

The Invisible World About Us

A LECTURE ON THE UNSEEN REGIONS
BEYOND THE GRASP OF THE PHYSICAL
SENSES AND THE LIFE WE LIVE
AFTER BODILY DEATH



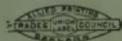
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THE INVISIBLE WORLD ABOUT US

In the midst of the most vigorous life few people are perfectly free from the fear of death. Death is the skeleton that sits at the feast of life. It is the silent spectre that fills the mind with fear. Across every threshold and upon almost every heart falls this fearsome shadow. Any philosophy that removes this dread, that dispels this cloud and lights the tomb with reason's torch, deserves the thanks and gratitude of all. No greater boon can come to man than a knowledge of nature that shall rob death of its terror and drive this fiend of fear from the human heart.

Nothing is, or possible can be, supernatural. Nature is all-inclusive. The lightest atom and the most ponderous star, the simple fact of daily life and the most mysterious phenomenon, are equally the subjects of universal law. A thing may be superphysical and for the moment incomprehensible; it can not possibly be supernatural.

We never fear what we really understand, and a knowledge of the invisible world about us, of the hidden side of nature, of the soul and its vestures, of the facts about death and the wider life to which it is but the doorway, will banish all doubt and fill life with confidence and joy.

Theosophists are not blind to the fact that every solution of great problems must run the gauntlet of ridicule. That has been the history of every great truth ever proclaimed.

It is the penalty of progress. It is the blind retaliation of the thoughtless, getting even with those who give them the pain of a new idea. Jesus was killed. Socrates was poisoned. Gallileo was persecuted. Copernicus was threatened. Columbus was imprisoned. Bruno was burned. Watt and Fulton were ridiculed and jeered. They were all unselfishly working for the enlightenment of mankind. They had ideas that were of incalculable value to the very people who derided them. They were the sanest of the sane. Yet they were regarded as dangerous men. They were denounced as fools and frauds and fanatics, and the hand of malice was not stayed until most of them were deprived of liberty or life. Original thinkers have usually been the victims of their beneficiaries. Every hand was against them, and every dungeon yawned for them. But in our day the infliction of physical pain has gone out of fashion. We are now satisfied with ridicule. "Crank" and "fanatic" are epithets that some people apply to a man who points out new facts than can not be explained by old theories, and produces new arguments that can not be conveniently answered. But thoughtful people no longer even ridicule new and strange ideas. With such wonders as radium and liquid air before us we begin to comprehend the fact that the invisible world about us is a vast field of unknown possibilities.

The first thing to be said about this invisible world is that everybody is acquainted with some of its manifestations. The street-cars we ride upon, and the telegrams we send, are visible evidence of the existence of the invisible thing we call electricity,—a force as mysterious and incomprehensible to the scientist as to the school-boy. The very winds that blow are a part of the invisible,—moving masses of an invisible matter that science is now able to condense into visible,

liquid form. There is a still rarer matter than air, called ether, that science declares exists, although it can not condense it, nor in any way whatever grasp, measure or contact it. How, then, is it known to exist? Because certain phenomena could not be, without it. Just as we could not have sound without the air through which it travels, neither can we have electrical phenomena without the ether as its medium through which to work. So in air and ether we have two kinds of invisible matter, and in electricity we have a force working through one of them whose visible results we see daily. This is as far as physical science is at present able to go into the unseen, in this direction, but occult science goes much further. Its methods are as definite and exact as those of physical science, but its facts are obtained through the development of certain faculties or senses latent in all human beings, that give those who possess them an advantage over those who have but the five senses, much like a person with those five senses would have over another who had the four, but did not possess the sense of sight. What has thus been learned of the invisible side of nature constitutes some of the truths theosophy offers to the world.

Theosophy divides the universe into seven planes or regions of nature, but for our present purpose we need give attention to but three of them: the physical, astral and mental. On these occur all the phenomena of life and death, and a clear understanding of them will dispel all doubt and drive away all fear for either our friends or ourselves. Now, while two of these divisions of the universe are invisible to physical sight and impalpable to physical touch, they are, nevertheless, composed of matter, and the first thing we should get clearly in mind is that this invisible matter interpenetrates and completely permeates all visible matter. If we could take a large

sponge, very coarse and porous, of spherical shape, and completely fill every cell with very fine sand, and also surround it entirely with the sand; if this sand globe, somewhat larger than the sponge, could then be lifted, with the sponge inside, and put into a globe of water that would completely surround both while the water interpenetrated the whole mass, filling all the space between the grains of sand, that would give us a fair idea of the relationship of these three regions of nature. The sponge would represent the physical region, enveloped and interpenetrated by the sand representing the astral region. The mental region would be represented by the water which entirely surrounds and interpenetrates every particle of both the others. Holding this picture in the mind a moment, it is easy to see how a force acting on the sand and moving the grains from point to point, need not in the least disturb the sponge; and how, also, force acting on the molecules of water need not affect anything but the water, although the molecules be moved freely through the entire mass. As a matter of fact, something like that is just what is occurring on these invisible planes of the universe. All the activities of life go forward on each without in the least interfering with any other.

What is it that makes these natural divisions, these regions of nature, these grades of matter growing finer and rarer, and that so completely separates them that they seem not to exist for each other? It is the inherent qualities peculiar to them, and which may be illustrated by the vibration of the matter of each region. It may be crudely represented by the difference that exists between ice, water and steam. We can take the visible solid called ice, and by the application of heat raise the rate of vibration until it becomes the visible liquid called water. We can continue the process until we change

the visible liquid called water into the invisible gas called steam. It is precisely the same matter all the time . We have merely raised the vibratory rate, and in doing that we have caused a solid to disappear. Of course, every atom of that matter is as much in existence as though we could still see it, and if this were done in a laboratory the steam could be reduced to vapor, the vapor to water and the water to ice, giving us the identical solid with which we began.

In order to understand something of the conditions of life after bodily death, we must understand what a human being really is, and not what to the deceptive physical sight he appears to be. We saw a moment ago that we are dealing with three regions, two of which are invisible to the physical eye. Now, just as the earth has its visible and two invisible regions of matter freely interpenetrating each other, so a human being has a visible and two invisible bodies, composed of these different grades of matter, with the same interpenetrating relationship. So, from birth we have not only the visible physical body, but the invisible astral and mental bodies, and just as the astral region of the earth not only interpenetrates the physical but extends beyond it in all directions, as in the illustration of the sponge and sand, so the matter of the astral body interpenetrates the matter of the physical body, and extends somewhat beyond it. It is an exact duplicate in form and feature, except that it is a little larger than the physical body.

To understand how the real self, or conscious being, comes into possession of these bodies, we must get rid of some of the delusions of which we are now the unconscious victims. One of these is that this physical life is the point where we begin the journey in the cycle of birth. This is not the home region of the soul, but the farthest region away from it.

But on this point we are in the grip of the same sort of delusion that leads us to see the earth as the center of the universe, with the sun and stars moving about it. If we could be transported to the sun, and from there behold the earth as the mote it would comparatively be, that delusion about their relative size and movement would instantly vanish. Precisely so would this illusion about the importance of the physical plane, with its material affairs, vanish if viewed from the mental region. Indeed, so very illusory is this physical life that the advanced occultist speaks of the physical body as "a shadow" of the real self. As we move toward the mental region we approach reality.

Let us think, then, of the conscious being, the living, thinking soul, as beginning its journey for another cycle of experience in the highest or rarest portion of the realm we have called the mental region. Its desire for experience generates energy. It draws to itself the unimaginably rare matter of the mental region somewhat as a magnet attracts iron filings, and as these minute iron particles arrange themselves about the magnet in perfect order, obeying the laws of vibration with the same accuracy that the earth moves in its orbit, so does this mental matter form the mental body about the soul. This accomplished, the soul continues its descent into matter, the astral body being the next acquisition.

But we must not be misled by the phrase, "descent into matter," or by the expression, "from higher down to lower regions." There is no higher or lower in the sense of altitude. The mental region is not further away than the astral. Both are as much here, within reach of the hand, as the physical. We must not forget that the matter of both interpenetrates all physical matter, and also completely envelopes it. So the soul, or consciousness, does not come down from

some place. There is no movement in space necessary. It merely attracts to itself the matter of a very rare grade, called "mental"; then, by a considerably different process in a coarser grade of matter, the astral body is secured. Finally, by a still different process, but still one of slow building, the physical body is constructed of physical matter. The three vehicles, or organisms, through which the soul is to function in the three regions are now ready to enable it to contact the various grades of matter and obtain the experience it seeks.

Now, having followed in thought the way in which, starting on the home plane of the soul, we successively clothe ourselves in the matter of these three regions, thus acquiring a body in which it is possible to function in each region, we are in a position to understand that this physical body is very far from being the real man; and that we are, each of us, far more than we appear to be, far more than we are able to express through this physical mechanism. Somebody has somewhere given the excellent illustration of likening the soul on its home plane to the bare hand. The hand is capable of much. In music, in art, in many lines of commercial dexterity, it can do wonders. But when the soul clothes itself in the mental matter it is more like a hand that has put on a very thin glove. It is a limitation. The fingers are not so nimble. When, in addition, the soul takes on the astral body, it is as though the thinly gloved hand drew on a heavy glove. Now the limitation is sorely felt. The fingers can scarcely move. The delicate touch has vanished, and the enrapturing music becomes broken and uncertain. The wonderful painting is but a hideous distortion. Then the soul reaches the physical plane and begins to express itself through the physical body. This is as though over the thin and the heavy glove is drawn

a thick mitten. The four fingers are now one. The hand is a clumsy club, and the once divine harmony would be but meaningless sound. And so, limited and confined as we are in dense matter, the soul is showing forth in this visible life, but the merest fragment of the real self.

Clearly, the physical body is not the man. If it were, the loss of a part of the body would logically be a loss of part of the man. But we know he may lose both arms and both lower limbs, the sight of both eyes, the hearing, the major part of the lungs and the entire stomach, and still live his allotted time. With so little of the physical body left he is the same man, with all the force of will and power of thought, with all the attributes of character that constitute a human being. This mere fragment of a body is sufficient for the real man to function through in the visible world. Of course, there is a point beyond which the mutilation of the physical organism cannot go without forcing the ego to abandon it; but every forward step in surgery is demonstrating more and more clearly that the body is but a wonderful machine and laboratory operated by a still more wonderful and independent intelligence.

What we call death is but the shifting of the life and consciousness from the physical to the astral body. It does not necessarily mean any movement in space, for the astral is here as much as the air and ether. Often one who dies by dropping off in unconscious slumber is not at first aware of it. He sees his surroundings much as before. He sees and speaks to his friends, and it is only when they do not answer, and take no notice of him, that he begins to realize that something unusual has occurred. He does not really see us as we see each other, but sees our astral bodies.

There is a mistaken idea that the astral world is some-

thing vague, misty and unreal. But in truth it is a more vivid and realistic life than this we are now living. There is nothing ghostly about it. With the shifting of the consciousness to the astral grade of matter the astral world becomes as tangible and substantial as the physical is now. We do not, by death, suddenly acquire great intelligence, as is sometimes supposed, but the mind is no longer hampered by the dense physical brain. We also leave physical pain behind. There is no bodily weariness in the astral world.

Naturally enough, we cannot even imagine what so great a change must mean to life. We may think of a lifelong dungeon prisoner being suddenly released into this world and all its prized freedom and opportunity becoming on instantaneous possession. But so tame a comparison is of little assistance. In many ways that do not occur to us larger freedom and new vistas of existence must appear. Of those that do occur to us we can hardly hope to get a comprehensive idea. Take one simple fact as an illustration—the fact that food, clothing and shelter would no longer be a problem of life, and that all the tremendous energy now given to their production would be necessarily turned in other directions. Think what that would mean if applied even to the physical life, and what a change would be wrought if each were free to use his time as he chose. Of course, the astral existence means different things to different people. We shall doubtless enjoy it or dislike it in proportion that we have wisely or foolishly lived the physical life. If we have been students we shall probably find our chief pleasure in pursuing our studies under immensely better facilities. If we have lived useful, helpful lives, we shall find wider opportunity for continuing in that line. If we have been completely absorbed in the accumulation of property, we shall probably find the sudden cut-

ting off of all business affairs a great annoyance. If we have lived so selfishly that we can not use our leisure and enjoy our liberty when it comes, we may find the astral life very dull and irksome.

Life on the astral plane is not punitive, but purgative. All of nature's processes are really kind and beneficent, although it is not always apparent on the surface. Pain is a friend. It is always the lesser of two evils. It is nature's danger signal. We unconsciously get a hand too close to the fire and are startled with a burn. That is the warning. But for it the hand would have been consumed. We overwork, and a warning pain springs up in our brain or heart. The network of nerves that makes us suffer is but nature's telegraph system prepared to send an instantaneous message of warning from every point of the body to the brain. Now, for precisely the same reason that we suffer here we may suffer there—not because we are being punished, but because the moral nature is being purged; because we are getting rid of certain traits and tendencies that to retain would mean greater suffering in the future. If a man has an abscess it may be painful to submit to the surgeon's knife; but that suffering is the way back to good health, plus the consequence of having violated some of nature's laws. There is no such thing as dodging natural law. It operates as unerringly and as exactly in the unseen world as in the visible, and therefore a study of this subject is important. By having a knowledge of the astral life and the after-death conditions, both terror and suffering may be avoided. Such suffering as may be experienced is not, of course, physical, for the physical body, with all its aches and pains, has been left behind. But we all know from experience that physical pain causes less suffering than mental and emotional distress. No physical pain is comparable to the pangs

of remorse, or the suffering caused by the sudden loss of a very dear friend. Strong but ungratified desire may also be a source of suffering, as may easily be seen in the case of a hard drinker being unable to gratify his insatiable thirst. This must be equally true, in varying degree, of all other material desires which people carry with them into the astral life, where there is no possibility of their gratification.

The astral region has seven subdivisions, and these form three groups or states of consciousness to which people go after death, and our location there depends upon the sort of life we live here; not that we are sorted out and assigned to different regions, like the guests at a hotel are sent to various floors, but that our life here is constantly drawing into our bodies finer or coarser astral matter, and this determines with absolute accuracy our astral career. If, for example, a man lives a very low and bestial, or a very selfish life, he is thereby constantly attracting into his astral body the grossest grade of astral matter, and the preponderance of this matter will carry him to that most undesirable sub-plane of our world, the lower astral region, as certainly as a gross impulse here will take him where it may be gratified. This lowest subdivision of the astral world is described by trained occult observers as appearing devoid of all that is light and beautiful. One investigator describes it as having an atmosphere of grossness and loathsomeness that gives one the sensation of being surrounded by some black, viscous fluid, instead of by pure air. This is that subdivision of the astral world that is undoubtedly the basis of the descriptions in Biblical literature of purgatory or hell.

It is the next rarer region of the astral plane to which the bulk of humanity goes at death, and here the sojourn may be long or short. It will depend wholly upon circumstances,

precisely as the length of physical life depends upon many things, including the soundness of our physical body, the care we take of it and the manner in which we live. Some may remain on the astral plane a very short time, and others for a long period. But in general it may be said that in the same way we reckon an ordinary physical life at sixty or seventy years, the astral life might be put at twenty-five or thirty years.

This astral region, as a whole, is the world of desires, passions and emotions. During physical life we have generated certain forces that have not had their full expression, and this stored-up energy must work itself out on the invisible planes. It may thus happen that, although a man who dies has no physical body through which he can suffer, he passes through a purgative process that we should as earnestly seek to avoid as we would seek to avoid burns and bruises, regrets and heartaches here. All evil and selfish thoughts and acts indulged here must necessarily cause more or less suffering in the astral world. All hatred, envy, jealousy, anger, and all gross desires and appetites indulged here must inevitably work out unpleasantly there.

On the other hand, those who have lived clean, wholesome and unselfish lives here pass quickly to the loftiest conditions of the astral world, and for the simple reason that they have been unconsciously all the time attracting the rarest grade of astral matter to their astral bodies until it predominates. That like attracts like is one of the fundamental principles of nature.

When the astral life is finished—that is to say, when the forces that carry us to the astral plane are exhausted—we pass into the mental region, or heaven world, which is the second great division of the invisible world about us. Again

we must remember that this does not represent any movement in space, but a gradual release from the astral body and a transfer of the consciousness to the mental body.

Each of these planes of nature, the physical, astral and mental, has its particular purpose in evolution. In the physical here we produce causes; we generate certain forces which, later on, must have either good or bad effects. It is, so to speak, the seed time. The astral is the purgative plane, where detrimental tendencies are worn away and undesirable tendencies exhausted. The mental plane is the place of assimilation, the harvest time, the period in which we reap the rich reward of noble thought and deed and garner the wisdom from all the experience we have passed through on the other planes. Here, in a perfectly blissful life, in a state of ecstasy impossible to describe, is passed a comparatively long period. Just as on the astral plane, the circumstances once more determine the length of the life in the heaven world, but the investigators agree that on an average it is a period equal to several times the length of the combined physical and astral life. This is a period of rest and of mental and spiritual growth. Here all the highest aspirations of our life on the physical plane have their complete working out. Experience becomes wisdom, and noble desire becomes faculty for future accomplishment. All the grossness of every possible kind has dropped away during the astral life, and not a single shadow of any sort remains to mar this life of perfect joy.

“Does this life on these two planes of the unseen world include a recognition of those we have known here?” is a very natural inquiry. A moment’s reflection on the laws of attraction and association will show that it could not be otherwise. Passing from the physical plane to the astral through death does not change one’s appearance nor characteristics, any

more than passing from one house to another. Two people in this life who greatly desire to be together cannot be kept apart by any contrivance we have yet discovered, and the same principle of attraction operates much more powerfully in the astral and mental life. We shall not only know our friends and be with them, but shall know them much better than it is possible to know each other now, for thought flashes from mind to mind without our clumsy methods of verbal communication.

We need not even wait until we go there to be of service to our friends who have gone ahead. It is quite possible for us now to help the so-called dead by contributing to their serenity and peace of mind. While we can neither see them nor know their thoughts, they can see our astral bodies and know of our thoughts that relate to them; they can at least know how we feel toward them. Everybody in these days understands something of telepathy—the instantaneous communication of thought from mind to mind. Since the invention of the wireless telegraph this does not seem wonderful, for precisely as a message is sent without a wire by utilizing ether waves, a thought is transferred from brain to brain through the wave vibrations of a still subtler matter. Thus those we mis-call the dead may be in telepathic touch with us and be susceptible to our thought when it is definitely directed toward them.

Now, some of those who have passed to the astral plane are much in need of sympathetic and loving thought, and their condition can be greatly improved by it. All may thus be helped, but those who have passed from this life suddenly, by accident or by suicide, are likely to particularly need it. Those who die in any other way than the natural one of old age or disease may remain for a considerable period in the lower

regions of the astral world. Sudden death, therefore, either by accident or suicide, may be regarded as very unfortunate. In the case of a suicide, if, as is nearly always the case, the motive was a selfish one—a desire to escape some disagreeable condition here—the astral life is likely to be very restless, and every kindly thought, every earnest wish for his welfare, is a boon indeed; for the suicide will undoubtedly find that, however superior the astral life may be to the present one, whoever seeks to evade a responsibility or lacks the courage to face a necessary condition, only makes a bad situation very much worse by destroying his life. To all such all sympathetic thought must be very beneficial, and this is true of all the departed. Kind, sympathetic, sincere well-wishing can not be otherwise than helpful. For these reasons all grieving for the dead is a mistake, for it only tends to make them unhappy. We ought not to indulge our own selfish sense of loss and desolation, but be thinking only of the welfare of the one we have lost, and be sending him cheerful, helpful thoughts.

This brief consideration of a great question can give but a few hints on the subject of life in the unseen world, but even that is enough to show the vital importance of acquiring some knowledge now of the conditions to come. If we were going upon a journey to some unknown foreign country we should learn all we could in advance of the pleasures we might enjoy and the dangers we might avoid. Each one of us is really going upon this journey into the unseen world. Nobody has any doubt about that. If we wisely study the planes of nature now, our knowledge will light the way and make us confident and fearless.

There is nothing more appalling than uncertainty about what follows death. This spectre of separation sits at almost

every fireside, darkens almost every home. A little while ago I saw a funeral that was a tragedy. Fear or despair drove the wife to the verge of insanity as she staggered shrieking after the coffin that, to her, carried her husband she knew not whither. An observer at a distance might have supposed it to be an execution instead of a funeral. And yet a little thought should convince us that in this sound, sane universe all may be safe. There is no penalty that we ourselves do not create. There is no hell that we ourselves do not prepare; that we are every moment now preparing, but which process we can check and stop at any moment if we learn how and then wisely use the information.

The trouble with the majority of people is that they have no definite knowledge on the subject. They endeavor to do right in a general way and vaguely hope that in the end all may be well. But until we have a knowledge of the laws of existence, until we have a comprehension of life and death that rests on the sure ground of natural law, we can not be free from doubt about the future. Such definite knowledge this philosophy will give to every thinking person, for Theosophy is the torchbearer of the ages. Into this physical life, where hundreds of millions of the human race are enchained in materiality, blinded with incredulity, narrowed with intolerance, groping in ignorance, and fettered with fear, comes this goddess of enlightenment and emancipation; and for all who study her wisdom the darkness shall vanish and the fetters fall, and in this illuminating flood of reason they can face the future without a doubt and without a fear.

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