

Introductory Study Paper 5: THE CONSTITUTION OF MAN

Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?

1 Cor. iii 16



The essence of our being, the mystery in us that calls itself "I" - ah, what words have we for such things? - is a breath of Heaven: the Highest Being reveals himself in man. This body, these faculties, this life of ours, is it not all as a vesture for that Unnamed?

Thomas Carlyle, *Lectures on Heroes*

Can man - a god in animal form - be the product of material Nature by evolution alone, even as is the animal ... seeing that the intellectual potentialities of the two differ as the Sun does from the glow worm? And what is it that creates such difference, unless man is an animal *plus a living god* within his physical shell?



H. P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*

WHAT IS MAN? - An Ancient Question

MAN, KNOW THYSELF! an ancient injunction! The way in which the complex constitution of man is described and analysed will depend in part on the purpose of the analysis and on the manner in which the different aspects of his nature are grouped together.

Thus he may be described as twofold, threefold, fourfold, fivefold, sixfold and sevenfold. Such divisions, however, are but aspects or modes of functioning of the one real man, the embodied Consciousness, enduring through the cycle of life and immortal in essence.

SANSKRIT - The language of theosophical psychology

The English language absorbs a constantly growing vocabulary of imported or new words to serve expanding fields of interest, from music and cookery to philosophy and computer technology.

Interest in eastern thought and spiritual practices has enriched our language with words like yoga, karma, mantra, koan etc. Where English lacks precision or consistency, as in words like mind, spirit, soul, self, Sanskrit offers a terminology which is clear and unvarying.

The Sanskrit words of common use in theosophical literature are few; familiarity with them will help to avoid confusion in later studies.

THE SEVENFOLD NATURE OF MAN

The Key to Theosophy gives a simplified reference table of the Sanskrit terms:

ATMA. Self or Spirit. It is not an individual but a universal Principle.

Atma, the '*Higher Self*', is neither your Spirit nor mine but like sunlight shines on all. It is the universally diffused '*divine principle*', and is inseparable from its one and absolute *Meta-Spirit*, as the sunbeam is inseparable from sunlight.

BUDDHI. Spiritual Soul, the vehicle of Atma. Buddhi, from a root meaning to know, denotes Wisdom, the faculty of discernment of good and evil; it also connotes intuition and '*divine conscience*'. Atma-Buddhi is the Divine Unit, the MONAD.

MANAS. Mind, Intelligence. When united with Atma-Buddhi, it is called the Spiritual Ego, the real individuality, which may therefore be designated Atma-Buddhi-Manas, the Higher Triad. Manas is "The mental faculty which makes of man an intelligent and moral being, and distinguishes him from the mere animal".

In incarnation, Manas is dual, for it projects itself into the Personality that it must use during the period of the earth life: hence the terms Higher and Lower Manas. Here, in the association of Manas with Kama, the principle of desire, is the battleground of our experience, justly called the drama of the soul in exile: on the one hand, the spiritual impulses of the higher nature, on the other the pull of the passionate animal nature.

The future state and the karmic destiny of man depend on whether Manas gravitates more downward to Kama rupa, the seat of the animal passions, or upward to Buddhi, the Spiritual Ego.

KAMA. The principle of Desire. Kama and Manas should be studied in conjunction with one another, for although thought and feeling can be separated as concepts, they are functionally indivisible. Kama may be directed towards either spiritual or selfish purposes, towards helping others or the satisfaction of personal goals.

PRANA. The Life-principle, or principle of vitality. Being derived from the ONE LIFE, it is omnipresent, eternal and indestructible. Prana, or life, is the active power producing all vital phenomena.

LINGA-SHARIRA. Various terms are used for this, the vehicle of Prana, the most appropriate being the model body (from *linga*, meaning model and *sharira*, a form easily dissolved). It provides the model round which the physical body is formed. It is also called the astral body or the etheric double, both terms; indicating the material of which it is made.

STHULA-SHARIRA. The physical body (*sthula*, coarse or bulky), the vehicle of all the other principles during life and the means by which man is able to function on earth.

MAN A FUNCTIONING WHOLE - aspects and divisions

Just as the human body may be analysed in terms of limbs, organs, chemical components, yet remains a functioning whole, so the several aspects of the inner man may be grouped together in different ways for the better understanding of the individual in life and in death.

MAN as twofold. This is the simplest and perhaps the most immediately practical division. It recognizes man as a Self or Consciousness acting through a complex vehicle. In theosophical literature the Self, the immortal Spirit in man, is termed the Individuality; the complex vehicle with which we commonly identify ourselves is the mortal Personality. The Individuality is the reincarnating Ego, described as the golden thread on which are strung the beads of its successive incarnations. In common experience there is often a conflict between the two, epitomized in the words of St. Paul, "the good that I would I do not, but the evil which I would not, that I do". (*Rom. vii 19*)

This twofold division is a simplification of the sevenfold picture of man, for the Individuality is the immortal Triad, consisting of *Atman* (Pure Spirit), *Buddhi* (Spiritual Soul) and *Manas* (Mind); the Personality is the Lower Quaternary, transitory and mortal, composed of *Kama* (Desire), *Linga-Sharira* (Astral Body), *Prana* (Life or Vitality) and *Sthula-Sharira* (Physical Body).

MAN as threefold. This division into "spirit, soul and body" is used by St. Paul (*I Thess. V23*). The distinction between spirit and soul, clearly shown in the text by the use of the Greek terms *pneuma* (breath, spirit) and *psyche* (soul), has been largely lost from sight in popular usage, spirit and soul being regarded as interchangeable terms, to the confusion and impoverishment of the Christian conception of man. In theosophical studies, *Spirit* is the immortal Individuality, soul the personal psychic vehicle composed of thought and feeling which, together with the physical body, "the house of the householder", constitute the mortal Personality.

MAN as fourfold. The Brahmanical system divides man into the four principles that are capable of a separate existence. These are the *sthula-sharira* (physical body, including *prana* and the etheric double); *sukshma-sharira* (corresponding roughly to soul); *karana-sharira* (causal body) and *atma* (spirit). The significance of this division may be illustrated as follows: Imagine the sun shining into a mirror; from the mirror the light reflects onto a metal disc; and from there it falls on a wall. The sun represents the Divine Self, the mirror the Ego or causal body, the metal disc the soul and the wall the body. At each remove from its source the brightness of the light is reduced, being further dimmed according to the reflective quality of the surface on which it falls. Nevertheless, however much reduced in brightness, the light is always that of the sun. (This illustration is given by T. Subba Row in his lectures on the *Bhagavad Gita*.)

MAN as fivefold. The *Katha Upanishad* gives a picturesque description of the human constitution: The Self or Spirit rides in the chariot, the body; the controlling agent, the charioteer, is the illumined or Spiritual Mind; the reins are the mind functioning in the Personality; the senses are the horses that pull

the chariot along the roads of the material world; The practical application of this analysis is made evident: When the Illumined Mind, the agent of the Spirit, is in charge, controlling the reins of mind, which in turn controls the senses, the journey towards the goal is made swiftly and smoothly and the man is born no more. But if the Illumined Mind has not been awakened, the reins are uncontrolled and the senses drag the man wherever they will: this man, says the Scripture, never reaches the end of the journey but is born again and again.

MAN as sixfold. This classification is given in the *Taittiriya Upanishad*. Here the different aspects or principles of man are described as sheaths, the coverings or encasements of the Divine Spirit. The sheaths are listed as: the sheath of *food*, the sheath of *vitality*, the sheath of *mind*, the sheath of *understanding*, the sheath of *bliss*, and finally "beyond all sheaths is the *Self*".

MAN as sevenfold. This is the classification most used in the theosophical literature. Like everything else in Nature, man's constitution is rooted in the septenary law, that is, man the microcosm reflects in his nature the sevenfold constitution of the macrocosm, the universe. The concept of man as a seven-principled being is one of the keys to the understanding of the processes in which, as an individual, he is involved - birth and death, reincarnation, spiritual progress.

Sometimes a poet can convey a picture beyond the analysis of facts. These verses from James Rhoades' *Out of the Silence* may contribute to a synthetic view of what the tradition teaches.

**Thou ponderest of the moon, the stars, the sun,
Whence the winds gather, how the waters run,
But all too lightly deemest of thyself,
Which art a myriad miracles in one.
That, which thou art, thou dreamest not - so vast
That lo! time present, time to be, time past,
Are but the sepals of thine opening soul,
Whose flower shall fill the universe at last.**

FOR FURTHER STUDY

The Key to Theosophy - H. P. Blavatsky
Deity, Cosmos and Man - Geoffrey A. Farthing
The Seven Principles of Man - Annie Besant
The Divine Plan - Geoffrey Barboka