

DEATH

Death is not the opposite of life, it is the opposite of birth.

unattributed

Heraclitus¹ was asked by a student, "What is the difference between life and death?"

Heraclitus said, "There is no difference."

The student followed, "Then why don't you kill yourself?"

To which Heraclitus replied, "Because there is no difference."

Jakob Boehme² was asked, "Where does the soul go when a man dies?" His response? "There is no need for it to *go* anywhere."

Interesting responses both. But do they make sense?

Have you ever noticed that the only *time* you will ever have to do anything is NOW?

Ten minutes from now will exist, but you don't yet have access to it. Ten minutes past existed, but again, you don't have access to it. Truly, the only time you'll ever have to do anything is NOW . . . NOW . . . NOW . . .

¹ Heraclitus was one of the Greek philosophers from whom we have very little in the way of extant works. He was the man who, when referring to the changing nature of existence, said, "You can't step into the same river twice."

² Boehme was a late sixteenth, early seventeenth century European mystic.

Have you ever noticed that the only place you will ever be is HERE? Right NOW, looking out through your eyes at this book, where are you? You are where you always are: you are HERE.

The only time you will ever have is NOW; the only place you will ever be is HERE.

With this in mind, where do you go when you die?

Answer: Assuming you don't cease to exist, you won't *go* anywhere. From your perspective, you will still be HERE.

The question is, where *is* HERE?

Consider the following: You are sitting in Physics class. The lecture is scintillating, but your mind takes off thinking about that hot date coming up next Saturday night, or the argument you had with your mother this morning, or that big test you blew yesterday. From your perspective, where *are* you during the daydream?

As you sit amidst your meditations, you are still HERE . . . but where *is* HERE? Your body is in Physics class—but your attention isn't. The teacher is talking merrily; you aren't hearing a word. Where have you gone?

From the Eastern view we are examining, it is believed that you have focused yourself into what are called *the inner worlds*—you have gone *inward*.

In the lecture on *thought*, we talked briefly about the *inner worlds*. At that time, they were said to be a "place" where THOUGHTS have a substantive, physical reality, a place where THOUGHT resides.³ It was also said to be the place into which Beings move at death.

In short, we constantly swim in a sea of thought, touching, animating, affecting the inner worlds as we ourselves think.⁴ In fact, we are so intimately linked to their

³ One could make a strong argument for the possibility that Jung's *collective subconscious* is intimately related to the idea of thoughtforms existing in an "inner world."

⁴ This is even true when we are apparently unconscious. As far as this view is concerned, sleep is a state in which the body goes dormant while the self focuses into the inner worlds (ever notice that during dreams, you are still HERE and it is still NOW).

existence that our immersion in them goes largely unnoticed.⁵ Nevertheless, as far as the East is concerned, we are in constant contact with them.⁶

So what happens when we die? It all depends upon how you look at it. If we are in constant contact with the inner worlds (*we are* constantly thinking), and if death is a refocusing of the self away from the physical body and into the inner worlds, then at death we are essentially *going* to a place we have always been. Put another way, we don't *go* anywhere (thank you, Jakob Boehme).

Looking from the perspective of the body, on the other hand, death is definitely a departure. We shed our physical form (like removing our clothes before going to bed) and slip completely into a "place" that is somewhere other than the body.

What is the journey like? The following is one of a number of plausible scenarios out of the East:⁷

When the Being/child-complex steps across the line, so to speak, it finds that it hasn't changed much at all. It still has the trappings of personality around It, though with time that falls away. It still has the wants and desires it exercised during its previous stint

⁵ Our minds drift aimlessly on a warm summer day and we give it a name—we say we are daydreaming. Once it's named we cease to find our ability to do so remarkable. But it is remarkable. The "place" we have gone is immense. (Reminds me of the riddle: What is bigger on the inside than it is on the outside? Answer: the mind!).

⁶ Real meditation is a fascinating thing to experience. It is the focusing of the self into dynamic thoughtforms that reside in the inner worlds. From this view, the meditation of the Buddha before His enlightenment takes on new significance. When Mara sent his legions against Siddhartha, it was a very real confrontation. When fear enshrouded the Buddha-to-be, for instance, it was a palpable, living thing that enveloped him. If there had been anything in Him that could have resonated with that thoughtform, fear would have found an entrance point and Siddhartha would have been lost.

Additional note: This is also why initiations in the Greater Mysteries were so seriously dangerous to the aspirant. The individual making the effort was, at the higher levels of initiation, taking a stand in a completely unprotected sense (initiates were supposedly sent out of their bodies and into the inner worlds during the effort, losing the natural protection the body provides against inappropriate other-level encroachments) against terribly powerful, potent forces from within the inner worlds. To fail was to lose control of the self . . . quite literally. It could mean death (i.e., not being able to re-enter the body) or, at the very least, the insanity of one who has no control over the self (we'll talk more about this problem later). In short, the Greater Mysteries were a spiritually rewarding experience for those who had made the efforts and were ready, but they were not to be taken lightly. They were deadly serious.

⁷ This scenario is a good, generic starting point from which to examine most of the East's beliefs about after-death. Different philosophies focus on different aspects of the scenario, but it all hangs together if you know how to read between the lines. Example: In Tibetan Buddhism, much is written about *the bardo*—the time of transition between life and death. It is as though they have telescoped that aspect of the experience, animating the happenings at that brief point into the center-piece of their philosophic tenets on the subject. Nothing in those teachings contradicts any of what you are about to read.

in a body, and it is still aware. In fact, the self finds that it still *has* a body—one that is as appropriate and substantial in the inner levels as your physical body seems to you now on this level.⁸ In short, the self finds that there is no real difference between "life" and "death" (thank you, Hericlitus).

As the journey begins, the self moves up through the lower levels and into a state of introspection. During that critical but loving examination, a Guardian helps the self see for itself what it has made of itself during the previous life. That is, it sees where the child has succeeded in a spiritual sense and where it has failed and needs more work. This experience happens quickly and without emotion, but is very complete.

Once this period of introspection is finished, one of a number of things can happen. If the Being (you or I) has been a relatively decent, run-of-the-mill human, it will probably go into what is called Devachan.

Devachan is a Sanskrit word that refers to what some would call a *heaven state*. Life in a body is tough. The psychological pressure on humans is immense. We get beaten around a lot. We have to put up with a lot of pain both physically and mentally. Devachan is a compensatory state in which an individual is allowed to play out his or her best aspirations in a relatively stress free environment. It is not heaven in the Christian sense: it is not forever; you don't have one life during which you can gain entrance or not; it is not the opposite of hell. It is simply a "place," a state where the best efforts of an individual are allowed to blossom in a pressureless, relatively blissful setting.

The self stays in Devachan until the energy of its compensatory experience is spent. At that time it comes out of Devachan and into a number of different possibilities. One possibility is to move into one of the learning states, immersing itself into thoughtforms like compassion or, more commonly, absorbing itself into the patterns of thought it had closely experienced in its previous life. Einstein, for instance, would undoubtedly move deeply into thought concerning the reality of space, matter and energy.

Sooner or later, the time comes when it is karmically correct for the Being to move back into the physical world again—to reincarnate. When that time comes, It is

⁸ Raymond Moody is an MD, a Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Virginia. He has done research on people who have been declared clinically dead for a period of time before being resuscitated via CPR or whatever. According to his work, some people who have been in this situation have brought back remembrance of what they were doing during their brief period of death (we will talk about this later). One of the things commonly reported was that after lifting out of the body, the departed found himself or herself in a body . . . but one that wasn't physical. Some even recounted trying to get the attention of their rescuers only to have one of the workers walk straight through them. As bizarre as this may seem, it is right in line with the East's view of after-death states.

drawn into a body of the right sex, with the right genetics, in the right environment, given the Being's spiritual necessity to continue to grow and unfold.

Aside from moving into Devachan, there are two other possibilities for a Being after its period of introspection with the Guardian. The second of the two is an unusual situation in which the Being chooses to forgo Devachan altogether. For most of us, a hard life is viewed as a burden. We feel abused because, from a purely personal point of view, we *have* been abused. We don't see pain as a teacher; for us it is simply something with which we don't want to deal and, if we do have to endure it, for which we want compensation. There are Beings who have moved passed this view of experience, who take the lessons of life with gratitude and move on. For them, compensation isn't necessary. Exactly what a Being does in this situation will be discussed later. For now, we will leave it as a relatively rare but certainly possible option for a Being who has just "stepped across the line."

The last possibility has a decidedly darker tint to it. To understand it fully we have to take another short side-trip.

Reiterating something we have already discussed, *thought* is considered to be real—it is believed to have energy and a life-of-sorts of its own. The consequences of this? Residing in the inner worlds, thoughts coalesce into great complexes of living energy called *thoughtforms*. For instance, existing in the inner worlds is the thoughtform of anger—an energy form that has been built and fed by every human who has ever exercised some form of that emotion *since the beginning of this evolution*. Where do these heavy forms reside?

The next more subtle level up from the physical is called the astral level (it is also called the astral plane). The upper astral is an OK "place" that presents a reflection of the physical world, complete with what appears to be a fixed landscape. The lower astral, on the other hand, is very much like a cesspool. This is where *anger* habitates along with all the other heavy thought-patterns that humanity has generated and reinforced throughout time.

If an individual has addicted himself or herself to any of these gross thoughtforms, the Being will not be able to shed those patterns when it is time to move more deeply into the inner worlds (i.e., after dealing with the Guardian). Individuals in

this situation have so completely built those patterns into the fabric of their Being that they are not able to extricate themselves essentially from themselves.⁹ As such, they are not able to move into the more subtle levels of Devachan and instead are drawn to where those heavier thoughtforms normally reside. In other words, they are pulled into the lower astral level by the very quality of themselves.¹⁰ Beings to whom this happens are called *earth-bounds*. They remain in the lower astral until they either let loose of the patterns that have drawn them there in the first place (if they can let loose, they are free to move into the more subtle Devachan states)¹¹ or until it is time to reincarnate.¹²

Although a self trapped in the *lower astral* is effectively in a hell state, it is not to be viewed as a punishment. It is a natural consequence of way things are set up. If you build into yourself obsessions that are heavy, you will not be able to disassociate yourself from those qualities at death and, as a consequence, you will be drawn to where those thoughtforms reside in the lower astral.¹³

⁹ Remember, we don't change much with the death of the body. The personality stays, at least for a while. The habits, attitudes, likes, dislikes, wants and desires, they don't just go away. By building them into ourselves in life, they become a part of us until we choose to tear them away and build anew.

¹⁰ It is interesting to note that the Egyptian Book of the Dead talks about the "houses" the departed has to move passed after death. Each house calls to the individual. If the individual cannot disassociate itself from the calling, it is pulled in. This is a Being who is being drawn down by the thought-forms to which it has attached itself.

¹¹ For the spiritually evolved Being who chooses not to enter Devachan, one of the things the Being can do is become a "worker"—one who goes into the astral to help earthbounds extricate themselves from those levels. We will talk more about the kind of Being that might take on such a task later.

¹² A fairly common question asked at this point is, "What determines where you go? Who or what makes the judgment?" It is important to understand that this is not a judgment call. It is a natural part of the system. If you jump into a pool of water holding fifty pounds of concrete, you are *not* going to float—you're going to sink. If you enter the subtle levels of the inner worlds having built gross, heavy thought-forms all around you, you are not going to be able to "float"(carrying through with the analogy) into the subtle inner levels. Instead, the heaviness draws you down into the grosser, heavier levels. Nobody is making you do it, it just happens naturally.

This isn't a surprising question, though. Christianity has its Judgment Day, as do many other religions. Even in ancient religions you find reference to judgment, though in at least some cases those references are misleading. In the Egyptian Book of the Dead (this was actually called The Book of Coming Forth to Light—but because archeologists found it in tombs it was dubbed otherwise), the soul is told that it must present itself for questioning before the 42 assessors while having its heart weighed against the Feather of Truth in the presence of Osiris, the judge of the dead. That doesn't mean the priests and initiates of the Mystery Schools believed that Osiris was really judging the dead, or that the heart was really weighed against the Feather of Truth, or that there were 42 assessors asking question of the soul. It means that the idea of a formal judgment was used to symbolize the after-death states to the uninitiated. Given what we know about the Egyptian civilization, it is evident that they knew better (see Footnote #16).

¹³ Again, this is not an unfair encumbrance on the self. No mental addiction can hold if there isn't at least a part of the child-self that wants it to stay (though often the higher part of the child is horrified at the

There is another twist that should be mentioned before leaving this topic. A Being bound to the lower astral still has the desire to exercise its addictions (that is its problem—it can't let go of its desires). Unfortunately, it hasn't a body through which it can do so. To remedy the situation, an earthbound will often attempt to link itself to an individual *in a body* who is experiencing the desired sensation.

How so? As far as this Eastern metaphysical view is concerned, each person in a body has a shielding around the aura. The shielding is designed to protect you from overly intimate contact with the other levels. It is possible to thin that shielding. Alcohol, for instance, will do it; so will drugs; even unusual physical conditions can dislocate the sheathing.¹⁴

So what happens when people drink, or take drugs, or exercise roaring, mindless anger (if that be their addiction)? It thins out their auric shielding. With the shielding thinned, an earthbound on the other levels that craves the sensation being experienced by the host can send tendrils of thought-stuff down through the thinned shielding and into the aura. In doing so, it can experience its addiction through the host. This is called *overshadowing*, and in some instances an overshadower can even affect the decision making process of the overshadowed host.¹⁵

The whole idea behind an exorcism in Christianity is to get rid of an overshadower. The difference is that in the church the intruder is believed to be

addiction while the lesser part secretly enjoys the excitement). Karma is simply saying, "OK, there is a part of you that wants to experience . . . so experience."

What's more, the self will sooner or later be given access to the kind of experience that will allow it to work its way up and out of the hole it has dug for itself (assuming it chooses to use the experience well). This system is not designed to trap individuals in misery; it is a very loving situation.

¹⁴ As an example, an individual who has a very high temperature will sometimes report sensing unusual things—seeing snakes going up the walls or feeling things crawling all over the body (going through the DT's will also do this). The assumption in the West is that such things are a product of the mind playing tricks on us (i.e., hallucinations). The belief in the East is that the auric shielding has been dislocated by the unusual physical circumstances (i.e., the high temperature or whatever) and that along with the brain doing weird things, the individual is also *mentally touching the lower astral* more intimately than usual. As such, the individual ends up sensing thought-forms that reside in the lower astral. Hallucinogenic drugs do the same thing: they alter the brain chemistry but they additionally disassociate the aura so the individual sees into the astral. With good trips, they see into the upper astral; with bad trips, they see into the lower astral. Looking into the lower astral isn't a fun prospect, especially if you have no control over it.

¹⁵ Have you ever noticed that when people are drunk, they act quite different than normal. Science says it's the consequence of altered brain chemistry; the East suggests that it may additionally be the influence of an overshadower (or possibly a whole committee of them).

supernatural—*the Devil*. As far as this view is concerned, it isn't the Devil . . . it's just an earthbound craving experience it cannot have in any way other than by leaching it off someone in a body.

What is interesting is that there are all sorts of phenomena that the West terms supernatural that the East simply accepts as *part of the system*. For instance:

Channeling looks like cuckoo-cloud-nine stuff from a western perspective, and a fair portion of the people who do this sort of thing are surely frauds. The supposed psychic sits down, makes mental contact with someone on the other side, then says something like, "Oh, so-and-so is coming through. Peace and love. Do you have any questions?"

People are making big money doing this, which irritates the gashnutz out of watchdog skeptics groups . . . and for good reason. In most cases, it's bunk. BUT, as far as the East is concerned, such things are possible.

Why?

Because if there are entities on "the other side," and if it is possible for a host (someone in a body) to make a mental link with one of those entities, then having that entity speak through the host is not as outrageous a possibility as it might otherwise seem. That is what channelers claim to do. The East dignifies it because it is a logical consequence of the way things are set up.

The problem with channeling? Assuming someone is really doing it, who do you suppose is coming through?

Basically decent entities are busy in Devachan. Spiritually evolved entities (those who chose to forgo Devachan) know better than to interfere with individuals in-body, especially if doing so would titillate the child-selves of those involved (and people *are* titillated by anything "otherworldly"). Spiritually evolved Beings on the other side wouldn't be caught dead (pun intended) acting as channel-spooks. So who is left? Earthbounds! They are the only ones both available and irresponsible enough to do such things.¹⁶

In other words, when people go to channelers and ask questions like, "What should I do with my life?", it is the equivalent to going up to a drunk down on skid row

¹⁶ Actually, there are a few other equally unsavory possibilities which we will discuss in time.

and saying, "Tell me, what should I do with my life and my wealth?" . . . then *listening* to their advice . . . then *taking* their advice!

What is worse, many people in the New Age community figure that if someone is in contact with the other side, the "someone" must be terribly spiritual. That simply isn't true! To be an effective channel, all one needs is an auric shielding that has been thinned out enough so that an entity on the other side can infiltrate the complex and affect the host's thinking. That is not being spiritual, that is being psychically porous.

In short, channeling is believed to be possible within the East, but it is not believed to be a particularly savory thing to do.

Another example: *ghosts*. What might a ghost be? It is possible to have a situation in which something happens to an individual that is so traumatic, so emotionally stressful that the Being impresses that situation upon itself and cannot leave it.¹⁶ Imagine an individual who was angry to start with, or who was highly emotional, or who just didn't understand life very well: how might a self like that react to being murdered? The Being would step across the line, spend time with the Guardian, then possibly be pulled back to the emotion and the place of the experience to relive it over and over again. Just as though it were addicted to a particular sensation, the Being would be earthbound. And under the right circumstances, it might be possible for you or me to sense the presence of that Being in the "haunted" place.

Another example: *astral projection*. Astral projection is a situation in which an individual lifts out and away from the body. How does it work? By focusing one's attention into the astral sheathing of the aura and extruding it out into the astral level, it is possible to get the affect of leaving the body (those who say they have experienced the phenomenon report being apparently connected to the body by a thin cord—this is the astral body as it exists between the extruded focal point of the self and the physical body).

This is not a good thing to be doing. Think about where the experiencer is. The self is moving around in the astral without the normal protection afforded it by the physical body and auric complex. And although the upper astral isn't so bad, the lower

¹⁶ Think about it. Have you ever had something happen to you that imprinted itself into your thinking so completely that you couldn't leave it. Example: you get into a big argument, then relive the argument for hours after-the-fact.

astral is not a place you want to be. The responsible teachers say so; the irresponsible teachers (of which there seem to be a myriad) are busily making money by teaching people how to astral project. If the East is correct, that is really dangerous.

A last example: contacting the dead in *séances*. When the body dies, it begins to decay . . . but that is not all that happens. The auric pattern—the energy field around the body—its sheaths also begin to decompose.¹⁷ The astral body, for instance—the energy link between you and the next level up (ie. the astral plane)—begins to fall apart naturally as it drifts in the astral level (this is another reason the astral isn't such a fun place to be—it is the grave-site of decaying astral-body debris). Under the right circumstances, a real psychic (of which there are probably very few) can re-energize someone's astral shell before it has decayed to the point of complete disassembly. As the astral shell contains all the memory patterns of the individual's life, contacting and re-animating that shell can elicit a response that appears to be coming from the dearly departed.¹⁸ Although most séances are probably fraudulent, the possibility of such contact exists if the East is correct.

The problem is that when a legitimate séance is executed, you really don't know what you have tagged into. It could be the astral shell of the individual targeted; it could even be an earthbound attempting to disguise itself as the loved one. In short, when you touch "the other side" in this manner you really don't know with whom or what you have made contact.

Parting shot: Heaven, hell, ghosts, quality of self, other-worldly phenomena, they all have their place within the scheme of things. And as for death? The East's views are

¹⁷ In the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, the soul is instructed on its journey into the underworld (the inner worlds). One of the things that is discussed is the *lifting out of the body* of what they called the ba (depicted as a bird), the ka (also depicted as a bird), the khu, the kaibit, and others. There is discussion amongst Egyptologists as to what each of these actually was. One possibility: they were different aspects of the auric sheaths as they pulled away from the body, coupled with the Being itself (the ba was said to be that part of you that is immortal).

¹⁸ This is another reason why highly emotional grieving at someone's death is such a disservice to the departed. Projecting enormous amounts of thought-energy at someone's memory considerably impedes the natural decay of the astral shell.

certainly reasonable. Whether they are right or wrong remains to be seen. After all, we are all going to die. Sooner or later, we will all have the answer.¹⁹

¹⁹ There is one other bit of whimsy that should probably be injected here. One of society's more popular ways of getting rid of undesirable individuals—murderers, etc.—is to put them to death. If this view is correct, killing someone in this manner is not going to get rid of the problem. Aside from making the individual more angry than he or she already is, sending a sociopathic Being out of body and into the inner planes actually gives the Being considerably more possibilities for power than would have been the case if it had been kept confined within the physical form. Why? Because once in the astral, the Being can begin to overshadow weaker minds. And what do you suppose such a Being is going to nudge those minds toward doing?

