

DOES THE PERSONALITY SURVIVE?

By L. W. Rogers

A writer whose views on the scientific aspects of Theosophy have occasionally appeared in this magazine asks for answers to some questions. The following are excerpts from his letter:

It is a curious circumstance that, so many years after H.P.B.'s death, many still cling to ideas she fought so hard to eradicate. She fought the prevalent theories of Spiritualism and tried to show that there was no real survival of the personality after death and that what really survived was an impersonal ego . . . and that when communication of some sort was apparent it was only with the fragmentary shell of the departed and not with his real self. Yet in spite of all that we still cling in most part to the romantic notion that at death we step out of our bodies and emerge on the other side clothed in the same personality as in life, but bodiless . . .

Surely no well-informed Theosophist holds that a human being is at any point of its journey through the physical, astral and mental planes bodiless! To be conscious on those three planes we must—and do—have bodies composed of physical, astral, and mental matter. When we leave our physical body, whether in death or merely in sleep, we are in our astral body. Likewise when we lose our astral body we are immediately functioning in the mental body on the mental plane.

When a person passes from the astral to the mental world, "remains" are left behind as was the case when leaving the physical life. The astral remains consist of the slowly diminishing matter of the astral body, plus such fragments of mental matter as may adhere to the astral corpse or shell. As the astral remains disintegrate the released mental matter rises by attraction to the mental plane where it naturally belongs. Thus there is a period of time between the departure of the person from the astral plane and the final disintegration of the shell. During that time, if there is an attempt to communicate, as at a mediumistic séance, connection may be made with the "shade" instead of with the departed friend. The departed would be functioning on the mental plane quite beyond the reach of any medium while the astral shell—animated by a little mental matter that *had* been a part of the person—could masquerade on the astral plane and give a plausible imitation of that person, so far as replying to personal questions is concerned. That interlude between the arrival of the person in the mental world, and the final fading out of his remains in the astral world, is what Madame Blavatsky must have had in mind when warning against such communications.

The personality does perish but only in the same way that childhood perishes. Boyhood perishes because it develops into manhood. What does not perish is the individuality. It is the same way in childhood and adulthood. In both the astral life and the mental life there is full memory of the friends and events of all the lower levels. As we pass upward from the material life the consciousness widens. Any given plane contains everything in the plane below it. When in the astral life we retain the memory of all the experiences of the physical life. In the mental life we have full memory of all our experiences in both the astral and physical lives.

This physical life that we are now living is the most limited state of consciousness we shall ever have. Here we know very little of what we really are. Most of us know only the daily experiences that occur between awakening in the morning and falling asleep when we go to bed in the evening. But between falling asleep at night and awakening next morning we have had other experiences. Only the body sleeps, the consciousness never. To most of us the night hours are a blank period or are filled with dreams. As a rule, those fragmentary and chaotic “dreams” are merely the result of the automatic activity of the physical brain and its etheric counterpart and are of no importance whatever. Rarely—very rarely—the “dream” is a memory of what you have been doing while the body slept; for you, the ego, the soul, the true self—you are *always* conscious either in the physical body or out of it. So we know only about two thirds of the experiences which befall us during this incarnation. It has sometimes been said that the nighttime of the body is the daytime of the soul. The physical life is not a complete record of the incarnation. The astral life is, because it is continuous while the physical record is made up of what we are saying and doing about two thirds of the time. Only when we break through into the astral consciousness while still living in the physical body, or when it sleeps and we are temporarily free from its limitations, do we have the full record. Only when the incarnation comes to an end and death thereby destroys its limitation of consciousness do we comprehend how very partial life in a material body is.

In discussing any theosophical subject we should remember that the philosophy of occultism is very new to the Western world and that its nomenclature is by no means well settled. In the time of Madame Blavatsky it was still more immature. If you compare the earliest writing of Dr. Annie Besant with her later work, you can see how true that is. Occult terminology is not yet well settled. Just what do we mean when we speak of the *personality*? By that word some obviously mean all that relates to the physical body, and no more. Others may say that it covers both physical and astral life. Still others would say that the personality includes all human experiences below the causal level—that is, all experiences obtained through the physical, astral, and mental bodies. What did Madame Blavatsky mean by *personality*? Obviously the writer of the letter quoted above takes it that she drew the line at the physical level. But why

should it be there when our personal relations with other people extend to both the astral and mental planes? On the astral plane the average person knows both their friends and their foes and often plots to get revenge for the wrongs done on the material plane. As for the mental plane do we need any stronger evidence than the fact that there the average human being fills their little world with images of those they loved most in the physical world and spends a long period in happy association with them?

It will be recalled that there are various issues other than the one we are here discussing in which statements made by Madame Blavatsky seem to contradict the ascertained facts. Her fluent English notwithstanding, it was not her native tongue. Add to that the statement of Subba Rao that such a book as *Light on the Path* has seven layers of meaning, and it is not difficult to see how apparent contradictions may arise. Even now, more than a half-century later, writers on occult subjects are not in agreement on the meaning of the term *personality*. Bishop Leadbeater, who knew H.P.B. well, and was her pupil, points out that the great teacher was often right when others thought her wrong because she had in mind a deeper occult view than they were able to grasp.

Whatever is the true definition of *personality*, there is nothing obscure about the theosophical teaching on the evolutionary journey of the individualized consciousness—a process of mental and moral growth through innumerable reincarnations in which memory is continually being submerged and lost on lower planes but only to be regained on the higher.

Aside from all definitions and differences of opinion, what each of us is deeply concerned to know is whether those we now know and love will be with us in an eternal future from which we can look back with unbroken vision to the times and scenes of this very moment and recognize ourselves as what we now are. Yes. A study of Theosophy logically leads you precisely to that conclusion. Call it by what name you will, your present consciousness—with all you have learned since birth, with all you are to learn as you pass through the astral plane—you will carry with you into the mental plane, or heaven world. If that were not so, such books as *The Devachanic Plane* by Bishop Leadbeater could not have been written. As the scenes of childhood are remembered in maturity so the events and the people of today will be recalled on the higher planes. Consciousness adds but does not subtract. What we fully know now we shall know forever.