounds of heavenly music, etc.

Paranormal researchers have been very impressed by the fact that NDEs cause a very profound transformational effect on the psyche of those who undergo the experience. They have found that the moral quality of delogs improve dramatically by transitional experiences. A reverence for life, among other spiritual qualities, was one of the characteristic expressions of transformed subjects. Psychic abilities are often developed as a result of NDEs. This alchemical transformation of the psyche through a NDE is very much akin to the psychological transformation that occurs to astronauts as they orbit above the earth in outer space.

The accounts of deathbed visions of NDEs very much parallel the visions of psychics and mystics. Incidentally, psychics who were witnessed to deathbed events, confirm the statements of the dying who were undergoing an NDE or a real transition, of the presence of discarnate beings waiting to fetch or greet them on the Otherside. Sometimes discarnate beings in the presence of the dying are seen by ordinary individuals as well. When more than one individual perceives the same thing at the same given moment, it can hardly be called a hallucination, especially when animals also react to such apparitions. Such psychic visions capture the attention and fascination of the dying and weary soul to the point where the attachments to earthly ties are forgotten and the desire for release augmented. In the same work as the above, Ian Currie sums up the core phenomena of deathbed visions that are universal to NDEs-visions that goes beyond one's cultural background or religious beliefs :

- "1) Most of the apparitions seen by the dying were `other-worldly'-dead close relatives and religious figures.
- 2) Most of them were there `to take the dying away to another existence.'
- 3) Most of the dying were eager to accept the invitation and `go'-by dying.

- 4) Most landscapes visions were of 'otherworldly' scenery of such compelling beauty that the dying did not wish to remain in this world.
- 5) Medically-inexplicable mood elevation occurred in some patients shortly before death." (1995:175)

OBEs

Like NDEs, the phenomenon of Out-of-Body-Experiences was also widely known to ancient mystics and psychics; but unlike NDEs, OBEs, commonly called astral projection in the occult tradition, is an innate ability of the soul to voluntarily project its subtle form and consciousness--and this occult ability may be unfolded with the aid of psychic exercises and occult procedures; or induced through the use of certain hallucinogenic herbs or mushrooms. OBEs may occur spontaneously, or enforced in some cases--as through accidents or anesthetics; but usually it is a voluntary practice in the occult arts.

Astral projection may be said to be the externalization or exteriorization of the consciousness from the physical form. In OBEs one feels and perceives oneself aware and functioning in a subtle, or astral body. In most cases, the astral senses perceive the physical form to be lying dormant and asleep as it emerges from the physical body. Usually though, this step is bypassed and the consciousness finds itself in another world, time, or place where physical laws do not apply. According to occultists, the quality or evolutionary status of the human soul and mind, as well as its willful expression may determine the nature of the astral form, and this very principle is being discovered by paranormal researchers. Although normally appearing as a counterpart of the physical form, the astral body is plastic-like, and may appear in any form imagined--and this quality is often taken advantage of by practicing occultists. Creative thought energy is a force that is often utilized by occultists to mould the astral form. Lycantrophy, or the so-called superstition of the metamorphosis of a human physical form into a werewolf is probably an occult practice based on the mind exerting its creative force upon the protean quality of the astral form within a certain mental matrix. It is reasonable to regard the shape-shifting of shamanism, of lycantrophy, to be of the astral form rather than the physical. In the Tibetan Tradition, one of the six realms is the world of animals. This refers to a locality within the lower astral realms where carnal and animalistic souls congregate or "incarnate." Such souls with animal characteristics and traits assume animal forms as mentioned elsewhere in this work.

The transformable or unstable form of the astral body that occurs in OBEs is reflected in the statement of Filippo Liverziani in his book "Life, Death & Consciousness," who along the lines of parapsychology, wrote concerning the OBE experience that :

"The projector may thus become aware of having the form of a small cloud, a wad of cotton or a luminous ball floating in space, just as he may see himself as possessing a very clearly defined human form that closely resembles that of his physical body."
(1991:33)

There are often cases in OBE phenomena where both astral and physical bodies are seen at the same time--although at different places. Technically, this is called bilocation. This phenomenon occurs when intentionally or unintentionally the vibrations of the astral form are lowered or densified with etheric substance, thus making it visible to physical perception momentarily--only to disappear at an unannounced moment. OBE subjects under such circumstances are often mistaken for "ghosts," by Man and animals. In fact, a high percentage of ghost sightings of the so-called dead, are in fact sightings of the astral form of living human beings. As a side-interest, we may presume that, therefore, there are three kinds of apparitions: that of the dead, the living and the dying--the dying person, like the normal living individual, may spontaneously or unintentionally astral project to close

relatives and friends. Apparitions of the dead and of the living share many common characteristics and abilities. This is stated emphatically by Ian Currie :

"Both the living and the dead have appeared as apparitions, been responsible for hauntings, communicated through mediums, appeared in death-bed visions, provided post-mortem accounts, spoken of a reincarnational past, and possessed the bodies of the living . . ." (1995:141)

From what we have stated so far, we may surmise that the trained mind may affect the astral form in various ways--it may affect the form of the astral, its density or frequency, and its locomotion. The astral form is described in parapsychological literature as being able to appear in three varying densities: as "invisible-permeable," where it is invisible to physical perception, and physical objects offer no resistance as to its movement; as "transparent-semi-permeable," where it appears as a haze to physical sight and somewhat subjected to physical laws; and "solid-appearance--impermeable to matter," where it appears and behaves like a regular physical form and completely subjected to the laws of three-dimensionality. It should also be noted that the mind, when occultly trained and working through the astral form--and by manipulating etheric energies--may cause such psychic phenomena as the teleportation or the movement of objects. This is probably one of the many causes of the poltergeist phenomenon which is actually an unconscious manipulation of energy done by human subjects.

It is interesting to note how perception through astral senses differ from the physical. Unlike the five senses of the physical body, the astral senses are reported to be diffused throughout the astral form. Subjects of OBEs declare that they were able to see in all directions at once, that they possessed a 340-degree vision. Objects in the physical world are not perceived in the same way as through physical sight, though. Through astral eyes, earthly objects are said to appear "transparent." According to reports, the magnetic emanations of objects are more easily seen than the physical forms themselves; and as for astral forms in general, objects in the astral world were discovered by adepts of astral projection to be "mental constructs" at the personal and collective level.

Among occult adepts living in the physical plane, as well as discarnates of the subtle spheres, the astral condition is often utilized as a media of contact between dimensions. In the astral form one is free of certain limitations or restrictions where time and space are concerned. This very fundamental law of the higher worlds is an important tool utilized by highly evolved entities to promptly attend and assist incarnated souls (or even discarnate ones) in aligning and harmonizing themselves with what may be called soul-destiny in conformity with the Divine Plan. These guides are sometimes called guardian angels or invisible helpers. These invisible helpers, whether from the physical plane or higher worlds, function as protectors, guides, and as the inner voice of incarnated souls. Hunches and intuitive impressions are often derived from these beings. They also provide strength and courage to souls who are in need of moral support. These guardian spirits, as stated above, do not always come from higher spheres. Some of these entities are ordinary human beings with the occult ability to astral project. More often than not, they are highly evolved with much soul experience and are able to minister and offer counsel to suffering or wayward souls, or even to fulfill certain prayers addressed to the Great One. In the case of possessions or hauntings it is normally the exorcist who acts on the physical plane as counselor to the lost, confused, or "earth-bound" soul. It should be noted that not all souls may accept the proffered help by invisible guides or exorcists. In the case of possessions, such entities are forcefully ejected from the hold that they have on their victims. Generally, invisible helpers only assist and guide souls who request such help. This very principle is recognized by Liverziani who comments in his aforementioned book :

"In the spiritual world of the other dimensions it is not possible to help somebody who does not want to be helped. Help is made effective only by the fact that those who stand in need become aware of this and therefore ask for help, accept it, and collaborate with those who give it." (1991:132)

It will be helpful here to enumerate the various points of experiences as reported by OBE subjects. According to paranormal investigators, subjects of OBEs, and collaborated by subjects of NDEs declare the following sensations and discoveries pertaining to the astral body and world :

- 1) A feeling of being very much alive and more mentally lucid than while being brain/body bound.
- 2) A feeling of euphoria, of peace profound and joy, with full possession of mental faculties.
- 3) A feeling of possessing a novel body with a protean quality, alterable with the use of the will-with the use of thought and desire; and that it may be densified so as to be physically visible.
- 4) Discovery that locomotion is driven through the use of the will.
- 5) Discovery that the astral body may be subtle enough to pass through physical objects and that it may be densified where interaction with the physical environment may be effected or desired.
- 6) Discovery that the astral form and awareness may influence the psychosomatic principles of sentient beings, as in the phenomena of psychic healing and possession.
- 7) Discovery that the psychic senses are heightened or enhanced; and that the consciousness functioning in full awareness in the astral world, activities in the astral realms may be engaged in.
- 8) Discovery that the astral or mental environment may be personally "created."

Astral projection is an occult art that was commonly practiced by ancient mystics. Apollonius of Tyana, Yeheshuah (Jesus Christ) and many other mystics often used the ability in their ministry and work. In centuries past and up to this very day, Wicca, or the tradition of witchcraft, teaches its adherents the secrets of astral projection. The superstition that witches rode on broomsticks to their covens actually stems upon the fact that witches were adepts in the art of astral projection and astral travelling. The art of astral projection was kept secret throughout the centuries until the inception and commencement of parapsychological research in the previous century by reputable and eminent scientists. What was once shrouded in mystery and transmitted secretly to initiates, are now being rediscovered or taught openly to the public through the mass media. This occurred because early parapsychological findings paved a way for the revelation of such arcane knowledge. People were made ready for the knowledge and power that occultism had to confer. In contemporary times, Carl Jung, the great psychoanalyst, experienced many OBEs and commented on the "absolute objectivity" of his experiences. Other famous persons who had OBEs were among others, St. Augustine, Goethe, Plato, Aristotle, Wordsworth, Alfred Tennyson, and Ernest Hemingway.

Astral projection, like NDEs, is one of the ways that an individual may prove to him or herself of the truth of the survival of consciousness at the time of transition-that the self, the personal consciousness may function independently of the physical brain and organism. Death is no longer feared, and in a sense, may be said to be "eradicated" once a single astral projection is experienced and apprehended.

Hypnotic-Regression of the Soul

Hypnotism has come a long way since the days of Anton Mesmer and his concept of "animal magnetism." It has passed through many changes of techniques and used for various purposes such as entertainment, self-improvement and healing. Certain principles or tools of psycho-transformation such as affirmation, or "subtle suggestion" are linked to the Mesmeric tradition. In recent years hypnotherapy, or hypnotism used as a therapeutical tool, commenced a new line of probing into the depths of the human psyche. This occurred when certain individuals had spontaneous recollection of their past-lives. If hypnotism could be used to stir and dig up the memory of the present life, could it not also be used to probe deeper into the memory of the psyche to acquire information of a life lived in a past identity or incarnation? This question asked by experts in hypnosis was based on the concept of reincarnation. The underlying premise was that if reincarnation were true, the results of deeper probings into the psyche would offer clues as to its reality. In this section we will not discuss the results of such findings, suffice to say that many case studies of soul-regression into past lives were found to be plausible and later discovered through research to actually be historically-based. What we will consider briefly here are the findings of soul-regression through hypnosis--in the theta-state--pertaining to soul-memory of the transition state and the life beyond the Great Change. This field of study and investigation is just another logical step from the previous probings into past life experiences.

Our main (and only) source of information concerning this subject is derived from Michael Newton. After investigating the matter for several years along the lines that we have delineated above, he published his findings in the *Journey of Souls*. One of his main discoveries is that not all souls are of the same spiritual age; that souls may be classified as to their soul-age or evolutionary status. This spiritual principle is actually the origin of the caste system formed in ancient India. Broadly speaking, souls of the same class or spiritual age usually conform to a certain set of experiences during transition and in their "placement" which souls of a higher class usually bypass or do not normally undergo. This corresponds to the general idea of Bardo experiences where one may liberate oneself at any stage, relinquishing the need to experience the following phases--and this usually conforms with soul age and experience. Newton discovered that there was a "homogeneity of experience" among his subjects in the transitional experience, especially when it progressed through further stages.

Subjects of soul-regression declare that after the initial surprise of being alive during and after transition with its concomitant deathbed visions, a certain white light emerges and attracts their attention. This stage is often accompanied by divine music. From the point of view of Tibetan metaphysics, this white light is none other than the Clear Light of the Void manifesting in the secondary stage of Chikai. Ignorant of what is to be accomplished at this stage, some of the subjects of Newton simply passed on to another stage of the bardo where the judgment or the "tunnel effect" was experienced. Some report of having hovered over the dead body for several days because of confusion, anger or bewilderment. This usually occurs to those who were killed or murdered unexpectedly. We may equate this experience with the latter part of the Chonyid or Sidpa bardo.

Almost all subjects of deathbed visions describe the "tunnel-effect" where one feels oneself travelling through a long dark tunnel to an uncertain destination represented by a point of light at the distance. This light gets closer and closer as one approaches its source. In occultism, this light is actually the light of the astral realms and should not be confused with the Clear White Light of the Bardo, which is essentially a state of illumination. The tunnel-effect is an experience of the crossing of the veil that separates the physical from the astral regions. It is a "movement" into a different dimension, a birthing into a higher world. After the tunnel effect, and while still being a little disoriented, subjects report on experiencing vibrations of love, comfort and companionship emanating from what they later discovered to be a reception committee comprising of close friends, relatives and their personal, spiritual guide. This "reception committee" Newton found, is always planned well in advance of the soul's transition by the soul's personal and spiritual guide to assist it in adjusting to new conditions.

Advance souls; however, according to certain case studies, go through the white light experience and the tunnel-effect very quickly. Most of these souls often go straight to their destined realm without undergoing the preliminary stages of meeting with loved ones. Newton believes that these souls do not require the comfort and solace from other beings that young souls usually crave for. After adjusting to the vibratory condition of the astral realm, Newton's subjects marvel at the remarkable sight awaiting them, and they are usually at a loss for words. Newton comments on this :

"I enjoy hearing from subjects about the first images of the spirit world. People may see fields of wildflowers, castle towers rising in the distance, or rainbows under an open sky . . ." (1995:24)

And he continues:

"Regardless of their state of mind right after death, my subjects are full of exclamations about discovering marvels of the spirit world. Usually, this feeling is combined with euphoria that all their worldly cares have been left behind, especially physical pain." (1995:25)

After meeting beloved ones, most souls are brought to special places designed to heal past traumatic experiences. In these healing centers subjects describe themselves as being bathed in swirling light. Those who are seriously damaged in a psychological way, and who possess negative, or evil tendencies, are brought to rehabilitation centers by their guides and secluded for a period of time.

After the required healing, souls are sent to the realm corresponding to their spiritual attainment. This is described in the Journey of Souls as "placement." Subjects describe riding on a beam of light, a current of energy, to their destination whether it be in the upper astral or the lower mental. In placements, souls are brought to their spiritual group comprising of individuals of a similar evolutionary status, and they normally do not wander from their group to join other associations. According to Newton's subjects, in the subtle spheres, the age of the soul manifests in a certain colour or hue in their aura; these souls of a certain evolutionary status (colour) congregate together to form their spiritual group, which is presided or directed by a higher soul functioning as guide and teacher. In these groups discussions take place concerning experiences in the newly-terminated life. The discussions that take place are not unlike the group discussions that occur in a psychotherapeutical meeting where one's attitudes, motives and feelings for a certain action are analyzed and where one's behavioral pattern or habit is rationalized by the psychotherapist, or others within the group. The spirit world, as we can see from this, is a time for evaluation, assimilation, and analysis. According to subjects, some of the activities that souls engage in are research and study in libraries or spiritual work undertaken at the direction of their spiritual guides. Similar to the teachings of the Occult Tradition, the case studies of Newton indicates an active life in the higher planes where one may study the various fine arts and sciences or express one's creativity in the art of mental creation, or alchemical precipitation. In the heavenly worlds a soul must learn how to utilize the mental and psychic faculties effectively in order to accomplish creative works.

In these fraternal groups of the astral regions, plans are also made for new challenges in the physical world through incarnation. Sometimes agreements are formed between members of these group-minds to incarnate together to carry-out certain tasks or for certain experiences beneficial to soul-growth. For instance, the marriage-made-in-heaven concept is actually formed by souls in the higher worlds who are karmically connected or spiritually related. Choosing a soul-entity to be one's earth marriage partner is done out of free-will as is the choice to reincarnate--though within the bounds of karma. These chosen partners may or may not come from the same group; however, as it all depends on the lessons that the soul wishes to learn. Before incarnating, these married-couples-to-be formulate

certain signs that they would have to look for or to be aware of in the circumstances of their physical plane meeting and in each other to realize the soul-agreement existing between them and that they are, in fact, "soul-mates."

These signs are not usually known or remembered on the conscious level. It is triggered into conscious knowing and feeling from the subconscious mind level through the actual manifestation of those signs on the physical plane. Although gender manifests universally in the physical plane, souls are described by Newton's subjects to be androgynous and manifests in the male or female form in the astral worlds out of preference. Lacking any permanent sexual form, it is thus possible for a soul-entity to embody in the physical world as a male or a female human being.

In contradistinction to "placement," some soul-entities are "displaced." Newton describes them in the following:

"There are two types of displaced souls: those who do not accept the fact their physical body is dead and fight returning to the spirit world for reasons of personal anguish, and those souls who have been subverted by, or had complicity with, criminal abnormalities in a human body." (1995:45)

Indeed, this is an interesting subject, we will therefore discuss this briefly. Paranormal researchers have found that some souls are not aware of their transition. This is usually the result of violent deaths where the permanent atoms are expelled from the physical form simultaneously causing consciousness, or self-awareness to be retained throughout the experience. One of the reasons that makes it so difficult for such souls to accept their condition is that they feel their astral form to be no different from the physical--that, in fact, it feels solid and very much alive. Another reason is that they are unattended and ungreeted by those on the Otherside to give comfort, solace and appropriate information. As a result, these souls become confused, frustrated and "lost." These souls are trapped in time and space and sustain their entrapment in the physical plane because of their ignorance. In spiritualism, these are called "earthbound spirits." The motion-picture "Ghost" and many others illustrate this earthbound condition. Only after certain discoveries--at times with the aid of spiritual guides--do these earthbound spirits discover their position and condition. At times the help of guides are rejected thus prolonging the soul's earthbound condition. Such souls usually bind themselves to a certain geographical location. They often seek contact with three-dimensional physical beings, thus commencing and producing a "haunting" condition. They usually live in darkness--their field of vision being murky--they are, therefore, attracted to any coloured illuminations that might appear in their vicinity. Not understanding the nature of these illuminations or lights--which are actually the aura of living beings--they tend to merge or attach themselves with it. They often find themselves trapped in people's auras. Unknowingly they may reach into such depths as to consider the physical body of their victim as their own and the original tenant as the victimizing spirit. This is technically called "possession," and causes much needless suffering to both parties involved. Possessions of this non-intentional, non-demonic variety may be exorcised effectively and morally only through helping both possessor and the possessed. In this method, the earthbound soul is given information and advice as to the nature of its plight and the way out to freedom. In this manner both sides involved in the possession are liberated. In this psychological counseling, the earthbound soul is made to realize that it belongs to another dimension; the simple awareness of this truth on the part of the invading spirit is sufficient enough to release it from its bondage and entrapment between worlds. Generally speaking, calls for help--and acceptance of such help, together with a release of desires and attachment to familiar surroundings of the earth plane on the part of the earthbound soul, gradually and automatically raises its vibration and moves it on into the astral world where it may find its placement and once again interact and relate with others of its kind.

The methods for exorcising demonic possessions are a little different from the above method where the principles of psychology are used to advise the victimizer. The so-called "demons" in such possessions are most often human souls with very negative and violent propensities. Such earthbound spirits are usually attracted to others of similar temperament, idiosyncrasies, habits and desires. They often seek to satiate their own earthly desires through a human channel. These souls are often stubborn, arrogant, and malevolent. Spiritual advice given to them in any way is often ridiculed and rejected. In such cases, assuming a wrathful and authoritative attitude with a definite command directed to them often helps to extirpate these entities. There is a principle that assists in this rite of exorcism--in expelling demonic beings from their human victims that psychic researchers have discovered: these negative beings are intensely afraid of pure radiant light, especially the pure light within the aura of pure and holy persons. Aside from the natural light-radiance of holy beings, in experiments it was discovered that visualized white light was equally effective. This light is visualized by the exorcist surrounding everyone present involved in the exorcism, especially the victim. Evidently, radiant white light causes some pain to these beings with demonic natures. Such luminescence is therefore avoided by them and causes their hasty retreat. When circumstances permit, these negative souls are brought to special places in the astral realm by their spiritual guides for rehabilitation. These places may be thought of as "hell" by its inhabitants. They are not there for eternity, though. They either progress from there to purgatory or incarnate once again in the three-dimensional world. In the end, all earthbound souls must submit to their rightful placement. It should be understood that in most cases of possessions the underlying cause is not by invading entities or malicious thoughtforms but by the assertion or projection of a personality (perhaps from a past life) from the subconscious. In psychiatry this is called schizophrenia.

Souls are sometimes earthbound because of their attachment to their relatives or friends. There are times when these earthbound souls contact earthlings through a medium. Usually they bring an important message which they feel themselves obliged to pass on to relatives or to certain individuals. This then may be a cause of their earthbound condition, or in other cases, they seek to enlighten humanity concerning life after death. It should be noted here that not all communications through mediums are from disembodied human souls. Some of the communicating beings are in fact elemental spirits, elementary beings, astral shells or even the medium's own subconscious mind--all mischievously deceiving ignorant humans. But nevertheless, sifting the information derived from communicating spirits through mediums, from the reliable to the questionable, psychic researcher Ernesto Bozzano states the following principles as affirmed by spiritualistic communicators (cf "Life, Death & Consciousness") :

- 1) That all of them found themselves in human form in the spiritual world.*
- 2) That for some time, or even for a long period of time, they did not realize they were dead.*
- 3) That during the pre-death crisis, or even a little after, they passed through the trial of summarily recalling all the events of their existence ('panoramic vision' or 'epilogue of death').*
- 4) That in the spiritual world they were welcomed by the spirits of their relatives and friends.*
- 5) That nearly all of them passed through a more or less lengthy phase of reparatory sleep.*
- 6) That they nearly eventually found themselves in a radiant and marvelous spiritual environment (in the case of morally normal deceased), or in a shadowy and oppressive environment (in the case of morally depraved deceased).*
- 7) That they had found the spiritual environment to be a new world that was objective, substantial and real, a spiritualized version of the earthly environment. During the separation of the astral from the physical body, it first assumes a cloudy nature which*

slowly assumes the shape of a physical body.

8) That they had learnt that this was due to the fact that thought was a creative force in the spiritual world and thus enabled a spirit living in the astral plane to reproduce around himself the environment of his memories.

9) That it had not taken them long to learn that thought transmission was the language of spirits, even though newly arrived spirits delude themselves that they converse by means of words.

10) That they had found that the faculty of spiritual vision enabled them to perceive objects simultaneously on all sides, just as they could see inside them and through them.

11) That they had discovered that spirits could instantaneously take themselves from one place to another--even when they were very far apart--by virtue of an act of will; nevertheless, they could walk in the spiritual environment or float a short distance above the ground.

12) That they had learned that the spirits of the deceased will fatally and automatically gravitate to the spiritual sphere to which they belong, this by virtue of the "law of affinity." (1991:88)

To conclude this section may we just add that Newton's subjects emphasize strongly that God is never once seen in the higher realms, although a strong feeling of a Supreme Power is felt ruling the ongoings of devachan, or "heaven," and the kinetic motion of magnetic streams of energy flowing in the atmosphere and environment. This truth denounces certain religious beliefs that in heaven one would finally see God face to face--for while on earth one may not see God's face and live, one would surely behold God's countenance in heaven. This principle has been misunderstood and misinterpreted for the past two thousand years; it should actually be understood in a mystical rather than in a literal manner. It reminds us of Gautama Buddha's silence when questioned about God--the implication of his subtle answer revealing a profound truth to the initiated.

Summarizing the scientific viewpoint on death and the afterlife--based on years of careful psychical, parapsychological research--the following conclusions have been reached :

- 1) That humans are essentially immaterial in nature and that the human essence, or self-awareness, survives physical death.
- 2) That human soul-units exist at differentiated levels of awareness in dimensions beyond the physical light-spectrum, beyond the reach of physical sensory perception.
- 3) That contact with departed souls is a possible feat under certain conditions and circumstances.
- 4) That all human soul-units periodically re-embody or reincarnate to continue their evolution.
- 5) That all re-embody according to the law of causation, or karma; or soul desire.

DISCUSSIONS

As we have seen in the previous chapter, death according to the various traditions, metaphysical experiences and modern scientific discoveries, does not annihilate the human soul; and relationships formed on the physical plane do not cease at the termination of one's incarnation, as is normally believed; also, one's aspirations, goals and ambitions, though simply and seemingly cut-short prematurely at a stroke of the scythe by the grim reaper called death, is actually brought over to the Otherside for a further strategic development that would bloom in a later incarnation. We have also seen that the nature of death and the afterlife can be known to those who are willing to develop the necessary sensory faculties of the astral form and its ability of soul-flight. Additionally, we have dealt

somewhat of the nature of heaven and hell, including the Judgment, from the various metaphysical, religious and scientific perspectives. We have described and hinted of some of the ways and means of avoiding those undesired experiences, states and conditions to be found in the bardo, and even in the lower astral. Non-attachment to the physical form and earthly life is helpful in the process of a peaceful and easy transition, and in a smooth journey through the bardo--this ought to be kept in mind. And lastly, with the descriptions by subjects of NDEs and communications from the beyond concerning the death process, we can be assured that dying does not have to entail any mental, emotional or physical agony; on the contrary, it may result in one of the most joyful states that average souls may experience at its present evolutionary level. It provides a certain pre-taste of what the nirvanic state is like when once the soul is liberated and fully aware of its divine unity with All That Is.

Humans may fear death, but "being dead" is actually the present state of awareness of most people. To be unaware of one's higher microcosmic principles is simply a consciousness of death. What separates the seen from the unseen is the level of one's waking consciousness, and the psychological impurities within one's subconscious mind. There are several components in the microcosm making up what we call the divine, human being. The more components we are aware and conscious of, the more alive we become in the spiritual sense. Non-experience of the higher principles and realities do not mean that they do not exist, it is just that the faculty for higher perception has not yet been developed. Fear is what closes the veil to spiritual knowing. When we fear, we circumscribe our consciousness. Fear of the unknown, is the ignorance of the source of our fear. Identification with mortal principles simply perpetuates (or perpetrates?) one's mortal existence as a normal human being--and it also maintains one's fears. We are meant to be perfect--as advised by the Piscean Master--perfect in consciousness, in knowledge, and in awareness. Attaining immortality, or awareness of such, requires the shedding of mortal concepts, beliefs, attitudes and feelings. With such spiritual labour we gradually build the link between the lower and higher principles and ensure the continuity of consciousness, and the awareness of the illusory nature of death. With each extermination of a false concept we become more alive in a spiritual sense. Death, "the last enemy," as declared in scriptures, though inevitable, will be swallowed up in victory when once its maya-nature is understood and the continuity of consciousness acquired. Death will then lose its sting. Death ends when once the multidimensionality of one's being is realized, and when once one's liberation from the wheel of reincarnation is attained. What we call death is an illusion. This is echoed in the words of the Taoist poet, Chuang Tzu :

"Birth is not a beginning, death is not an end."

Fear simply robs individuals of their physical, emotional, mental and spiritual energies--energies which could be used for more constructive and creative purposes. When enlightened of the nature of death, like Socrates, we will not fear it; and this knowledge, understanding, and enlightenment would greatly help humanity to live an abundant life, as promised by Master Jesus. Like a chain effect, the awareness of the non-existence of death and the truth of man's purpose for being would improve the quality, nature, and service of every governmental department and institution, affecting society's consciousness, development and welfare. But to return to the emotion of fear ingrained in Man, there are several principles that assist one to "die" without fear :

- 1) Non-attachment to physical form, earthly possessions, and relationships.
- 2) Understanding that death is natural and that it does not end one's aspirations.
- 3) Understanding and being aware of one's true nature as divine and immortal.
- 3) Preparation through spiritual practices such as meditation, purification, and the acquisition of merit through service.
- 4) The unfoldment of love and compassion.

From a higher perspective, death is no enemy. It is a merciful friend that grants us rest at a time when we need it. It provides a moment's respite until we re-engage ourselves in the battle of life through another incarnation with new--or old, unlearned experiences. What is important is the assimilation of experience, for if it does not take place, it will have to be undergone again and again until the lesson inherent in each one is learnt by the soul; this can sometimes prove to be wearisome. Life on earth should not be seen as a chance happening, as a biological occurrence in time and space, or as a chemical formation spawned by chaotic forces. Life is Real, is the only Reality and has a definite purpose. Knowing that life was formed on the earth plane for a purpose encourages the soul to discover that purpose. Soul-objective is known to the awareness-principle at deeper levels of consciousness and at the conscious level prior to incarnation. The purpose or intent of the Spirit, however, is normally forgotten once the "waters of Lethe" is drunk during the process of birthing. Our main task set by evolution is to be aware or more conscious of the "unconscious" levels of the mind; thus transcending the state of mediocrity or mortality. Mortal beings are not courageous enough to think, contemplate or face the conditions of death, they thus miss the true opportunities that life affords. When one fears death, one has not yet begun to live. "Death" to average individuals, is always thought of in connection with other people and never their own. This refusal to be spiritually-aware bind souls to an unproductive life in the cosmic scheme. This is the complaint of all mystics concerning the sons of men. In the Old Testament we read,

"Man lies down and never rises. They rouse not from their sleep." (Job 14:12)

From what we have said so far, it may be surmised that there are various forms of death, and this is true. St. Paul hints of this when he declared, "I die daily" (I Cor 15:31). We tabulate the forms of death in the following:

- 1) Death to higher realities and verities
- 2) Death to a higher awareness of divinity
- 3) Death of one's slumber in matter
- 4) Death of the false ego and its carnal, self-centered desires
- 5) Death of sleep
- 6) Death of the physical and etheric bodies
- 7) Death of the astral body
- 8) Death of the mental form

We will briefly describe each one: death to higher realities and verities, and the death to higher awareness of divinity are related. This is in fact the involutory path of the soul as it descends for the first time in a new cycle of manifestation, or "manvantara." In involution the soul loses a certain awareness only to regain it with an enhancement during the Path of Return. Most souls prolong this period of ignorance and awareness of higher multidimensional truths by their own free-will.

Death of one's slumber in matter is the awakening of the soul's aspiration to spiritual possibilities--paradoxically, it could also mean being spiritually unconscious; this is followed by the death, or transcendence of the false ego and its expressions in the movement within the evolutionary spiral. The death of sleep occurs every night as the soul takes flight to subtle worlds. Death of the physical and etheric bodies occur when one leaves the present incarnation for the astral world. This is followed by the deaths of the astral and mental forms as the soul rises higher and higher to rest for a period in the causal body before preparing to reincarnate.

Knowledge of the nature of death and the other worlds are important subjects for every metaphysician. As said earlier in this paper, in the course of one's metaphysical ministry, one would often encounter individuals in bereavement requiring comfort and solace. Equipped with a higher

understanding of the nature of death and the purpose of life, metaphysicians are in a better position to enlighten humanity, and to fulfill one of their functions as ministers. To Catholics, administering the "Extreme Unction," or the last sacrament to the dying may be considered vital. But to the metaphysician, much more is required to guide the soul through the dying process. With the appropriate knowledge and occult ability, the metaphysician may assist souls in making a more meaningful transition. Deathbed-rites of an occult formula and design, taking the bardo into consideration, are needed by those engaged in the metaphysical field. The importance and purpose of life should be appended and stressed in those rites as a lesson not only for the departed, but for those who are left behind. An experience of a loss of a beloved one through the portals of death on the part of grieving and confused individuals should be looked upon by metaphysicians as opportunities for the sowing of the seeds of truth into their receptive consciousness. Metaphysicians as farmers in the vineyard of truth should play their part perfectly. By offering various truths concerning the nature of death-truths that are rational, logical, helpful and spiritually stimulating--we improve the whole image of the metaphysical ministry in the minds of the public. The more metaphysicians have to offer to the public as to occult and esoteric knowledge and as to the expressions of their high psychism, the more will the public's awareness be stirred and lifted to a higher plane of consciousness. Metaphysics as a synthesis of religious, spiritual, philosophical, and scientific truths has the capacity to offer what traditional forms of religion, science and modern philosophies are incapable of offering--that is, real help.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In the Introduction of this paper we presented the purpose and the need of why this subject had to be written and discussed--of the importance of its place in the metaphysical ministry as well as its influence upon the individual and society as a whole. This purpose was again stressed in the previous chapter. In order to organize our thoughts regarding the subject, we formulated several themes that would be the basis for the structure of our paper. Our fundamental themes consisted of the following:

- 1) The survival of personal consciousness
- 2) The process of transition
- 3) The nature of life after so-called death

The structure of our findings and of this paper, was based upon four perspectives:

- 1) Religion/mythology
- 2) The occult tradition
- 3) Tibetan Buddhism
- 4) Parapsychology

From each perspective, we initially dealt with the basic themes from a certain point of view, but ended up with the same findings, the same conclusions, and the same cosmic truths; nevertheless, among the above perspectives, there is still much to be said about religion as a whole that has somewhat misrepresented the spiritual truths as taught by their founders. We are certain, though, that every metaphysician would research into this subject sooner or later as it is mentally and spiritually rewarding. In years to come "death" will be a time of celebration and not a time of mourning as it is now.

Finally, in the fifth chapter, we discussed on humanity's basic psychological problem--that of senseless fear. We have seen how this fear robs man of his or her true life as a divine son or daughter of God living an abundant life in the here and now. We have also briefly discussed how the elimination of the fear of death would transform the individual and society as a whole.

To sublimate and transcend this fear condition that overwhelms society we suggest that additional research be conducted into along the lines of soul-investigation, and into the many other principles of the bardo process not discussed or discovered by Tibetan Lamas. Ways of researching into this should be conducted in a scientific and intuitive manner, though this may not always be through conventional methods. Researchers should not fear probing into the invisible, into the immaterial, or into the abstract. Through research within a single avenue, other possibilities will present themselves. An answer to a single question begets many more questions, ad infinity; thus humanity progresses.

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