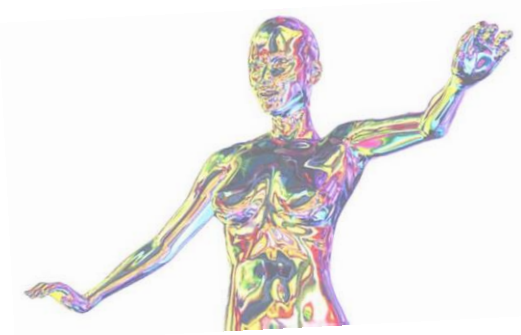


Theosophical Correspondence Course
Topic No. 5 Part B

THE POWERS & FUNCTIONS OF THE ASTRAL BODY



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WHAT ARE THE POWERS OF THE ASTRAL BODY?

As we learned in the first part of the topic (5A "The Body and the Astral Body"), the astral body (*Linga Sharira*, Sanskrit) has a complete set of senses and organs which are the "originals" of those in the physical body. But being formed of a much more highly refined and developed matter, their powers are not only much higher, but they encompass more and different functions.

It is proposed that it is the most "material" plane of our world that imposes the restrictions of time and space upon our perceptions and limits us to externals, which from the point of view of the Vedantins, Buddhists and all who followed, are illusory.

When the inner senses are released from these constraints the obstacles of time and space no longer exist for them. The functions of telepathy, clairaudience and clairvoyance become natural operations for them. And since they can then more easily perceive causes already set up, and the results which must take place, they can - to varying degrees - offer views into the future. They also provide accessible avenues to increase the power of discernment of the Ego through their broader and deeper appreciation of reality.

It is on the astral plane that the pictures and memories of all the events of life are captured and stored. The astral body, being of the same substance, is able to contact these pictures, sounds, emotions, etc. which to the trained Adept can be of great value. To the untrained psychic who does not know how to interpret them they can offer fascination, but with it, confusion.

There are many more powers attributed to the Astral Body such as the ability to extrude a limb from the body, to actually leave the body and travel at great distances, to become visible and to accomplish many other feats. These will be gone into at greater length in a later topic, but for the present it is sufficient to say that without a thorough knowledge of the laws governing these phenomena, along with a pure motive and character, any excursions into these activities are extremely dangerous.

In his article, "*Sheaths of the Soul*", William Judge gives a picture of the normal place and functioning of the Astral Body as one of these "sheaths." He states:

So during the long ages that have passed since the present evolution began in this solar system, the Soul has constructed for its own use various sheaths, ranging from very fine ones, near to its own essential being, to those that are more remote, ending with the outer physical one, and that one the most illusionary of them all, although appearing from the outside to be the truly real. These sheaths are necessary if the Soul is to know or to act. For it cannot by itself understand Nature at all, but transforms instantly all sensations and ideas by means of the different sheaths, until in the process it has directed the body below, or obtained itself experience above.

The Astral Body is one of these sheaths and has the function of reporting or translating any sensations to the next higher sheath, and in like manner it translates the commands from the Inner man to the nerves, muscles, etc. of the physical man. And, although the Astral Body contains all the organs and senses, the gross physical body is necessary to the Ego for contacting life on this physical plane.

HAVE WE EVER EXISTED WITHOUT THE PHYSICAL BODY?

Yes, there was a time when the astral was the outermost vehicle we needed since matter itself was still in the astral state. There will come a time when humanity collectively will see through the illusion of matter and we will again operate in these finer bodies. There are those now who have advanced to this state who live and act on

this inner plane in their astral bodies. These are the Adepts, Masters, etc. who have no present need for physical vehicles, yet continue their work on the inner planes. There are those among them, however, who take on physical bodies so that they can communicate directly with beings on our plane. In these cases it is taught that They can leave the body whenever necessary and can operate equally on either plane.

CAN WE IMPROVE OR POLLUTE THE ASTRAL BODY?

Once the Astral Body is in operation it is extremely difficult to alter it to any degree. However, since this body is the real physical body and is subject to the activities of both the Kamic nature and the lower mind, it is possible to pollute it with mean and ugly thoughts and feelings.

It is possible, also, to obstruct the use of those inner Astral senses. And this is done, primarily by not believing that they exist, that there is an inner Being. Either through lack of knowledge or by materialistic prejudice we have developed an attachment to things that are the objects of the physical senses. This attachment has the effect of locking the inner senses to the outer or physical ones, and thus limiting their full effectiveness. In the *Bhagavad-Gita*, Krishna speaks of the value of non-attachment to the results of our actions as a key to obtaining the perception of the Supreme.

On the more positive side of the picture, the Philosophy speaks of a way the Astral Body can actually be altered or purified; it is the process of building a permanent Astral Body through control (concentration) and is given quite some attention, as it is a procedure we all will have to begin at some time. It is by this undertaking that an individual creates an Astral Body that can be kept, along with its memories, and powers, from life to life.

Robert Crosbie has this to say in the *Friendly Philosopher*, p. 292:

Now as soon as we begin to make the effort to control the mind, and desire to know and to assume the position of the inner man, the effort and the assumption bring an accession of power and of steadiness. We have started something going in the astral body. What were before merely centers of force around which organs were builded now tend to become separate astral organs. A gradual building of those organs goes on within us, until in the completion of our effort we have an astral body, with all the organs of the physical completely synthesized, and we are beyond the vicissitudes of physical existence; we have the power of the action of the astral body. The astral body is even more complete and effective on its own plane than our bodily instrument here on the physical plane, for it has a wider range of action in its seven super-senses, where physically we have use of only five senses.

IS THERE MORE THAN ONE ASTRAL BODY?

The physical body is the instrument for the expression of only one state of consciousness, our everyday working consciousness. But the Astral Body has to cover a greater range of activity. It has to furnish both the substance and the powers for the expression of several states of consciousness, and for the several inner principles of the seven-fold man. Because of the fact that the phases of a life are varied, the demands for specialized instruments are equally varied. In some places in the Teachings it is stated that there are several astral bodies¹ and in others it is stated that there is one astral with several aspects. Beyond this it is indicated that when one task is completed, a particular body may be altered to answer to a new demand.

In the last pages of the [Answers to Questions on the Ocean of Theosophy](#), Robert Crosbie makes these interesting statements:

Astral body is merely a generic term. The term "astral" is used for everything beyond the physical. But, it should be understood that as on the physical we have earth, water, air and fire as divisions of this plane, so on the astral plane are similar divisions. The astral form that corresponds to earth remains with the physical body and dissipates with it. The one that corresponds to water is that state of astral substance which forms the kama-rupa; the one that corresponds to the air is the manasic body; and the one that corresponds to fire is the seat of consciousness, the body of the thinker.

There are other ways to categorize the various aspects of this body, but suffice it to say that "Astral Body" is a name given to an inner, finer physical principle that because of its intelligent and plastic nature is able to play a number of roles as a transmitter and a translator between the spiritual side of man and his physical envelope.

IS SCIENCE TODAY NEARER TO ACCEPTING THE ASTRAL BODY AS A FACT?

History shows us that Science as an "establishment" has a difficult time accepting any new idea that imposes a radical change in the structure of their discipline. This acceptance will probably come only when some other discipline, psychology, medicine, etc., has seen this body as something that can throw light on their own research. However, there are some scientists who have come close, and are still coming closer to

¹ The astral body has many aspects, W.Q. Judge writes that each field of consciousness is "made up of seven divisions or sub-fields..." and that each one is "a whole class of seven" sub-divisions to which the Ego may go. (from '[Hypnotism and Theosophy](#)'). The Secret Doctrine in vol. ii p 57 shows each plane has seven sub-planes: "Man needs four flames and three fires to become one on Earth, and he requires **the essence of the forty-nine fires** to be perfect." The emphasis shows it is the *essence* of these fires that is of importance.

the Theosophical position. The most remarkable of these were Dr. H.S. Burr and Dr. F.S.C. Northrop of Yale University, who in 1939 presented the results of experiments based on an electro-dynamic theory of life.² We report these statements as taken from a report made by the Science Editor of the New York Times on April 25, 1939:

There exists in the bodies of living things an electrical architect who molds and fashions the individual after a specific predetermined pattern, and remains within the body from pre-embryonic stages until death. All else in the body undergoes constant change; the individual myriads of cells of which the body is made...³ to be replaced by other cells, but the electrical architect remains the only constant throughout life, building the new cells and organizing them after the same pattern of the original cells, and thus, in a literal sense, constantly recreating the body. Death comes to the individual after the electrical architect within him ceases to function.

The electrical architect promises a new approach to the understanding of the nature of life and the living processes. It indicates that each living organism possesses an electrodynamic field, just as a magnet emanates all around it a magnetic field of force. Similarly, the experimental evidence shows, according to Dr. Burr, that each species of animals and very likely also the individuals within that species have their characteristic electric field, analogous to the lines of force of a magnet.



Science is starting to take more seriously the existence of an electric and magnetic pattern body that interpenetrates the physical. Dr. Rupert Sheldrake was dissatisfied with the old orthodox approach to biology and presented a theory based on the astral that explains the phenomena as varied as how telepathy works, how limbs are formed and regrown, to how dogs or homing pigeons find their homes, even when they have been moved.

He stated in *A New Science of Life*, that what he calls morphogenetic fields do indeed have measurable physical effects, that these fields are responsible for the characteristic form and organization of systems at all levels of complexity, that they impose "patterned restrictions on the... possible outcome of physical process."

² See the addenda at the end on the important idea of the electro-dynamic theory of life.

³ The original article stated that the brain cells don't die, which is now thought to be wrong. Research indicates we are always making (and losing) brain cells, although not making new *neurons* in those with Alzheimer's. Neurons are specialised brain cells that transfer electrical impulses to other cells, across their synapses. The whole body goes through continuous cycles of life and death. <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2019/mar/25/humans-can-make-new-brain-cells-into-their-90s-scientists-discover>

WHAT HAPPENS TO THE ASTRAL BODY AT DEATH?

At the death of the body, the lowest aspect of the Astral Body disintegrates along with the physical. This is the "field" that forms the mold for the physical molecules, and it is because of the breaking up of the cohesive force in the astral that natural death takes place. This is the phantom that is often seen over graves shortly after burial.

Another aspect of this "body" is the Kama Rupa which means the body of desires; called this because it is a body formed at death as a temporary vehicle for the departing Passions and Desires. This has a longer life than the first one mentioned, but it too will be subject to disintegration as soon as the real Man, the Higher Triad, has thoroughly detached itself from this nature, this fourth principle of man.

In the *Theosophical Glossary* p. 172, H.P.B. states, "Here, the pale copy of the man that was, vegetates for a period of time, the duration of which is variable and according to the element of materiality which is left in it, and which is determined by the past life of the defunct.

Bereft as it is of its higher mind, spirit and physical senses, if left alone to its own senseless devices, it will gradually fade out and disintegrate".

This is what has been termed the "spook" and is more often than not the performer in Spiritualistic seances, since it can be revitalized by the medium and made to give up the memories that are resident in its memory bank. It is not the Spirit of the dead man.

The Spirit has departed and cannot be reached by any practices on this plane. There will be more on this, and on the many "Psychic wonders" that are explained by this astral world in one of the later topics.



For the Egyptians an aspect of the body (they called it Bâ, a human-headed bird) was said to fly out of the tomb at death.

There is no equivalent in Theosophy, but it may be considered that which coalesces at death with the Astral Body and goes on to form the Kama-Rupa, such as the desire principle, Kama, or the Life Breath, Prana.

WHAT PART IS PLAYED BY THE PRINCIPLE OF PASSIONS AND DESIRES?

Theosophy makes a point of the fact that Kama (passion and desire) is not caused by the body, "the flesh," but is a principle in itself, and is in existence before the physical body is brought into being. It is the fourth principle in the seven-fold constitution of

man, and, as said before, it is the balance principle from which the ways go up or down. William Judge calls it the basis of action and the mover of the will. He goes on, "For whether we wish to do well or ill we have to first arouse within us the desire for either course. The good man who at last becomes even a sage had at one time in his many lives to arouse the desire for the company of holy men and to keep his desire for progress alive in order to continue." Kama has been termed *personal desire* and has been called evil since it is the attachment to desires that stands in the way of our spiritual advance.

But there is another side to Kama that should not be overlooked. Again from the *Theosophical Glossary*, "Kama is the first conscious, all embracing desire for universal good, love, and for all that lives and feels, needs help and kindness, the first feeling of infinite tender compassion and mercy that arose in the consciousness of the creative ONE FORCE, as soon as it came into life and being as



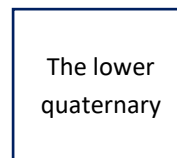
a ray from the ABSOLUTE Kama is pre-eminently the divine desire of creating happiness and love; and it is only ages later, as mankind began to materialize by anthropomorphization its grandest ideals into cut and dried dogmas, that Kama became the power that gratifies desire on the animal plane." ('Kamadeva' in the *Glossary*)

We can see that Kama has two aspects, one low and the other high. When our consciousness is placed entirely below in the body and on material things the tendency is to stimulate our animal nature and strengthen its hold over us. When, on the other hand, our consciousness is centered in our noblest aspirations, unselfish desires, then Kama is transformed and the force of Spirit comes from our Buddhic nature. The attachment to selfish desires closes down the range of our perceptions to nothing but the physical world and the physical senses. Freedom from this attachment opens us up to the range of our inner senses and to the discernment of the Buddhic nature, the judgment compounded of countless lives.

The Principles of Man



The upper trinity



The lower quaternary

- Atma – spirit
- Buddhi – divine soul
- Manas – dual mind
(higher and lower)**
- Kama – passion & desire
- Prana – life force
- Linga Sarira – astral body
- Sthula Sarira – physical body

NB: each principle is the vehicle for the one above it.

As we stand, Kama (number 4, counting from the bottom upwards) and Buddhi (6) can be said to be a pair of opposites with Manas (5) standing in the middle. So it is we, the Manas or Ego, who make of Kama (4) a constructive or a destructive force.

Kama represents the energetic force of Matter (1) in action and it depends upon how we use that force whether we go forward in our evolution or drift in the other direction. A valuable picture of the Passions and Desires and their place in our lives is described here:

Passion and desire (4) together with astral model-body (2) are common to men and animals, as also to the vegetable kingdom, though in the last but faintly developed. And at one period in evolution no further material principles had been developed, and all the three higher, of Mind (5), Soul (6), and Spirit (7), were but latent. Up to this point man and animal were equal, for the brute in us is made of the passions and the astral body. The development of the germs of Mind made man because it constituted the great differentiation. The God within begins with Manas or mind, and it is the struggle between this God and the brute below which Theosophy speaks of and warns about. The lower principle is called bad because by comparison with the higher it is so, but still it is the basis of action. We cannot rise unless self first asserts itself in the desire to do better. In this aspect it is called rajas or the active and bad quality, as distinguished from tamas, or the quality of darkness and indifference.

Rising is not possible unless rajas is present to give the impulse, and by the use of this principle of passion all the higher qualities are brought to at last so refine and elevate our desires that they may be continually placed upon truth and spirit.

By this Theosophy does not teach that the passions are to be pandered to or satiated, for a more pernicious doctrine was never taught, but the injunction is to make use of the activity given by the fourth principle so as to ever rise and not to fall under the dominion of the dark quality that ends with annihilation, after having begun in selfishness and indifference. *The Ocean of Theosophy* p 49

Theosophy tells us that if we wish to set in motion and direct the will we first must arouse the desire; not the desires of the lower nature, but the desire for a life of service to humanity. Even a Buddha or a Jesus, we are told, had in some life long past, to arouse in Himself the desire to help the world, and had to keep that desire alive through many lives of effort.

We hear much of the value and the power of a vow. Much of this lies in the clear formulation of the intention, the rejection of conflicting aims. But beyond this, there must be the willingness to make the effort necessary to fulfill its implications. This is the regeneration or spiritualization of the Kamic or desire principle.

PHANTOM LIMB PAIN: AN INTERACTION BETWEEN THE ASTRAL & PHYSICAL BODY?

[At the end of Topic 5A we looked into the well-known and phenomena of "phantom pain," so troublesome to those who have had limbs amputated. We share further references on it as it is both relevant to medical research today and offers potential validation of the Perennial Wisdom's teachings on the Astral, one of the keys to higher science.]

Paradoxically, an amputee frequently reports a sensation of pain in a missing limb. Working with U.S. combat veterans, Vilayanur Ramachandran, director of Centre for Brain and Cognition, at the University of California, San Diego, conducted a series of experiments to better understand why these feelings of pain arise and how they might be eliminated. Ramachandran has found that an amputee could be "cured" of phantom limb pain by tricking the brain into reacting to the sight of someone else performing soothing, massage like gestures. When two volunteers with an amputated hand watched a third person's hand being stroked, they also began to feel a similar sensation in their absent limb. One of the subjects reported that when he watched someone rub his hands together, it helped to stop the cramping pain in his amputated hand for 15 minutes. "If you do it often enough perhaps this pain will go away for good... If performed early enough, this type of therapy may also be used to help stroke patients regain movements by watching others perform their lost actions," Ramachandran told *New Scientist*, the British Weekly. He seeks to explain the phenomenon on the basis of "mirror" neurons in the brain. (*The Times of India*, March 21, 2008)

Our physical body is built on a design body called astral body, which is the model for the physical body. The astral body is made up of matter of very fine texture, with great tensile strength and it is electromagnetic in nature. The astral body of the child in the womb is connected with mother's imagination. If the mother vividly imagines that her child would be born without a leg, then her strong imagination would act on the astral leg of the developing baby in her womb, so as to cut off or shrivel it up. As a result, the physical molecules having no model of leg to work on make no physical leg. But when a person feels the presence of a limb, which the surgeon has cut off, it is because its astral counterpart (leg, arm or fingers, as the case may be) have not been interfered with. This is because knife or acid cannot injure the astral model. Thus, it is not surprising that a man whose physical arm or leg has been cut off still feels pain, because the astral arm or leg is still present, and can be affected by thoughts, because the astral body has a complete system of nerves and arteries of its own.

Our ideas and imagination first affect the astral body and then, through it, the physical. For instance, ecstatic, fanatical women and men, by constant brooding on the picture of wounds of Jesus, imprinted the picture deeply on their own astral body. Then internal impressions and stimulus were projected to the surface, developing similar wounds on their own body. In [Isis Unveiled](#) H.P.B. mentions that when a person witnessed deep wounds being inflicted by one soldier on the body of another soldier, he was so dreadfully frightened that when he reached home, the same wounds broke out on his body. The fact that astral limbs, and hence, the phantom limbs could be affected by *imagination*, might explain how pain in the phantom limb could be cured by the sight of a soothing massage being performed on the limb of another person.

from '[The Theosophical Movement](#)' May 2008, "In The Light of Theosophy"

IS "LIFE IN NATURE" A CAUSE OR AN EFFECT OF MATTER?

While at Yale University Drs Burr and Northrop published "The Electro-Dynamic Theory of Life" in 1935 which proposed an electrical basis of life. Burr was an original researcher and pioneer of his field, his work occurring at the time that Einstein proposed that 'fields' can explain the behaviour of physical phenomena more completely than electric charges and material particles.

Burr is well-known for measuring electric currents in growing corn and reporting that "electricity seems to bridge the gap between the lifeless world and living matter... electricity is one of the fundamental factors in all living systems..."

Burr's book, *The Nature of Man and the Meaning of Existence* (1962) was an attack against materialist philosophy. In the book Burr wrote there is order in the universe, unity in the organism and man is endowed with a soul. His book *Blueprint for Immortality*, published late in his career though he based it upon work carried out over decades, contended that the electro-dynamic fields of all living things, which may be measured and mapped with standard voltmeters, mold and control each organism's development, health, and mood. He named these fields "*fields of life*" or L-Fields.

In opening his paper (opposite) he writes about the difference between the Greek holistic and the modern reductionist approaches: the former "conceive of Nature in terms of formal causes; modern science in terms of material causes." The one approach is psycho-spiritual, the other materio-physical.

For more on these aspects of the Astral see <https://blavatsky.net/Wisdomworld/additional/TheAstralBody-HistoricalStudies/SeriesNumber7-of-8.html>



THE ELECTRO-DYNAMIC THEORY OF LIFE

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THESE are several factors which suggest that living things must be viewed from the electro-dynamic point of view. Certain of these factors appear in the non-biological sciences and in general philosophical considerations; others arise in biology itself, and particularly in connection with recent evidence concerning the factors controlling the development of the nervous system.

I. GENERAL SCIENTIFIC AND PHILOSOPHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

If one views the history of science as a whole, including its Greek as well as its modern manifestations, a certain contrast appears. Greek science was dominated largely by mathematics and astronomy, whereas since the seventeenth century physics and chemistry have been the leading disciplines. This difference in emphasis among the special sciences bespeaks a more fundamental difference in scientific outlook. Mathematics and astronomy as they appeared in Greek times in the geometry of Euclid and in the mathematical astronomy of Eudoxus, were systematic deductive sciences dealing with the entire spatial and astronomical universe as a whole. It is an obvious peculiarity of geometry as a pure science that it is concerned wholly with structure and not at all with matter. It is a more unexpected peculiarity of astronomy that it, more than any other of the natural sciences, tends to conceive of nature as a purely formal system. This was the case in Greek times and with Kepler, and is, or was, the case in our own time with Eddington and Jeans. It was not the case,

however, with Galilei and Newton. They conceived of the astronomical universe as a physical system analogous to the system of earth and ball and inclined plane with which Galilei verified his profound and revolutionary reflections.

This brings us to the sharp contrast between traditional modern science and Greek science. The latter, dominated as it was by such scientists as Eudoxus, Euclid, Apollonius and Archimedes, tended to regard mathematics as more fundamental than physics and to think of nature as a purely formal structure; the former, following Galilei and Newton, made physics primary, and hence regarded nature as an aggregate of many physical objects in motion, mathematics becoming a very necessary means, but nevertheless merely a means, of precisely formulating this physical conception. Stated in more general philosophical terms, Greek science, including biology with Aristotle, tended to conceive of nature in terms of formal causes; modern science, in terms of material causes. The two views have not been compatible in traditional scientific or philosophical theory. To maintain that nature is a system of forms, unconditioned by matter, is to maintain that nature and its systems possess a changeless structure; hence, the doctrine of the fixity of biological types in Greek biology. To maintain that nature is a collection of physical objects in motion is to regard structure as a relation between these objects, and subject to change with their motion; hence, the essentially modern character of Darwin's doctrine of the modification of biological types. In

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CONCLUSION

We hope that what is presented in this and later topics will be seen as a well-thought out and self-consistent system of metaphysics which explains and solves many of the mysteries and experiences we pass through in our journey of living and dying.

The intuitive and open-minded sense there is a whole range of puzzles of the soul-nature, of dreams and visions, of psychic experiences and premonitions, of seeing or feeling the passing presence loved ones after their death, through to the mysteries of the ancients and their inexplicable and massive architectural remains and curious similarities,⁴ to the philosophy and ethics of the Unity of Mankind, and Oneness of Life and all-pervading consciousness of that links all parts of nature into an intelligent, well-functioning whole.

The experience of sensing man's interdependence and connectivity with all that surrounds him in his life has long been common throughout the world's societies.⁵ For instance [Isis Unveiled](#) (1:561 & elsewhere) suggests a connecting link between Ankor Wat (Cambodia), the Ellora Caves (India), and the Mexican Copan and Egyptian temples, all these being built by those who shared this same, once-universal religion even while they were not of the same race.



We have quoted much from the *Ocean* by William Q. Judge, and there is more information in it on the Astral Body and the Kamic Principle.

Beyond this we would like to recommend four articles which bear on these subjects and give some interesting and helpful insights to the make-up of the "human tabernacle." These are:

"Culture of Concentration"	Judge Pamphlet No. 11, " The Inner Man "
"Mesmerism"	} Judge Pamphlet No. 16, " Mesmerism and Hypnotism "
"Hypnotism"	
"Sheaths of the Soul"	

These articles may also be found in the first volume of the "[William Q. Judge's Theosophical Articles in 2 volumes.](#)"

⁴ For instance [Isis Unveiled](#) (1:561 & elsewhere) suggests a connecting link between Ankor Wat (Cambodia), the Ellora Caves (India), and the Mexican Copan and Egyptian temples, all these being built by those who shared this same, once-universal religion even while they were not of the same race.

⁵ "For thou shalt be in league with the stones of the field: and the beasts of the field shall be at peace with thee." Job 5:23

QUESTIONS ON TOPIC 5B

1. Does the astral body play any part in the phenomena of Spiritualism? What part, if any?
2. What do you think happens to the astral body in the cases of suicide, capital punishment, or accidental death?
3. Some scriptures tell us to "kill out desire." Do they mean that all desire is wrong or are there some desires that are necessary?

The following questions are optional and for those at that level:

Intermediate

4. Are there dangers in attempts at "astral travel" and "astral projection"? Give your reasons.

Advanced

5. Much has been said about MOTIVE in theosophy and that in a great many cases it makes the difference between what is in line with true spiritual development and what is not. So the question is how do we go about changing or purifying our present motives – do you have any suggestions or practices?