

Near Death Experiences

IN THE LIGHT OF THEOSOPHY

Near Death Experiences and the Law of Cycles

The Esoteric Philosophy known as Theosophy was presented to the world by H.P. Blavatsky, assisted by William Q. Judge, and inspired by the Masters of an Eastern Brotherhood, at the end of the 19th century. One of the most central and important amongst its many teachings is that which relates to the subject of death and the various states and experiences which occur after physical death and prior to rebirth.

At the time that these teachings were given out, the now quite common phenomenon of Near Death Experiences (or NDEs) had not yet arisen. No-one was talking about tunnels of light, beings of light, and so forth. This only really started to come about around the 1960s and 1970s and particularly from **1975**, the year in which Raymond Moody's world famous book "Life after Life" was published.

From a mundane perspective, one explanation for this is that until that time medical science and technology was not sufficiently advanced to be capable of so frequently reviving patients from temporary "death" and thus there was only an extremely small amount of people who had been brought back from the very brink of the afterlife and who were capable of describing what they had experienced.

Another explanation, from a more metaphysical perspective, relates to the fact "that during the last quarter of every hundred years an attempt is made by those "Masters," of whom I have spoken, to help on the spiritual progress of Humanity in a marked and definite way. Towards the close of each century you will invariably find that an outpouring or upheaval of spirituality – or call it mysticism if you prefer – has taken place," (H.P. Blavatsky, "The Key to Theosophy" p. 306-307) and that therefore "Every century an attempt is being made to show the world that Occultism is no vain superstition. Once the door permitted to be kept a little ajar, it will be opened wider with every new century. The times are ripe for a more serious knowledge than hitherto permitted, though still very limited, so far." (HPB, "The Secret Doctrine" Vol. 1, p. xxxvii-xxxviii)

The incessant working of Cyclic Law, the gradual yet inevitable progression of the cycles of time, results in new experiences and developments in both humanity's inner and outer evolution, and so far it seems safe to say that the most adequate, satisfactory, and reliable explanation and guidance relating to these is that which can be found in the Ageless Wisdom of Theosophy.

Although there are many similarities between what Theosophy teaches about death and people's recent accounts of Near Death Experiences, the two do not identically match up or perfectly correspond.

Some people, who have not thought in any depth about the matter, have thus concluded that the basic NDE model must be the true explanation of what happens to us after death, seeing as it is so well attested to by so many different people from different backgrounds all over the world, and that the flaw or inaccuracy, if any, must lie somewhere in the Theosophical system.

Something is often overlooked in regard to NDEs. The clue is in the name. We always have to recall that Near Death Experiences are only "**Near**" Death Experiences. They're not **Actual** Death Experiences and thus do not provide an entirely accurate or exact overview of the real after-death process. Once the latter is truly entered upon, there is no possibility at all of returning to the body to tell people about it.

HPB writes on p. 555 of the first volume of "The Secret Doctrine" that a human being can be resuscitated or "resurrected" from seeming death as long as their "astral "vital body" has not been irreparably separated from the physical body by the severance of the magnetic or odic chord." Such a separation or severance of this "silver cord," as it is often called, results in real and permanent death of the physical body. Differences and apparent contradictions between the teachings of Theosophy and the experiences of Near Death Experiencers can be accounted for in this way.

The latter often gain brief and partial glimpses of the state of Devachan. This is the heaven state, which is not a location or a plane but a mental state, a state of consciousness. It is actually quite different from the popular religious conceptions of Heaven. For a start, Theosophy teaches that everyone has their own personal Devachanic state and that each of us creates it for ourselves unwittingly out of our own consciousness. It is the exact representation and experience of what you had believed, hoped, and expected Heaven or the afterlife to be like while you were still alive on earth.

What happens when we die, according to Theosophy?

THE MOMENT OF DEATH

“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 *personal* becomes one with the *individual* and all-knowing *Ego*. But this instant is enough to show to 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 suffering that has overtaken him.

“*Does this happen to everyone?* Without any exception. Very good and holy men see, we are taught, not only the life they are leaving, but even several preceding lives in which were produced the causes that made them what they were in the life just closing. They recognise the law of Karma in all its majesty and justice.” – **H.P. Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy*, p. 162**

“The breath leaves the body and we say the man is dead, but that is only the beginning of death; it proceeds on other planes. When the frame is cold and eyes closed, all the forces of the body and mind rush through the brain, and by a series of pictures the whole life just ended is imprinted indelibly on the inner man not only in a general outline but down to the smallest detail of even the most minute and fleeting impression. At this moment, though every indication leads the physician to pronounce for death and though to all intents and purposes the person is dead to this life, the real man is busy in the brain, and not until his work there is ended is the person gone. When this solemn work is over the astral body detaches itself from the physical, and, life energy having departed, the remaining five principles are in the plane of kama loka.” – **William Q. Judge, *The Ocean of Theosophy*, p. 99-100**

“The man may often appear dead. Yet from the last pulsation, from and between the last throbbing of his heart and the moment when the last spark of animal heat leaves the body – the brain thinks and the Ego lives over in those few brief seconds his whole life over again. Speak in whispers, ye, who assist at a death-bed and find yourselves in the solemn presence of Death. Especially have you to keep quiet just after Death has laid her clammy hand upon the body. Speak in whispers, I say, lest you disturb the quiet ripple of thought, and hinder the busy work of the Past casting on its reflection upon the Veil of the Future.” – **Master K.H., *The Mahatma Letters*, p. 171**

KAMA LOKA, THE SECOND DEATH, AND THE GESTATION STATE

“ “Bardo” is the period between death and rebirth – and may last from a few years to a kalpa. It is divided into three sub-periods (1) when the Ego delivered of its mortal coil enters into *Kama-Loka* [Tibetan: Yuh-Kai] (the abode of Elementaries); (2) when it enters into its “Gestation State”; (3) when it is reborn in the *Rupa-Loka* of Deva-Chan. Sub-period (1) may last from a few minutes to

a *number* of years – the phrase “a few years” becoming puzzling and utterly worthless without a more complete explanation; Sub-period (2) is “very long”; as you say, longer sometimes than you may even imagine, yet proportionate to the *Ego’s* spiritual stamina; Sub-period (3) lasts in proportion to the good KARMA, after which the *monad* is again reincarnated.” – **Master K.H., *The Mahatma Letters*, p. 105-106**

“According to the Eastern teaching the state of the deceased in Kama-loka is not what we, living men, would recognise as “conscious.” It is rather that of a person stunned and dazed by a violent blow, who has momentarily “lost his senses.” Hence in Kama-loka there is as a rule (apart from vicarious life and consciousness awakened through contact with mediums) no *recognition* of friends or relatives, ... “We meet those we loved only in Devachan, that subjective world of perfect bliss, the state which succeeds the Kama-loka, after the separation of the principles. ...

“But the process of stripping off the lower, the fourth and part of the fifth, principles is an unconscious one in all normal human beings. It is only in very exceptional cases that there is a slight return to consciousness in Kama-loka: and this is the case of very materialistic unspiritual personalities, who, devoid of the conditions requisite, cannot enter the state of absolute Rest and Bliss.” – **HPB, *Some Old Questions Answered***

“After physical death, when the entity passes into *Kama-Loka*, the real struggle is confined to the fifth principle alone, that is, to the seat of consciousness together with the affinities generated in it during its earthly incarnation. In *Kama-Loka*, therefore, the fourth principle of *Kama-Rupa*, which is the *Upadhi* or seat of all earthly desires and passions, &c., drags towards itself those affinities of the fifth principle which are of a material nature, while the higher aspirations are attracted towards the sixth and the seventh principles. ... the struggle in *Kama-Loka* varies according to the nature of his affinities; until the *consciousness* being linked to the higher ones is entirely separated from the ‘astral shell’, and is ready to go into Devachan. If a person is highly spiritual, his *Kama-Loka* is of a very short duration, for the consciousness is quickly assimilated to the higher principles and passes into *Devachan*. It will thus be seen that in any case intercourse with the *Kama-Loka* entities is detrimental to the progress of those entities and also injurious to the persons indulging in such intercourse. This interruption is just as bad and even far worse than the disturbance in the death-chamber on this Physical plane. ... When the struggle between the lower affinities and the higher aspirations of the man is ended in *Kama-Loka*, astral death takes place in that sphere as does physical death on this earth. The shock of death again throws the entity into a state of unconsciousness before its passage into *Devachan*.” – **T. Subba Row, *Thoughts on Kama-Loka***

“The length of this “transfer” [from Kama Loka to the state of Devachan] depends, however, on the degree of spirituality in the ex-personality of the disembodied Ego. For those whose lives were very spiritual this transfer, though gradual, is very rapid. The time becomes longer with the materialistically inclined.” – **HPB, *The Key to Theosophy*, p. 173**

“The three higher principles, grouped into one, merge into the state of Devachan, in which state the Higher Ego will remain until the hour for a new reincarnation arrives; and the *eidolon* of the ex-Personality is left alone in its new abode. Here, the pale copy of the man that was, vegetates for a period of time, the duration of which is variable and according to the element of materiality which is left in it, and which is determined by the past life of the defunct. Bereft as it is of its higher mind, spirit and physical senses, if left alone to its own senseless devices, it will gradually fade out and disintegrate. But, if forcibly drawn back into the terrestrial sphere whether by the passionate desires and appeals of the surviving friends or by regular necromantic practices – one of the most pernicious of which is mediumship – the “spook” may prevail for a period greatly exceeding the span of the natural life of its body.” – **HPB, *Theosophical Glossary* (Entry for “Kamarupa”)**

DEVACHAN – ITS NATURE, PURPOSE, AND EXPERIENCES

“*But what is Devachan?* The “land of gods” literally; a condition, a state of mental bliss. Philosophically a mental condition analogous to, but far more vivid and real than, the most vivid dream. It is the state after death of most mortals.” – **HPB, *The Key to Theosophy*, p. 100**

“The Ego is, so to say, wedded to the memory of its last incarnation. Thus, if you think over what I have said, and string all the facts together, you will realize that the Devachanic state is not one of omniscience, but a transcendental continuation of the personal life just terminated. It is the rest of the soul from the toils of life.” – **HPB, *The Key to Theosophy*, p. 156**

“If our physiologists find the cause of dreams and visions in an unconscious preparation for them during the waking hours, why cannot the same be admitted for the post-mortem dreams? I repeat it: death is sleep. After death, before the spiritual eyes of the soul, begins a performance according to a programme learnt and very often unconsciously composed by ourselves: the practical carrying out of *correct* beliefs or of illusions which have been created by ourselves. The Methodist will be Methodist, the Mussulman a Mussulman, at least for some time – in a perfect fool’s paradise of each man’s creation and making. These are the *post-mortem* fruits of the tree of life.” – **HPB, *The Key to Theosophy*, p. 165**

“We *create* ourselves our *devachan* as our *avitchi* while yet on earth, and mostly during the latter days and even moments of our intellectual, sentient lives.” – **Master K.H., *The Mahatma Letters*, p. 127**

“What goes into Devachan? What reincarnates? It is certainly the ego, the Manas, the higher portion of Manas. ... It is the reincarnating Manas that goes.” – **HPB, *The Secret Doctrine Dialogues*, p. 621**

“*Mr Old*: What is Devachan – a state, a place, or both?

Mme. Blavatsky: A state. It is no more a place than your dreams.

Mr Old: Has it any corresponding loka?

Mme. Blavatsky: No, it has not. ... It is a state, not a locality. ... It is a dream – the most vivid, so vivid that even in this life there are dreams that sometimes you awaken and are not sure whether it was reality or not. You just imagine yourself a dream as vivid as life.” – ***The Secret Doctrine Dialogues*, p. 589**

“What we believe in is a *post-mortem state* or mental condition, such as we are in during a vivid dream.” – **HPB, *The Key to Theosophy*, p. 138**

“All those who have not slipped down into the mire of unredeemable sin and bestiality – go to the Deva Chan. They will have to pay for their sins, voluntary and involuntary, later on. Meanwhile, they are rewarded; receive the *effects* of the *causes* produced by them.” – **Master K.H., *The Mahatma Letters*, p. 101**

“There are great varieties in the Deva-Chan states ... As many varieties of bliss, as on earth there are shades of perception and of capability to appreciate such reward. It is an ideated paradise, in each case of the Ego’s own making, and by him filled with the scenery, crowded with the incidents, and thronged with the people he would expect to find in such a sphere of compensative bliss. ... and although as actual Egos, children prematurely dying before the perfection of their septenary Entity do not find their way to Deva-Chan, yet all the same the mother’s loving fancy finds her children there, without one missing that her heart yearns for. Say – it is but a dream, but after all what is objective life itself but a panorama of vivid unrealities?” – **Master K.H., *The Mahatma Letters*, p. 102-103**

“It is sometimes asked, what of those we have left behind: do we see them there? We do not see them there in fact, but we make to ourselves their images as full, complete, and objective as in life, and devoid of all that we then thought was a blemish. We live with them and see them grow great and good instead of mean or bad. The mother who has left a drunken son behind finds him before her in

devachan a sober, good man, and likewise through all possible cases, parent, child, husband, and wife have their loved ones there perfect and full of knowledge. This is for the benefit of the soul. You may call it a delusion if you will, but the illusion is necessary to happiness just as it often is in life. And as it is the mind that makes the illusion, it is no cheat.” – **WQJ, *The Ocean of Theosophy*, p. 115**

“When, therefore, it is stated that the “personality” dies with the body it does not state all. The body, which was only the objective symbol of Mr A. or Mrs B., fades away with all its material Skandhas, which are the visible expressions thereof. But all that which constituted during life the *spiritual* bundle of experiences, the noblest aspirations, undying affections, and *unselfish* nature of Mr A. or Mrs B. clings for the time of the Devachanic period to the EGO, which is identified with the spiritual portion of that terrestrial Entity, now passed away out of sight. The ACTOR is so imbued with the role just played by him that he dreams of it during the whole Devachanic night, which *vision* continues till the hour strikes for him to return to the stage of life to enact another part.” – **HPB, *The Key to Theosophy*, p. 185**

“During every Devachanic period the Ego, omniscient as it is per se, clothes itself, so to say, with the reflection of the “personality” that was. I have just told you that the ideal efflorescence of all the abstract, therefore undying and eternal qualities or attributes, such as love and mercy, the love of the good, the true and the beautiful, that ever spoke in the heart of the living “personality,” clung after death to the Ego, and therefore followed it to Devachan. For the time being, then, the Ego becomes the ideal reflection of the human being it was when last on earth.” – **HPB, *The Key to Theosophy*, p. 147-148**

“The Conscious *Individuality* of the disembodied *cannot materialize*, nor can it return from its own mental Devachanic sphere to the plane of terrestrial objectivity.” – **HPB, *The Key to Theosophy*, p. 28**

“Such a return to earth [as proposed by the Spiritualists] would be incompatible with any state of *unalloyed* bliss after death, as I am prepared to prove. We say that man suffers so much unmerited misery during his life, through the fault of others with whom he is associated, or because of his environment, that he is surely entitled to perfect rest and quiet, if not bliss, before taking up again the burden of life.” – **HPB, *The Key to Theosophy*, p. 34-35**

“After the great change known as “the second death” all connection with earth is broken off. A pure-minded living person by his aspiration and love may *himself ascend* to a heavenly place and there seem to speak and feel and be with those he loved, but that speaking and feeling do not disturb the one there. The very essence of the spiritual state would exclude all disturbance, though we can obtain the kinds of feeling which exist in that condition.” – **Robert Crosbie, *The Friendly Philosopher*, p. 257**

“The states after death are merely the *effects* of the life last lived. We step through from the place of our endeavor to reap what we have sown – first casting off the evil, and then experiencing the highest and best of all our aspirations. In all of these states each being realizes himself to be the same person; never for an instant does it enter one’s perception, or consciousness, that he is any other than the one who was on earth; nor does he know that any such thing as death has occurred at all. In his highest state he has with him all those whom he loved, and in just that condition which he would desire to have for them. He has his bliss, because the balance between cause and effect, even for his sufferings on earth, is struck straight and true for the spirit. All those states are within us, not outside; in those states, we meet first, last, and all the time OURSELVES – first as we think we are, and finally as we really are.” – **RC, *The Friendly Philosopher*, p. 257**

Who or what is the "Being of Light"?

Many students of Theosophy view and understand the phenomenon of the “Being of Light” who features so prominently in so many Near Death Experiences as relating directly to the presence of our

Higher Ego. The Higher *Ego* is not our Higher *Self* - which is Atman and not a Being or Entity of any kind at all - but the real Higher Manas or Manasaputra. The following is an excerpt from the 1989 publication "A nineteenth century explanatory scheme for the interpretation of near-death experience: the transpersonal model of death as presented in Madame Blavatsky's Theosophy" by Dr Jean-Louis Siémons, a longtime associate of the United Lodge of Theosophists in Paris, France:

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"Entering the Light", or "encountering the being of light" – an imaged interpretation by the personal self of its re-union with its deep-rooted source of self-consciousness.

"No wonder that NDE'ers should feel unable to describe their experience in usual terms of daily life language. Like to the prisoners in the famous cave imagined by Plato in his *Republic* (Book VII), they had been accustomed from birth to the casual spectacle of the world's moving shadows (*maya* for the Hindus), fettered in their dualistic views (myself, and the others, etc.), and their linear perception of time, flowing between past and future. Then, all of a sudden, the prisoners were set free and drawn out of the cave, to a place enlightened by the sunshine, beyond all familiar limitations. In their ignorance that, at this point, they had returned to their Parent-Self, their psychic machinery interpreted the latter as different from themselves – a welcoming light, or a "being of light" – a *personal* being. In Moody's words,

*"It has a very definite personality. The love and the warmth which emanate from this being to the dying person are utterly beyond words, and he feels completely surrounded by it and taken up in it, completely at ease and accepted in the presence of this being. He senses an irresistible magnetic attraction to this light. He is ineluctably drawn to it. [R. Moody, *Life after Life*, p. 59.]*

"Quite often, in their efforts of description, experiencers use different labels to identify this "presence" – God, Christ, Angel, Guide, or what not. Obviously, in their complete ignorance of deep (spiritual) psychology, they could hardly find better terms to translate, in an intelligible mode, this unexpected encounter with their own individual Ego-Self, which seems to "know all about them", to bear them "a total love and acceptance" and to have with them a kind of intimate, "personal" exchange. *For very good reasons indeed* – in the light of Theosophy – if we remember that this Ego is not a stranger to its terrestrial personality, but remains closely "interested" in its destiny: from birth to death, the transpersonal individuality broods over (or "meditates") its earthly representative (or emanation), registering the latter's behaviour and inspiring it with its own knowledge and energy, through the unspoken language of intuition, dreams, etc."

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"All is impermanent in man except the pure bright essence of Alaya. Man is its crystal ray; a beam of light immaculate within, a form of clay material upon the lower surface. That beam is thy life-guide and thy true Self, the Watcher and the silent Thinker, the victim of thy lower Self."

– ***The Voice of the Silence* p. 63, translated by H.P. Blavatsky from *The Book of the Golden Precepts***

We each have our own Higher Ego, for it is said that there are as many "gods" in "Heaven" as there are human beings on Earth, as well as those who are undergoing their Devachanic interlude between embodiments.

Each man, woman, or child, is the physical incarnation of his or her own Ego; the present yet fleeting personality or temporary persona of the permanent individuality, the real inner "I". Whilst the lower "I" is very often selfish in nature and driven by desire, the higher "I" is of the very nature and essence of impersonality, universality, altruism, wisdom, love, and compassion. One who may succeed in subjugating and conquering his outer personality to such an extent that the inner individuality may shine forth continually in all its light and glory through the vessel of the external being is one who may truly be looked upon as a divine incarnation. This is the task, mission, and destiny of all of us.