

IF THE FOLLOWING SHORT EXTRACTS INTEREST YOU, YOU ARE INVITED TO READ THE LONGER READINGS FROM WHICH THEY ARE TAKEN

What is Death and Dying?

PERSONALITY AND INDIVIDUALITY

H.P. Blavatsky *The Key To Theosophy* pp. 32-34

ENQUIRER. I was told that the Theosophical Society was originally founded to crush Spiritualism and belief in the survival of the individuality in man?

THEOSOPHIST. You are misinformed. Our beliefs are all founded on that immortal individuality. But then, like so many others, you confuse *personality* with individuality. Your Western psychologists do not seem to have established any clear distinction between the two. Yet it is precisely that difference which gives the key-note to the understanding of Eastern philosophy, and which lies at the root of the divergence between the Theosophical and Spiritualistic teachings. And though it may draw upon us still more the hostility of some Spiritualists, yet I must state here that it is Theosophy which is the *true* and unalloyed Spiritualism, while the modern scheme of that name is, as now practised by the masses, simply transcendental materialism.

ENQUIRER. Please explain your idea more clearly.

THEOSOPHIST. What I mean is that though our teachings insist upon the identity of spirit and matter, and though we say that spirit is *potential* matter, and matter simply crystallized spirit (*e.g.*, as ice is solidified steam), yet since the original and eternal condition of *all* is not spirit but *meta*-spirit, so to speak, (visible and solid matter being simply its periodical manifestation,) we maintain that the term spirit can only be applied to the *true* individuality.

ENQUIRER. But what is the distinction between this "true individuality" and the "I" or "Ego" of which we are all conscious?

THEOSOPHIST. Before I can answer you, we must argue upon what you mean by "I" or "Ego." We distinguish between the simple fact of self-consciousness, the simple feeling that "I am I," and the complex thought that "I am Mr. Smith" or "Mrs. Brown." Believing as we do in a series of births for the same Ego, or re-incarnation, this distinction is the fundamental pivot of the whole idea. You see "Mr. Smith" really means a long series of daily experiences strung together by the thread of memory, and forming what Mr. Smith calls "himself." But none of these "experiences" are really the "I" or the Ego, nor do they give "Mr. Smith" the feeling that he is himself, for he forgets the greater part of his daily experiences, and they produce the feeling of *Egoity* in him only while they last. We Theosophists, therefore, distinguish between this bundle of "experiences," which we call the *false* (because so finite and evanescent) *personality*, and that element in man to which the feeling of "I am I" is due. It is this "I am I" which we call the *true* individuality; and we say that this "Ego" or individuality plays, like an actor, many parts on the stage of life.* Let us call every new life on earth of the same *Ego* a *night* on the stage of a theatre.

One night the actor, or "Ego," appears as "Macbeth," the next as "Shylock," the third as "Romeo," the fourth as "Hamlet" or "King Lear," and so on, until he has run through the whole cycle of incarnations.

The Ego begins his life-pilgrimage as a sprite, an "Ariel," or a "Puck"; he plays the part of a *super*, is a soldier, a servant, one of the chorus; rises then to "speaking parts," plays leading *roles*, interspersed with insignificant parts, till he finally retires from the stage as "Prospero," the *magician*.

Agnus H. Haddow, Dying, Death and After Death

The dying person's vision appears more powerful and his hearing is different in that he can pick up thoughts. He is unable to touch anything and communicate with those who are still alive. Sometimes the spirits of relatives or friends who have died may be seen. While in this spiritual body he senses floating in dark space and has a feeling of joy, love and quiet peacefulness. In many instances at or near death, noises are heard. These may take the form of a loud buzzing or ringing, or, in a few instances, beautiful music is heard. At the same time there is often the sensation of being pulled through a dark tunnel and some experience seeing light at the end of the tunnel. Emerging at the end of the tunnel into the light, sometimes a kindly "Being of Light" is seen who asks non-verbally for one's life to be evaluated. There is no sense of time and any person who is met has no particular age. If the person revives, he has the sensation of being pulled back through the tunnel, often being reluctant to leave the blissful atmosphere for the contrasting harsh reality of earthly life. After such an experience, many express no fear of death and their views on its relationship to life is altered.

How to Help the Dying?

Nelda Samarel, *HELPING THE DYING* p. 34

Regardless of which interventions are used when assisting dying persons, the essential component required to make any of them effective is caring. In true caring, devotion must be present. This devotion is manifested by our total presence of attention and by acceptance of obligations. Ingredients of caring include knowledge, patience, honesty, trust, humility, hope, courage, commitment, and selflessness. It is expressed nonverbally more so than verbally and includes those activities which provide assistance to another individual based on an interest in or concern for that human being, or to meet an expressed or unexpressed need.

The Panoramic Vision

H.P. Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy* pp. 162-63

ENQUIRER. Then the personal man must always go on suffering *blindly* the Karmic penalties which the Ego has incurred?

THEOSOPHIST. Not quite so. 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.

ENQUIRER. Does this happen to everyone?

THEOSOPHIST. 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.

ENQUIRER. Is there anything corresponding to this before re-birth?

THEOSOPHIST. There is. As the man at the moment of death has a retrospective insight into the life he has led, so, at the moment he is reborn on to earth, the *Ego*, awaking from the state of Devachan, has a prospective vision of the life which awaits him, and realizes all the causes that have led to it. He realizes them and sees futurity, because it is between Devachan and re-birth that the *Ego* regains his full *manasic* consciousness, and rebecomes for a short time the god he was, before, in compliance with Karmic law, he first descended into matter and incarnated in the first man of flesh. The "golden thread" sees all its "pearls" and misses not one of them.

Mahatma K.H. *Mahatma Letters to A.P. Sinnett, Letter 23b* (October, 1882)

(16) It is a widely spread belief among all the Hindus that a person's future pre-natal state and birth are moulded by the last desire he may have at the time of death. But this last desire, they say, necessarily hinges on to the shape which the person may have given to his desires, passions, etc., during his past life. It is for this very reason, viz. — that our last desire may not be unfavourable to our future progress — that we have to watch our actions and control our passions and desires throughout our whole earthly career.

(17) It *cannot* be otherwise. The experience of dying men — by drowning and other accidents — brought back to life, has corroborated our doctrine in almost every case. Such thoughts are *involuntary* and we have no more control over them than we would over the eye's retina to prevent it perceiving that colour which affects it most. At the last moment, the whole life is reflected in our memory and emerges from all the forgotten nooks and corners picture after picture, one event after the other. The dying brain dislodges memory with a strong supreme impulse, and memory restores faithfully every impression entrusted to it during the period of the brain's activity. That impression and thought which was the strongest naturally becomes the most vivid and survives so to say all the rest which now vanish and disappear for ever, to reappear but in Deva Chan. No man dies insane or unconscious — as some physiologists assert. Even a *madman*, or one in a fit of *delirium tremens* will have his instant of perfect lucidity at the moment of death, though unable to say so to those present. 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.

G. de Purucker, *Esoteric Tradition* p. 809-10

It might here be added that just as the panorama of the whole past life glides past it in review at the death-time, so the precisely identic picture, or series of panoramic views of the same past life which has been indelibly stamped into the fabric of being, again passes in review before its 'mind's eye' just before the Reimbodying Ego takes birth anew. The reader or student of course understands that these wonderful processes are in no sense an effort of the will of the Reimbodying Ego, but are, so to say, automatic procedures of the functioning of its own substance, from which, on an immensely smaller and more imperfect scale, a man during his earth-life has his frequent periods of 'memory' or recollection or remembrance of what has been lived through in previous years or days.

This panoramic picture of the past, great or small, according to the individual human cases, is purely automatic, as said above, and the important point to remember here is that the soul-consciousness of the Reimbodying Ego, watching this wonderful life-review incident by incident, is for the time being entirely unconscious and oblivious of everything else except this panoramic vision. Temporarily it thus lives in the past; and memory dislodges from the akasic record, so to speak, event after event, aye, even to the smallest detail; and thus it sees all its past life as an all-inclusive vision of picture rapidly succeeding picture.

There are very definite ethical and psychological reasons which by Nature's laws inhere in this process; for this rapidly moving panorama comprises the entire reconstruction, mentally speaking, of both the good and the evil done in the past life, and, as said above, imprints it all indelibly on the fabric of the spiritual memory of the man who is passing.

Finally the end comes; it has come; and then the mortal and material portions of the panorama sink into oblivion; whilst the Reimbodying Ego retains with it consciously and carries away with it the best and most spiritual and most loftily intellectual parts of these memories of the Panoramic Vision into the Devachan or Heaven-world.

Death and the Circulations of the Cosmos - 1 p. 22-3

... it is not the last breath, nor again even the last beat of the heart, which marks the snapping of the vital cord, but both the last breath and the last heart-beat do mark the moment of apparent death, which is equivalent to saying the moment likewise of the vanishing of the larger part of the vital cord. Nevertheless as long as the panorama of the past life's experiences is passing through the brain, which occurs in all cases of death, there is still a slender strand of the filament visible to the Seer's eye, and the panorama itself becomes blank unconsciousness when this last feebly glowing strand in its turn vanishes; this is full and complete death of the body.

...There are no perfectly defined and trustworthy signs which the body gives to the ordinary physician as marking the moment of complete or full death, otherwise of the snapping of the last strand of the cord of life. The Seer knows, of course; but unfortunately I know of no absolutely and infallibly reliable sign which the ordinary medical practitioner could understand as showing him the exact instant when death is full and complete. It is known even to medical science that the mere cessation of the breath, and the stopping of the beating of the heart, are no conclusive signs of complete death, outside of other things; cases of resuscitation are on record which have occurred even when the heart has stopped beating and breathing has ceased. In consequence of this, it is not only wise but a following of the dictates of humanity always to avoid too precipitate or too hurried a disposal of the human body which is supposed to be 'dead.'