

The Astral Light

by Louise A. Off

reprinted from "Theosophical Siftings" Volume 3

The Theosophical Publishing Society, England

The Astral Light, as the source of all world phenomena, is a theme of no little importance to the student of occultism.

The root of the word "Astral" is to be found in the Assyrian *Istar*, signifying star, and was applied to this element by the Kabalists and later mystics, because they considered the heavenly bodies as the concrete crystallizations of the Astral Light. Some Theosophic writers have confounded the nature of this element with that of Akasâ, while in fact the latter comprehends infinitely more both in quality and quantity. Literally the Sanscrit term Akasâ means the sky, but occultly the *impalpable* Ether or the Soul within the Ether. Our most logical authority, *The Secret Doctrine*, defines it as the "immortal spirit", the progenitor of Cosmic life and "universal intelligence whose *characteristic property* is Buddhi". Akasâ is the sphere of the pure undifferentiated *Monad*, the essence of wisdom, while the Astral Light at its opposite pole is the abstract atom of matter, the plane of generation, and the great womb out of which issues all planetary life. Ether, which is the highest vibration of the Astral Light, is but as a vehicle for Akasâ, a gross body in comparison.

The functions of the Astral Light are as manifold as the expressed universe. Its nature is dual — the highest Ether forming its positive, and the concrete, or differentiated elements, its negative pole. Its cause reaches back to the root of all causes, and its effects involve all our physical and psychical experiences. We deal with its familiar phenomena in every breath and every motion, while the rare and abnormal phases are as strictly subject to its laws. It is not substantially identical with any one of the material elements of Cosmic matter, but is one degree superior to *Prâkriti* (Nature as apprehended by the senses), and it impenetrates and vitalizes each atom. It is itself the one underlying element in which all other known elements have their source and supply. In its physical aspects it includes the Ether of modern [Page 25] scientists, but in the metaphysical sense they scarcely touch its borderland. For while it is the reservoir of Heat, Light, Magnetism, and Electricity — the field of all degrees of vibration — it is also the sphere of all intellectual life, and the ruling agent in the alchemical process which frees the cerebral atom and converts it into thought. Its vibratory rate determines individual mental tendencies, and also establishes our intimate relations in body with the stars. Paracelsus maintains that, "as fire passes through an iron stove, so do the stars pass through man with all their properties, and go into him as the rain into the earth, which gives fruit out of that same rain". While the modern spectroscope reveals the identity in substance of infinitesimal man, and the greatest luminiferous body that glides in vast revolutions through space, no instrument has, as yet, been discovered so sensitive as to register the subtle and evanescent fluid which, by its uniform nature, makes astronomical research and thought-transference possible. Keely's motor has, however, already foreshadowed such a discovery.

The Astral Light is the great record-book upon whose pages every thought and act of differentiated

consciousness is engraven, there to be read by the individual who has learnt the secret of exalting his vibrations until they become synchronous with the waves of this finer element. The definition of Memory which has ever been the enigma of science, a function with an inapprehensible cause, is related to the domain of the occultist, who may briefly define it as the correlative vibration of the cerebral centre with the Astral Light. Within this correlation reside all the possibilities of consciousness from the horizon of Maya (Illusion) to the zenith of pure Ether or transcendental life. Madame Blavatsky sweepingly states: "The Psychic forces, the ' ideomotor ' and ' electro-biological powers ', 'latent thought' and even 'unconscious cerebration' theories can be condensed into two words, the Kabalistic 'Astral Light'." Quesne treated of it as a universally diffused fluid permeating all things, and differing in action only according to the mobility of the organism by which it is confined.

The differentiated *will to live* accompanying each primary monad is the sculptor of the astral images which constitute individual experience. An intense power of concentration makes these images subjective, in which case they are realities only to the operator, but under still more acute and intelligent development, these images may assume a concrete objective form with power of duration proportioned to the original impulse or determined purpose of the projector. "Determined will", says a fire-philosopher, "is a beginning of all magical operations", and the great magician, Abbé Constant, states; "To acquire magical power, two things are necessary: to disengage the will from all servitude and to exercise [Page 26] it in control". He alone can become a master whose physical and psychical organization is attuned to the Astral Key-note — whose self-consciousness has out-grown the limits of personal slavery, and whose will is so cultivated as to act without fear and without desire — intelligent, determined, self-possessed and confident. While the majority of mankind is occupied in mere negative registration of sense-impressions the occultist classifies these, and admits only those most useful to his purpose. Colonel Olcott refers to the manipulation of the Astral Light in his statement, that "the efficacy of all words used as charms and spells lies in what the Aryans call the *vach*, a certain latent power resident in Akasâ. Physically we may describe it as the power to set up certain measured vibrations, not in the grosser atmospheric particles whose undulations beget light, sound, heat and electricity, but in the latent spiritual principle or force — about the nature of which modern science knows almost nothing". As an illustration of this we have the word *Aum*, which, as all students know, has an equilibrating effect which resists the inroad of passion.

The symbol used to express the astral realm by the mystics of all ages is the serpent, or the "fiery dragon". It is stated that long before our globe or even our universe became egg-shaped, "a long trail of Cosmic dust (or fire mist) moved and writhed like a serpent in space". This was the beginning of our Eternity, exoterically expressed by a serpent with its tail in its mouth, or in the act of incubating the *Mundane Egg* with its fiery breath. The Chaldean Oracles refer to the Astral Light as "winding in form", which qualification refers to the vibratory motion that characterizes it. The intense rate of its pulsation may be faintly realized in the rapidity with which successive images are recorded in the dreaming or hypnotized state. An illustration is recounted of a student who was making scientific experiments in this psychological field with a friend. While a drop of water was descending down upon his forehead, he closed his eyes and dreamed that he started out from a harbour upon the wide main, soon passing several beautiful islands full of villages, cities, verdant fields and mountains. The sun was beaming generously, but little by little the sky grew darker and heavier, and drifts of black clouds swept upon the scene. A great gale arose. Consternation and horror pervaded the crew. The waves began to rise higher and higher, until finally the heavens and the sea were blended into one dense chaos.

The crisis was at hand. The dreamer suddenly felt as though the whole sea had burst asunder and drawn him in — he awoke just as the drop of water touched his skin, fallen from the hand of his friend and held but a few inches above his head. He had registered the full episode of dramatic changes during the instant in which the sensor nerve flashed its irritation [Page 27] to the brain. Far more remarkable than this are illustrations on record which cover an extent of years and are recorded in an instant of time, experimentally proven to be less than the period required for transmitting a nervous current. The wondrous rapidity with which feeling and thinking may be condensed has also been frequently analyzed in the experience of persons nearly drowned, and as Helmholtz has demonstrated that the period in which a nerve-current may be conducted is a *definite* one, we have no alternative but to assume that a far subtler element or vehicle is employed in registering psychic experiences. By the astral current throughout the ayas, around the nerve-centres and nerve-tubes, mind contracts mind, thoughts are flashed in upon us and emotions conveyed. It radiates from the individual man as an impalpable but intelligent aura - the medium of his psychic and intuitional life, by means of which he evinces sympathy and understanding; while in its higher aspect it is the sensitive plane that records Cosmic ideation, and conveys impressions of truth and of universal law to the human mind.

Experiment with trained sensitives has proven that when an intellectual concept is formed, the astral aura photographs it instantaneously, while, when an emotion is evinced, the aura changes in intensity of colour, and, on volition becoming manifest, there is a positive increase of vibration. We, therefore, carry with us all we have ever thought and felt — and *self* is the ever-refining essence of this thought and feeling. From this point of view responsibility assumes enormous proportions, and we perceive why the great Teachers of the world have ever agreed that Man is his own heaven and his own hell.

The great mesmerizer, Du Potet, declares that the faculty of directing this fluid is inherent in certain organizations, that it passes through all bodies, and that everything can be used as a conductor — “*no chemical or physical forces are able to destroy it.*” treating thus with the merest initial of this latent power, who can say where its further unfoldment will lead the collective consciousness of Humanity?

In the present age, our science informs us, we perceive in the main only the lowest vibrations and inferior qualities of the Astral Light, because we are in the lower arc of our present cycle, and the energy of the life-wave is at its ebb. Mme. Blavatsky says of Plato's method of expression that he “divides the intellectual progress of the universe during every cycle into fertile and barren periods..... When those circulations, which Eliphas Levi calls 'currents of the Astral Light' in the universal Ether,take place in harmony with the divine spirit, our earth and everything pertaining to it enjoys a fertile period. The occult powers of plants, animals, and minerals magically sympathize with its superior natures, and the divine soul of man is in perfect intelligence with these inferior ones. [Page 28] But during the barren periods the latter lose all their magic sympathy, and the spiritual sight of the majority of mankind is so blinded as to lose every notion of the superior power of its own divine spirit. We are in a barren period”. Ignoring our latent inherent forces, we drift in negative submission to the lower laws of Nature, suffer deprivation, want of thought, emotion, and volition, while the precious fluid, in mute anticipation, haunts our dreamless sleep, and awaits the dawning of a higher Consciousness.