

the Light-bringer

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For seekers of Truth

Current topics viewed in the light of the Ancient Wisdom or Theo-sophia — the common source of all great world religions, philosophies and sciences

The meaning of life

- What is life?
- Wisdom in practice
- Infinitely learning to Learn
- I am the Boundless

Will computers become smarter than man?

Freedom of expression



Contents Lucifer – the Lightbringer

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Editorial

p. 34

The meaning of life

Introduction

p. 35

Herman C. Vermeulen

What is life?

p. 37

Bouke van den Noort

Wisdom in practice

p. 41

Mariska Zwinkels

Infinitely learning to Learn

p. 45

Patricia van Lingen

I am the Boundless

p. 49

Ella van Zaanen

Freedom of expression

p. 58

Should anyone say and write what he wants, without taking into account the feelings of others?

Barend Voorham



Will computers become smarter than man?

p. 53

What are computers, and which abilities do they have — presently and in the future? Are computers able to become just as living and conscious as we humans are, in the future?

Henk Bezemer

Questions & Answers

61

» The earth and life atoms

» H.P. Blavatsky and gods

» Initiation



Editorial

If we would measure the success of *Lucifer, the Light-bringer* by its worldwide dissemination, then we certainly cannot be dissatisfied. Our magazine is now being read in no less than 43 countries.

We view this development as a very positive signal. Nonetheless, the number of subscribers per se does not determine the degree of success. This is determined by the extent to which we succeed in presenting the theosophical principles and teachings, but also and foremost by clarifying the practical applicability of those teachings. This is a learning process for the editors, in which we should never be satisfied. Just like our readers we have to study in order to be able to clarify Theosophy. We know that we can only offer the ideas; everyone has to think about it for themselves. But it is our duty to present those ideas as clear as possible.

We hope that in this issue we have at least offered food for thought.

In four articles an attempt is made to answer in simple words the question that every human being asks himself sometimes: what is *wisdom of life* and how can it be obtained? To find the answer, you first need to know what life is. This is explained very clearly in the article: "What is life?" The next article is a reflection on wisdom in practice. Subsequently, we will reflect on how the learning process proceeds. This process never stops, because we are Boundless.

These four articles are the result of the annual symposium of the Theosophical Society Point Loma in September 2017, in The Hague.

Furthermore, this issue deals with the contemporary topic of artificial intelligence and smart computers.

Finally, from a theosophical perspective a vision is given about freedom of expression.

As always, we have included a few questions and answers, this time about gods, elementals and initiation.

If you have any questions about the articles or about Theosophy in general, or if you have any comments, you may always email or write the editors. Your correspondence will always be answered.

The editors

The meaning of life Introduction

On September 9, 2017 The Theosophical Society organized a symposium titled “The meaning of Life – *Wisdom in practice*”. Herman C. Vermeulen introduced the day, which follows below.

A warm welcome to our September symposium.

Today we want to talk with you about “The meaning of life” — which is, I think, a very important matter. Imagine, you have a good concept of the meaning of life, you can describe the meaning of life for yourself, that means that from that vision it becomes much easier to make decisions in life about matters we are confronted with.

Of course, we have all kinds of traditions in which the meaning of life is being discussed, but over time many of those traditions have gradually lost their content. Today we will try to rebuild some of that again.

If you build an image of the meaning of life, you can also consider what the consequences will be of your decisions and whether or not you are willing to accept the consequences of your decisions. Just look at what is taking place in society at the moment. It turns out to be much harder

to reach consensus on these matters that it is to come to an agreement about a budget, since that is just a matter of exchange I think, of making some spreadsheets and see if that is going in the direction you want it to go. But in questions dealing with one’s philosophy of life, opinions can be so entirely opposite, that it is very difficult to come to an agreement on that.

That is why today we want to present to you a vision. A vision from the Theosophia that is very old. It is a knowledge doctrine that we as members of the Theosophical Society have studied and have experienced for ourselves. We would like to present some of these ideas in a day-to-day manner; in such a way that you can contemplate on them and can find out if these thoughts are true in everyday life. Because there is one thing we *cannot* do for you, which is to *give* you Truth. Truth comes when you develop ideas yourself and experience these in daily life. That

involves a process that takes time. Of course, we are more than willing to help you go through that process. Today you are going to hear things that you can think about for a long time — but more importantly: look around in society to see if you can recognize it there. And if you can recognize it – and you see the truth of it –, then step by step it can become more a part of you and actually it becomes a personal experience of TRUTH.



And then you will be able to connect this to your decisions in daily life. So, it is a dynamic process.

We have a couple of lectures for you, and we have workshops. In these workshops we are going to find out together if you can experience the thoughts we present to you. At the same time, during the workshops you have the opportunity to get answers to your "yes, but" questions, by looking at them together. But above all, it is about being personally involved in this dynamic process. We think that this can be very meaningful.

On May 20 of this year we had a symposium where we spoke with each other about subjects like depression. The information we offer today is actually an extension

of that symposium.

Now, we will listen to the first contribution, that will help us to define "life" better. Bouke van den Noort will talk about which thoughts evolve around the term "life" and which ideas about life lead to a dynamic outlook on the whole.



What is life?

Introduction

With the most advanced instruments, we are looking for life in the universe, but actually, we don't even know what we are looking for. That is, not if you look at the definition of life, since there is no such thing as *the* definition of life; indeed, there are about two hundred of them in circulation. And yet, if there is one thing that matters in order to be able to answer the question on the meaning of life, it is having a clear view on what exactly life is.

When we check Wikipedia on this, the first thing we encounter is that life is a quality of organisms. But this would mean that life is a quality of life, and that is a circular argument that doesn't make us any the wiser. "Quality" also means to say that there must be something that precedes life first, something that has life as quality. In the definition that is given subsequently, this idea also comes up: in short, it says that life is a chemical system, which is capable to sustain itself, to grow and to reproduce by metabolism.

So, in this materialistic vision it is about a chemical system, about lifeless matter, that suddenly comes to

life in a certain composition. How and at what moment that life arises remains a mystery, but the idea is that it results from matter in any case.

In general, the cell is considered to be the smallest building block of life in this vision. All life is made up of cells, is the rationale. However, it becomes interesting when we take a look inside that cell...

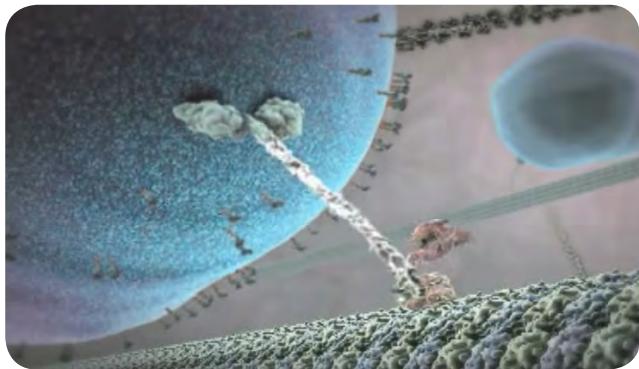
With amazement, scientists discover that that cell is a world of life in itself. With current technology, we are capable of studying the processes taking place in it down to the smallest detail. These processes turn out to be so complex and structured, that a comparison with a city is often made: Each cell could be thought of as a complete functioning community with its own power plants, plants where building blocks are produced and packed, and transport systems by which those building blocks are then transported to exactly the right place. There are copy machines, there is waste disposal, in short: a world of continuous focused actions by molecules and proteins, in which all are in tune with each other.

To give an impression of what hap-

Key thoughts

- » Life is the ability to come into motion and to react.
- » Everything acts and reacts; therefore, everything lives and is an expression of Boundless Life.
- » Life has its natural Laws: cyclicity, evolution and emanation.

pens in a cell, scientists made an animated film based on their observations. This is a still of one of the fragments in which building blocks (enclosed by a membrane in the shape of a bowl) are being transported along a “highway” track in the cell.



This is the link to the animation: <https://youtu.be/wJyUtbn0O5Y>.

It may look like science fiction, but those molecular machines, those proteins, turn out to literally move that way, step by step. Amusing to realize that this is happening in billions of our cells at this exact moment.

Now, the big question is: what is it that directs all processes of those so-called lifeless molecules? If life is a characteristic of organisms, with the cell being the smallest unity of it, as science puts it nowadays, then what is it that takes place inside that cell? What is it that puts all that autonomous movement in motion?

Definition of life by Plato

Someone who can help us in answering this question, and who we would like to quote in this context, is Plato. From Ancient Wisdom, Plato gives a simple but clear and universal answer to the question of what life is.

Life, so he says, is the ability to come into motion, and to react.⁽¹⁾ That is, the capacity to act and react. And that is exactly what we see happening in that cell, the movement of all of those microscopic small parts, that react to one another in their complex cooperation.

Now, let's see where this definition also applies, since not only inside the cell, but also between cells there is continuous movement. Continuously, exchange of information is taking place where, depending on the signal, an appropriate reaction occurs. For example, in case of unwanted visitors, the immune system comes into action and white blood cells literally chase the intruders.

Turning to a somewhat larger scale, we see that organs also execute their specific task for which they mutually coordinate and cooperate. Yet a step further, with humans

and animals the capacity to act and react is entirely clear. And in the plant kingdom we see besides growth, which is motion as well, also the capacity to react to the environment. Trees can warn each other with semio-chemicals when they are eaten away by insects. And recently, the spectacular discovery was made that complete forests exchange information and nutrients via root systems. For instance, healthy trees actively pump water to their congeners that are having a hard time and would otherwise dehydrate.

Taking it another step further, we also see that earth and other planets in our solar system comply with Plato's definition. We see planets rotating around their axis, and together, they also rotate around the sun. And in turn, our solar system rotates as a whole around a still larger centre... And here, on this cosmic scale as well, continuous interaction takes place. For instance, think of the tidal effect by the moon and all water life that depends on it. Or Jupiter, who causes increased solar activity with its 12-year cycle.

If we take a look at the other extreme, the micro level, then it is not different. Comparable to a solar system, atoms consist of rotating parts around a core, and in metaphysics the mysterious phenomenon was discovered that atoms react to one another simultaneously over large distances. Think of the interaction of molecules in chemical reactions; a clearer example can hardly be found, I would say. It is quite a list, however, what we want to make clear is that we can draw a fundamental conclusion from this: wherever we look, and on whatever scale: EVERYTHING moves. Everything acts and reacts to one another. Try to think of something that knows no movement, however slow that movement may appear to our eyes.

When you think about this, it can only raise wonderment about where that movement comes from. And that wonderment is crucial in order to make progress in finding the answer to the question what life is. Because why do we limit ourselves by saying that life needs to consist of cells? Or by saying that there can only be life when elements like carbon and hydrogen are present? Why don't we transcend this limitation we imposed on ourselves, and look at what sets all that movement on smaller and larger scales in motion?

Spiritual principle

Again, Plato can help us, because in his description of life he introduces another term: *Self-movement*. He says the following about it: something that is set in motion from

outside is always temporary and impermanent. However, self-movement, that what causes movement from inside, has to be timeless.⁽²⁾ Self-movement does not have a starting point or ending point, for then it would be finite and if it would be finite, it would never be able to act as a source for that movement.

Now, when we summarize this, based on Plato we arrive at the following:

1. Everything moves and reacts on one another, so *everything* is life
2. Life or movement comes from within and is timeless.

So, life is infinite self-movement. It is therefore not a *quality* of organisms, as Wikipedia puts it, but the *origin*, the *essence* of it. It is the SELF of everything that comes into movement from within. In Theosophia, this is called the spiritual principle: the idea that everything we perceive, each phenomenon, is the expression of an inner force that works behind or through it.

But where does this force come from? What is this SELF that comes into movement? In order to get a good notion of this, we must try to develop a view of that infinite source Plato is talking about. Infinite means boundless. And this means that you cannot add to it or take from it, otherwise it would not be boundless. It also means that everything must *be* the boundless in essence, because otherwise there would be something outside it. And there is no ‘outside’ the boundless. And that means that in essence, the SELF of the one is also the SELF of the other. Everything is an expression of the ONE BOUNDLESS LIFE

Quite a stream of thought, but you could imagine this as an endless, motionless ocean that encompasses everything. As soon as motion arises in it, waves and currents appear, which we consider to be independent things. But what we perceive as separate things is only a limited expression of the ONE UNIVERSAL LIFE. Motionless as infinite boundlessness, but eternally in motion in all its parts.

And that is an important thought; it is not the case that all individual life together constitutes a unity, but rather that everything *is* that unity and is expressing it in individual ways.

Of course every comparison eventually fails, but an analogy to help you get the picture is that of a tree: all parts of the tree – the roots, the trunk, the branches, the leafs – can be recognized as separate parts, but in fact they *are* that tree. It is the one life of that tree that is flowing through all those parts.

In the same way the boundless life flows through every

being, and each being expresses its own unique aspect of it. From atoms to universes, it is all the same life from which we only perceive a limited form or outer shell. The physical focal point on the outer plane, so to speak. We only see the tip of the endless proverbial iceberg. Just like we cannot see electricity as a principle, but we do perceive all kinds of electrical activity thereof.

Another term for life is consciousness. As soon as there is movement in that ocean there is conscious *being*, *being* that is conscious. *Being* that starts to move, that perceives in one way or another and, consequently, is able to act and react, as Plato defines it.

Cyclicity of consciousness

So consciousness or life is boundless, eternal motion. We can however recognize patterns in it. For life generates a number of natural laws and cyclicity is one of them. If we stick to the example of the ocean, we observe that there is a rhythm in the motion. There is an endless rising and disappearing of waves in that ocean. It is a property of life to have alternating periods of activity and of rest; different states of consciousness it can be in. What to us is appearing and disappearing, is nothing but a shift of consciousness to another plane of activity. It is a dynamic process, in which consciousness periodically withdraws from the outer to the inner plane to come to the front again after a period of rest.

Therefore, life and death are merely phases of life. And what we call death is nothing but another *state* of life. So, this means there is *continuity* of life, and there are only *relative* endings and beginnings. The outer appearance, that is to say the body, disappears, but the consciousness that caused it isn’t gone. The wave as an appearance disappears, but the essence lives on as an inseparable part of that ocean.

An inner urge to grow

But how do those waves come about? What makes everything awaken again after a period of rest, like for instance in spring, when nature comes to life and everything starts to grow and blossom again? Here we arrive at the second law that we can recognize in life, which is the impulse to grow. It is the inner urge in every being to express more and more of that infinity. It is the same impulse that makes us wake up each morning, ready for new experiences and new things to learn. It is what expresses itself in animals as survival instinct and what is contained in a seed to develop into an enormous tree. The force of this urge is

easily demonstrated by a phenomenon everybody knows of, when asphalt is cracked by a seedling, which grows straight through it, without a speck of light.

Another word for this urge, this law, is evolution. Evolution in its true meaning of developing evermore of the boundlessness that all life in its essence is. And because there is no beginning and no end in the boundless, we can also understand that it is expressed in an infinite number of forms.

This development, this growth, also means that in the cyclical process nothing returns to exactly the same level, but always moves a step higher, in fact like a spiral. Nothing stays the same, but as an expression of the ONE everything is equally valuable. Depending on how far a consciousness has evolved, has developed its potential from the inside out, it has now reached a certain level of development. We all know a few of these levels; the kingdoms of nature. The mineral kingdom, the plant kingdom and the animal kingdom, each brings about its own specific stage of development. And within these kingdoms each individual consciousness does so in its own way.

Emanation, cooperation, life within life

But those kingdoms of nature are not separated from each other. They cannot even exist without each other. Ecologists know as no other that in ecosystems everything is interconnected and every part has a function within the totality. This cooperation in nature is a necessity and along with cyclicity and evolution it constitutes a third law of life. Life can only exist thanks to other life. Just like we depend on our planet, the cells in our body depend on us, and without our cells we could not have our bodies. It is an interdependence in which the further developed consciousness offers the less developed consciousness the possibility to manifest itself. And at the same time this less developed consciousness constitutes the necessary vehicle for that higher consciousness.

Another word for this cooperation is emanation, which literally means flowing out. It is the flowing out of an atmosphere of higher developed life in which less developed life can have its existence. So, there is no creation out of nothing, but an attraction of what in essence is already there. Emanation is the law of life within life, in which the further developed, encompassing consciousness lays down the pattern that is automatically followed by the lower.

This principle also explains why we encounter universal patterns in nature, like the golden ratio, which we can recognize in all realms of nature. From the shapes of

shells and the distribution of the petals of a flower to the proportions in our body; we see this cosmic ratio reflected everywhere in the life that is part of it.

Another interesting phenomenon that we can clarify by emanation is the fact that individual parts cannot explain the behaviour of the greater whole they are part of. If we observe a beehive or an anthill acting as a perfect unity, we cannot explain this from the individual bees and ants. Or the rhythmic beating of the heart, which cannot be explained from the individual heart cells. It is always the less developed consciousness, the individual elements that automatically follow the pattern of the higher consciousness.

As above, so below, exactly in the way our organs automatically fulfil their duties within our consciousness, we see cells that specialize within the sphere of influence of those organs. And thus, we arrive again at the processes in the cell we started out with: the countless molecules and proteins that in their turn perform their tasks within the sphere of influence of the cell: As a minuscule link in the endless series of life within life, on its way to express ever more of the boundless.

Summary

To put everything in order:

1. According to Plato's definition, Life (or consciousness) is the ability to act and react. Everything moves, so EVERYTHING is Life.
2. All individual consciousnesses are expressions of the ONE boundless life, that endless ocean.
3. We have seen that life has its natural laws.
4. The first natural law is cyclicity: alternating periods of activity and rest. A continuous process, in which life and death are just different states of consciousness.
5. Then, the law of evolution: the inner urge of all life to develop ever more of its endless latent powers.
6. And lastly emanation or life within life: the infinite cooperation in which no single link or part can be left out.

References

1. Plato, *Laws* 894c-896d.
2. Plato, *Pheadrus* 245c-e.



Wisdom in practice

Key thoughts

- » Cyclicity is the underlying proposition of the two jewels of wisdom Reincarnation and Karma.
- » Life and death cannot exist without one another.
- » Because of our free will, all circumstances we find ourselves in are the results of free choice, consciously or unconsciously.
- » Self-determination (with capital S) concerns the development of the learning soul; self-determination (with lower case s) alludes to the transitory part of man.

What is life?

In the previous lecture, Bouke van den Noort presented us with some basic elements, which are relevant to addressing self-determination over our lives. He demonstrated what Life is, using Plato's definition. "Life", says Plato, "is the ability to initiate motion and be able to respond." Which is to say: the ability to cause action and reaction.

Bouke also mentioned the concept of self-motion, likewise coming from Plato. That which causes motion must originate from within and must be timeless. Life is therefore unlimited self-motion.

While explaining how life generally works, it was mentioned that another name for life is consciousness. And also that Life is characterised by alternating periods of activity and rest. This then concerns different states of consciousness.

We will now proceed from the general definition of Life to the definition of, more specifically, the life of man. One human lifetime recognises several stages, such as birth, baby, toddler, et cetera. But the human consciousness also recognises different stages throughout more than one lifetime.

There is an unlimited unfolding of latent abilities during alternating cyclic periods of activity and rest. And everyone shapes their lives in their own unique way.

During this second lecture, called "Wisdom in practice", I will elaborate on these laws of nature by discussing Reincarnation and Karma. Bouke discussed three fundamental propositions. From these three propositions flow forth what we call the seven jewels of wisdom. Well, Cyclicity is the underlying proposition of the two jewels of wisdom Reincarnation and Karma. Both are required to envision the implications of self-determination.

I will also further examine which S/self, or which state of consciousness it is that has self-determination. The lower case self: the transitory, physically visible human being, or the Self with the capital S: the reincarnating Human Being.

Cyclicity – Reincarnation

In the eternal, boundless Life we see alternating periods of active life followed by periods of rest. We see Nature repeating itself everywhere. However, this isn't a static repetition,

like an assembly line or a pile driver. In Nature, every repetition is an expression of a transformation which took place first. Thus, day follows night, being asleep follows being awake, winter follows summer, the high and low tides alternate with each other, and the planets revolve in regular trajectories around their sun. During each cyclic period, life continues to grow or evolve in a spiral fashion. Reincarnation is likewise such a cyclic way of alternating periods of active life and periods of rest. Literally, reincarnation translates as “re-becoming-flesh”, meaning the return of the human soul into a new, transitory human body. The consciousness, the underlying force, manifests itself through the use of a vehicle: the human body.

The Theosophia depicts Man as a composite being, consisting of an imperishable part: “the Spirit”, a learning part: “the soul” and a transitory part: “the body”. The learning part: the soul, is the reincarnating part of man. That part of man that focuses on the spirit, that overlaps with the spirit, is what we call the true (higher) Man, with a capital M; that is the enduring part. Another term would be “impersonal man”. As opposed to “personal man”, the physical, once-only, transitory part, man with the lower case m.

As it so happens, neither part, the higher, nor the lower part of man, can do without the other. The higher part requires the lower part to gain experience on this physical plane. We can compare this to an actor and his role. The reincarnating soul is the actor in a play, and his role is the personal man in this world. The role is temporary and doesn't reflect who the actor really is, but is essential to being able to perform in the play. By performing the role, the actor is able to express himself and gain plenty of experience.

Cycle of life and death

One could compare the cycle of activity and rest, of life and death, to the cycle of being awake and being asleep. When you're awake you are in a different state of consciousness than when you're asleep. Essentially that is also the difference between what is called life and death: a difference in states of consciousness. The terms “life” and “death” are used from the point of view of the limited, personal man, the part that lives in fact only once and therefore dies and disintegrates. This temporary, physical part has by then served its meaningful purpose. The soul however, the true Man, lives on, but in a different state of consciousness. Two distinct stages of life, taking place in cyclical succession. Life and death are therefore a matter of

perspective. It is a matter of which level of consciousness to identify with: the higher or the lower level of consciousness, the transitory or the reincarnating man.

Whichever you identify with, is a “choice”. You choose on which part to focus: the higher or the lower. However, the level of consciousness in each stage depends on how far you have developed as Man (with capital M). Highly advanced people experience these stages, life and death, as well as the passage from one to the other, self-consciously. When the development is advanced to such an extent that a large part of consciousness corresponds to the immortal, spiritual part, it could be said that Man survives “death”. In which case the learning soul also remembers its former, temporary lifetimes, just like we remember the previous day after a night of sleep. However, as far as we know, this is extremely rare.

The two stages, called life and death, cannot exist without one another. For during the stage of life, the human soul is able to gain experience and grow in consciousness. While in the state of consciousness of death, we assimilate the lessons-learned into our character. Just like we assimilate the experiences of the day into our consciousness during sleep. When it concerns spiritual experiences, these will be preserved for good. Thus, there is constant spiritual growth: man increasingly becomes himself, as he essentially is. At birth reincarnating man shapes himself a new body, in accordance with the character that he himself has developed during all the previous stages, ready to learn new lessons once again.

Now, a frequently asked question about reincarnation is: “How then did I end up in these circumstances? Do I choose where I am born?”

Karma and free will

The answer to this question is yes, but it is a “yes” with an explanation. In this explanation the terms “karma” and “free will” play a role.

The term “Karma” is of Sanskrit origin and means “doing”, “making”: “action”, or also “effect”. The idea is this: if a being acts, in this case a human being, he acts from within; he acts because of an underlying thought. Thought and action then result in reactions. Karma is essentially a chain of successive causes and effects, that continues unlimitedly. Karma is inevitable, both the nice and the less nice effects of causes, because it is an indispensable element of universal Nature, that is unlimited, omnipresent and timeless. The being, or human being, that caused the effect, will inevitably live to see this sooner or later. In other words:

at some time we reap what we sow. You are therefore your own karma; you are yourself this unity of cause and effect. Explained this way, it may seem rather straightforward, but the reality is very complex due to the amount of causes and effects that occur simultaneously.

One final remark on Karma: Karma is just; karmic law is also called the law of the re-establishment of harmony. If by our actions we cause an imbalance somewhere, the reaction of Nature will ensure the re-establishment of balance, of harmony.

Back to the previous question: "Do I choose where and in what circumstances I am born?" Not in the literal sense that a choice is made right before birth. No, this choice has already been made: You choose by every thought, consciously or unconsciously, during the stage of activity. By every action here and now in this lifetime and in every former lifetime, you choose. Man acts, on several levels of consciousness, both the personal and the impersonal levels. And the entirety of these actions consequently determines where and in what circumstances you end up. By thinking and acting, you make use of developed habitual patterns and developed preferences, or attractions. Such habitual-action more often than not takes place automatically, so you do not operate quite so self-consciously quite so often. Every moment of the day you can decide to alter your life, to further your development and to make the effort it takes. But only within the scope of the possibilities you have developed up till now, the built-up Karma and the laws of Nature. And that is what we mean by "free will".

Because we have free will at our disposal, all circumstances we find ourselves in are the result of free choice, consciously or unconsciously. And again, every time we have the free choice to respond. Man becomes himself again with every new reincarnation; that which he has made of himself up till then. And during manifested life, the Human Soul has the opportunity to act and thus to learn and further its development.

As it happens, as human beings we do not live by ourselves. We are all part of a group, or rather: of several groups, such as family, friends, workplace, country, continent and world population. Which means that we reincarnate into a group at the same time or place for a reason; because of the ties we have built together. Those are the attractions I mentioned earlier. Consequently this may refer to both people we *like*, attractions based on our preferences, and people we *dislike*, attractions based on our aversions. Since life is an indivisible, unlimited unity, one can hardly talk

of individual karma. Everything is inter-related; karma is the totality. However, we shape it individually.

So, you can "shape" your life according to your wishes. It's something you always do, continuously; you shape your own life consciously or unconsciously. You constantly make choices, depending on what you like or dislike, or on what you *do* or *do not* value. It applies to personal choices and impersonal choices alike. You are therefore responsible for your own life. You have self-determining power over your own life.

S/self-determination

Yes, that's quite something, self-determination over your own life. With it comes a lot of responsibility. In daily life the term "self-determination" is used to describe the possibility to make decisions about you yourself and your own body and life. Basically this alludes to the transitory part of man. We refer to that as self-determination with a lower case. This is the centre of the political debate "completed life" regarding euthanasia. Another example is the lawsuit in England this year of parents, who went to the highest courts to be allowed to continue treatment of their terminally ill son Charlie. Ultimately the judges did not support their point of view.

In the Theosophia the term "Self-determination" has a much broader scope. It comprises the Self-determination over many lifetimes. That is Self-determination with a capital S, belonging to the higher part of man, that reincarnates many times over. It concerns the development of the learning soul: to bring out the highest from within yourself and to live accordingly. In this light you ask yourself questions like: "what actually makes this person want to end his current life?" and "what can I do to reduce the suffering of this man?"

If we look at self-determination in relation to life as discussed here, we can state that true man, the human soul that incarnates time and time again, in actual fact cannot be destroyed, neither by fire, nor by bullets, nor by any other thing that is lethal to the physical body. That part of us which is eternal, we cannot destroy. So that falls beyond the reach of our self-determination. But the part in which the learning soul manifests itself does fall within this reach; the human body, the transitory, once-only part. We have active self-determination over the instrument by which we gain, here and now, the experiences necessary for the human soul to learn. So, when we exercise control over the temporary body, this then has immediate consequences for the human soul.

So, how then does Self-determination work? Just how consciously or unconsciously do we make our choices? The short answer is that we make our choices at the level we have developed within ourselves.

Starting with the daily choices: everyone present here, has at some point, by subscribing, consciously decided to attend this symposium, instead of going to a workshop on “flower arrangements”. And then you followed through by taking the train or bicycle, while maybe a friend just called asking you to join her on the beach on this nice, sunny day. The choice becomes more difficult still when your mother calls just before departure, longing for your company because she feels so lonely today.

We all know we don't make every decision quite so consciously. Walking to this venue from the train station, for example, is done nearly automatically. The muscles in your body know very well how it's done. You don't have to pay attention to every step you take. You *did* have to pay attention to the very *first* steps you took, while learning to walk, as is the case for example while rehabilitating after an accident. But in daily life walking has become a habitual pattern for most people. Not just walking, but also many other choices are made, based on habitual patterns. And in this way we shape our own character. For example, you may always be annoyed by certain types of behaviour, like people cutting in line at the cash register. Or you may always be strict with your children, because you've been brought up to believe a parent should be strict but fair. Or it may be that you've spent years aspiring to a management position, because this was important to your father and he wanted you to “make something of your life”. But it may also be that you already live more by the higher principle: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you”. All these examples, again, really illustrate that actor playing a role based on a script you have written yourself throughout your many lifetimes. You are able to change the script for this role yourself, even though that *does* require some effort.

Changing these patterns even leads, more often than not, to quite an ordeal. You find yourself confronted with old, ingrained habits, fortified by all the effort you put into them, that you have become and that your environment has come to expect of you. It takes will power, courage and perseverance to change those patterns, but the reward is great. It is important to realise that these changes can only be brought about during the active stage of consciousness: during life. So, if we don't take action now, nothing will change. Not now, nor in next lifetimes.

If you wish to change your habitual patterns, you'd best not write a very detailed new script, it is instead more effective to build an explicit vision to guide your thoughts and actions. A longer-term vision on how you would like to guide your life towards your highest ethical values. You are then able to check your thoughts and actions against that vision you built. The previously mentioned principle “do unto others as you would have them do unto you” is therefore more effective than replacing “aspiring to a management position” by “status and making money”, while continuing to look at that as “making something of your life”.

In order to realise change, an open attitude of wonder is a lot more effective than pointing fingers and telling how to live one's life. Because wonder leaves room to learn non-judgementally and to take responsibility for your own choices in life. The two jewels of wisdom, reincarnation and karma, with the underlying proposition of Cyclicity, fit in well with such a long-term vision.

To summarise: In this lecture the terms “reincarnation” and “karma” have been clarified, in order to provide tools to handle self-determination wisely. The difference is explained between the life and death of the temporary, physical man (with a lower case m) and the life of true man (with a capital M), who survives the death of the physical body. The matter has been raised that you have self-determination over your own life, and that change is only possible in the active stage of life.

In order to find the answer to the question if life can be completed, you will therefore have to look not at just the one lifetime, but reflect over several lifetimes.

I am curious to find out whether the sketch of the jewels of wisdom in this lecture has changed your perspective on this question.



Infinitely learning to Learn

A young girl once asked Albert Einstein how he had become so smart. He said the following:

I have no special talent but I am very curious. The only thing I do is asking questions, just like children do. That's the most important thing and everybody can do it.

In this lecture, we will try to get a deeper understanding of the process of infinitely learning to Learn. If for now we accept what Einstein conveyed to us, this at least will help us to be curious and to keep asking questions. Do keep investigating the ideas you will hear today. We can learn throughout our entire life and even throughout many lives. You don't only learn at school, but everywhere, every day over and over again, and as the title of this lecture indicates, that is not all. No, it never stops, it is an endless process. One could say that learning – seen from the perspective of growth and development – belongs to life. This morning Bouke van den Noort already pointed out that an inner urge for growth is inherent to *all* life, it is an urge to express more and more of

that boundless life.

In this lecture, we will tune in on this, we shall investigate how the learning process is related to who we really are. Above all, we want to show that one can never learn and grow without others.

What is learning

If we want to come to a better understanding of the meaning of life and if we want *to be* the change we wish to see in the world, we have to continually broaden ourselves to gain new insights. Learning to differentiate which faculties in ourselves to use, is of great importance.

In our society, we see two kinds of learning by which we can discern what part in us is being activated. These are *intellectual learning* and *comprehensive learning*.

Intellectual learning means to accept or learn facts or opinions based on determinations without undertaking further investigation yourself into the preceding processes and without asking yourself *why* certain conclusions have been drawn. Factual knowledge is being provided from the outside. Learning by the intellect is a way of learning we can still see in schools.

Key thoughts

- » We distinguish two ways of learning: intellectual and comprehensive learning.
- » Self-guided evolution: consciously focus on who we really would like to be. One consciously appeals to one's higher capacities.

This includes the well-known drumming into one's head, where – without any appeal to comprehensive learning – certain information has to be learned by heart, such as mathematical formulas and historical dates.

However, by doing this we limit our faculties by not asking questions anymore, believing those ideas to be true and taking for granted that others must be right. We take it all for granted and trust others to know better.

Comprehensive Learning is already a step in the right direction, because it appeals to the higher aspects in man. We train our ability to comprehend by looking at the background of the foregoing problem to get to the essence of it. Insight is the power to see interrelations, the correlation between cause and effect, in other words: why things happen the way they do.

Real causes always originate from the consciousness; therefore, real solutions are to be found there as well.

Comprehensive learning focuses on looking for causes. In other words: we don't look at the conclusion but examine the process that led that conclusion. We investigate *how* certain effects came to be. In that way we can gain new insights. Here wonderment and the want for a greater truth play an important role.

Then in mathematics the formula is not of main interest, but our *comprehension* of certain regularities, by inquiring about the underlying fundamentals. And in history it will not be all about the historical dates, but about the ideas on which civilizations have been built and *how* – by change of mentality – history entered a new phase, like what happened, for instance, during the Renaissance in Florence. During this period, the inspiring influence from the old universal wisdom was brought back to life again. In this way of learning, knowledge is not provided from the outside, but it is extracted from within. After all, we have boundless faculties in ourselves.

Comprehensive learning is remembering

In short, we distinguish two different ways of learning. Each of these appeals to different faculties.

Intellectual learning mostly appeals to the transient aspects of our consciousness. We behold the world from a personal point of view, on which our development is focused. This way of learning is never enduring, after all, we easily forget these petty facts.

Comprehensive learning appeals to our comprehension, our impersonal questions appeal to that part in us which holds that universal wisdom. This way of learning is focused on the search for sustainable solutions.

By learning to investigate and to independently ponder over problems, we develop a broader view on life. This type of learning is sustainable. When we really acquired an understanding of something, we never forget. You have found a little more truth that nobody can take away from you, and which you take with you to your next life. Taking this second way of learning as a starting point, you could say that in fact it is the re-awakening, the reminiscent call to the impersonal aspects of the soul. After all, as stated before, we are a part of the infinitude, which at the same time means we have everything of that infinitude in us. Our personal consciousness only has to remember those powers. Building insight and knowledge of these higher states of consciousness, is in fact a process of remembrance.

Learning for life

If we want to understand life more and discover the meaning of life, then the challenge is to break down our old thinking patterns that say that we are separate from the rest of life.

Instead, we build up new thinking habits, by which we learn to see life from the perspective that all life matters, as far as our thinking faculty can reach. Learning to place events in a broader perspective – to see things against the background of the totality – helps us to see the meaning or the purpose of things.

We ourselves can work on that by continuously regarding life and asking the right questions. For instance: "Does chance exist?". "Can we perceive the force behind the manifestations?". "Can we recognize the definition of Plato that life is the ability to act and react?"

As stated before, the answer already lies within us and, in fact, only needs to be remembered. However, this does not mean that we don't need each other, because learning is a process of action and interaction. There are always people who know more. We can always appeal to the ideas of great thinkers like Plato, Lao-Tse, Buddha, Jesus, et cetera. These are examples of people who had fully unfolded this comprehensive way of thinking and thus saw the coherence of life and lived their lives in compassion. They are the real teachers of mankind.

A true teacher appeals to your comprehensive thinking and will never force you to accept anything. He will never give any straight answers but instead awaken your intuition by inspiring you.

Cooperative learning

You don't need to be one of these great teachers to inspire

others, we can do it on our own level just as well. Being an inspiration to others means: being an example, living your own ideals in which the needs of others always prevail, living by your higher nature.

So, we can all follow those teachers' examples at our own level, by sharing our life's experiences, knowledge or wisdom with one another. You don't need a diploma – it is just a matter of mentality.

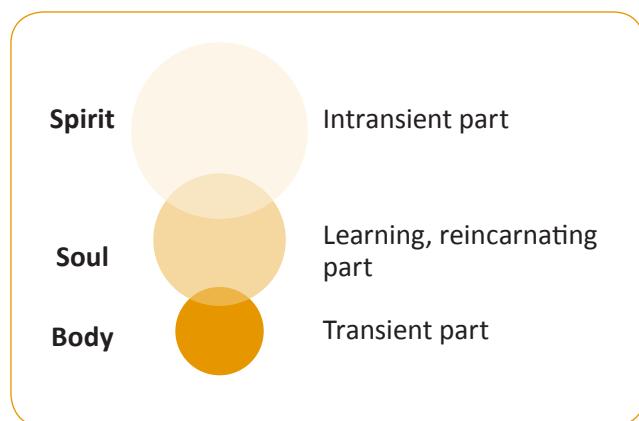
That mentality emerges from your understanding of how things interrelate. Everything is linked to everything, which means that cooperation is the most logical fact in nature. Like for example an eco-system. See how forests, fields, the sea, *all* creatures – animals, plants, mould, bacteria et cetera – all depend on one another, need each other so that the totality can grow and develop.

In the kingdoms of nature below the human kingdom this happens unconsciously, but we humans can choose consciously for cooperation. Seen from the spiritual background of life, from the unity of life in which all is united, brotherhood is a fact in nature. We don't have to aim for that. We only need to learn to see and understand that fact. We can recognize this fact in ourselves when we learn to build a vision on life.

Hierarchy within ourselves

In order to answer life's questions, in the end we must always appeal to our inner wisdom. The more we appeal to that spiritual part in us, the more we train our consciousness to respond to this thinking quality and the more we shall be guided by it. We appeal to our comprehensive way of learning.

According to this diagram of the composite constitution of man we can explain this to you in a better way.



We see the spiritual part, the soul and the vehicular part in this composite constitution. The soul is the learning

part. For example, if we would like to help someone out of compassion, or when we think about certain questions of life, we focus our thinking faculty on the spiritual part in us, the place where our universal knowledge is located. We tune into spiritual spheres and pick up ideas with similar qualities. The soul is opening up to the influences of the spirit. But the soul is also able to focus on the vehicular part in which personal matters often prevail.

Our interests in life, the things on which we are focused, determine which influences we are attracted to, which actions we take accordingly and which habits we finally construct. One becomes what one thinks.

The wish of Learning to understand life makes us see the cohesion and underlying relations of life ever better. Then we can speak of learning with a capital L. More and more we come to understand that Brotherhood is a fact in Nature. We realize we are part of a Spiritual eco system: a system in which all life is cooperating together *as a unity*. In the next lecture we shall elaborate on that.

Why we are who we are

As shown before: one becomes what one thinks. During that eternity which lies behind us we have developed our own character. That makes us who we are today. If we are not satisfied with ourselves, it is because of the choices we have made in the past – choices we would not make based on the wisdom we have today. Choices that caused the effects we now have to face. But this is also the case for positive circumstances. We meet those situations just as we have created them ourselves.

When we learn to understand that we ourselves have created our present situation in life by our thoughts and actions, we can learn to understand the justification of why we are who we are today. When learning to understand why we have come into a particular situation also makes us learn to understand and accept our responsibility of those circumstances within our own life. Seen from this point of view genetics are not the cause but the result. We ourselves have formed our character and although the building blocks of the physical vehicle return to us by our parents' assistance, in fact they belong to the reincarnating consciousness itself. So, we always inherit ourselves, nothing less, nothing more. We inherit our own created character.

But we have many hidden capabilities and talents that we have not yet developed. We can, therefore, become so much more than what we are now.

Self-consciously learning to Learn – From vulnerability to strength

If we want to change our character, then we can learn how to consciously focus on what or who we really would like to be. We call this *self-guided* evolution. This means that one consciously chooses to appeal to one's inner capacities, so that we live through our higher aspects. How can we be guided by our higher capacities?

Firstly by training our visualizing capacity and by that we mean creating a positive view of the world being harmonious and peaceful.

Generally it seems a lot easier to think of what we do not want, for example that there is no war and no poverty. The idea, however, is to imagine how a human being thinks and acts who realizes the unity of all that is, for whom the interest of the larger whole is key, because then we can live in peace with each other. For instance, imagine what the world would be like, when materials and food could be shared equally among all the people of the world. How would we live then? And how would we approach immigrants?

How will we live together when we realize that every creature matters, being part of that one life which we form together? We visualize a life in which every creature gets the possibility to express its higher nature in its own unique way and we all help one another in developing this. Keep in mind that we can always be perfecting this ideal image! If we keep perfecting this image and carry this vision of life with us in the back of our mind during the day, our actions and reactions will be tuned to that; just like a mother who is expecting will program her life, her actions, for the welfare of her child.

The most optimal changes of learning to live accordingly to these ideals lay hidden in every-day life. How disharmonious the world seems to be, we shall always look for solutions that benefit all with calmness and compassion.

Spiritual growth

The more we learn to let ourselves be guided by our higher aspects of consciousness, the more we learn to Learn. Our knowledge and understanding of the unity of life evolves. We come to see the indissolubly interconnectedness of life. So, if we remain open to all questions we as humans and as humanity are faced with, for which yet perhaps we have no suitable solution today, we realize – seen from unity of life, the indissolubly connectedness and our influence therein – that change is always possible.

The wisdom that is needed is yet within our reach, waiting

for us in our spiritual divine stock. We only need to learn to discern the ideas we take within our observational consciousness and what ideas are necessary in order to create that change.

That's what we mean by Learning infinitely, to really understand and comprehend the processes of nature – in life – and to live up to that.

The meaning of life is growth; to be more and more able to express one's spiritual capacities. But there is a still more profound meaning of life. You will hear more about it in the next lecture.



I am the Boundless

I am the Boundless

Building a vision of life is an active attitude of which we can practice during many a lifetime.

In the Esoteric Philosophy or the Theosophia, this attitude of life is founded on the One Boundless Principle, a starting point that says that everything, from an atom to the milky-way, is an expression of the ONE, boundless LIFE. This thought is the foundation of all great Religions, that are *one* in essence. Therefore the ethics in all of them is the same.

The same is taught to us by the Adwaita-Vedanta, a philosophical school in Hinduism, in the three words “Tat Twam Asi” or: “YOU are THAT”. THAT seen as the Boundlessness. You can never be outside the Boundlessness, because in essence you are the Boundlessness.

So, in reality we are the ONENESS, THAT, even though we see ourselves as seemingly separate parts. Like the ocean that expresses itself in waves, streams, drops of water; in the same way the ocean of the all-encompassing Life or the Universe expresses itself in countless beings or consciousnesses.

If we want to understand the Uni-

verse, then we should try to understand our Self, because we are a copy of the Universe. The Universe repeats itself in each of its building blocks.

You may know the proverb that was inscribed above the Temple of Apollo in Delphi: “Man, know Thy Self”. In just a few words, this proverb expresses the meaning of taking the Inner Path. A Path of consciousness that people follow who expand their consciousness, in order to raise the personal to the Above-personal.

“Thy Self” is the One Self that is identical in all beings, the Self, in which we do not differ from one another. It is the heart of the Universe, that we all are in the depths of our being. So, if you can know your Self in the depth of your being, you know the whole Universe, both inwardly and outwardly. Not just because you are part of it, but because, in the heart of the heart of your being, you ARE the Universe.

Philosophy of life based on fundamental principles

As we indicated in the announcement of this symposium, our society needs a clear vision of life, because the multiple and often contrary opinions and

Key thoughts

- » All great religions are *one* in essence.
- » “Man, know Thy Self” is the Inner Path.
- » The purpose of life can be found in the Seven Jewels of Wisdom, because they reveal the Inner Path.
- » The purpose of life is spiritual growth based on COMPASSION and the Unity of Life.

ideas clearly show that we lack a generally accepted vision that can serve as a guideline in our lives and as a foundation to organize our society.

The philosophy of Life that we present to you, consists of Three Fundamental Propositions and their elaboration in Seven Jewels of Wisdom. These treasures of wisdom are reliable guides for your thoughts and acts, because they describe the patterns of behavior of the Universe. The more insight we develop in these fundamental principles, the more we will recognize of the inner and outer structure of the Universe.

Every Jewel in itself is a key to wisdom, but together they form one whole. They are interwoven. One Jewel explains and is also a continuation of the other. When we ask ourselves "who am I" and "what is the purpose of life", we find the answers in the Seven Jewels of Wisdom.

Keep your thinking focused on the Higher Self

Man is, as we have seen, composed of spirit, soul and body. When the soul manages to unite itself with the imperishable spirit, then this human being becomes immortal, meaning that he does not lose his consciousness when he dies.

In order to reach this condition, it is necessary that we learn to focus more and more on our Higher Nature, which is *one* with the source of our consciousness. Instead of occupying ourselves with the illusions of daily existence, it would be better to continuously keep our Higher Self in the back of our minds. Then our will and desire will naturally tend to keep our thoughts focused on the Higher Self.

By practicing this, the influence of the Higher Self increases and becomes clearer and more powerful with every thought we think. Knowledge and energy will flow from this. We become more and more conscious of the power behind the phenomena. The more we learn to rise above personal thinking and selflessness increases, the more we develop an understanding eye for the development of *all* things.

What are the consequences for your daily life, if you try to live from your Higher Self? You will want to develop spiritually. You no longer focus on the illusions of this outer life. But the question is: why would you want to do that?

What do I want to be in the boundless? The whole or me myself?

There are two choices for continuing our development,

two paths to choose from. One path is called "The Path of Each for Himself". This is the Path that leads to liberation for yourself only. The other path you can choose is called "The Path of Compassion. One chooses this path in order to serve the whole. One stays in the world to inspire and to help wherever possible.

Actually, you do not have to choose anymore because your whole being is infused with the realization of ONENESS. That is why you only live to benefit that Unity.

We have already progressed quite a bit in our spiritual development, but we're not there yet. Let's use the seven Jewels of Wisdom to see where we stand now.

Progressive evolution

During the many phases of our progressive evolution – the fifth Jewel – we gradually awakened our inner powers, and lived our lives for better and for worse. In this way, we developed ourselves to become the thinkers we are now. But we are still imperfect thinkers. Through self-directed evolution we can learn to become perfect thinkers. We carry in us all the capacities that are needed, and it is imbedded in the order of nature to develop these.

Self-becoming

We have developed ourselves into what we are now. That is what we learn from Jewel four: Self-becoming. But we can become even *more* ourselves, our *Higher Self*. The urge to develop originates from within. Thus, we create more and more our own unique Self.

Where do I stand on the Ladder of Life?

Self-becoming leads time and again to a certain position on the Ladder of Life. The Ladder of Life is in fact the hierarchical nature in which everything is related and cooperates together. Jewel Three — the doctrine of the Hierarchies, indicates that every being has its unique place on the Ladder of Life, of consciousness. That place is determined by the level of consciousness that one has reached throughout succeeding lives as a result of the Law of Cause and Effect. The doctrine of Hierarchies means that everything is related to everything, that we are mutually dependent on one another and therefore we are all responsible for the whole.

In this light I would like to read to you an experience of a group of journalists. They were thinking about the term "dependence". This is one of the remarks that were made and I quote: "What we slowly started to notice was that seeing dependence and mutual connectedness changes

your outlook on the world, and the way you stand in life. Once you have seen that, you always see it. There is no more choice. Much more often you feel invited to take responsibility.

The greatest promise is that we can, through practice, succeed in holding on to that outlook. Then, our understanding of dependence becomes somewhat like the doctrine of evolution: it is a fact all the time, as a determining power, and your understanding of the world and your influence on it increases if you declare yourself dependent."

It seems that people realize more and more the connectedness of all that exists. And that gives hope for the future.

My choices determine my place on the Ladder of Life

How we reached this position on the ladder of Life, is explained by Jewel two, Karma. We are our own karma, and consequently we have control over our own life. So, we also determine our future. We cannot escape our responsibility for our own destiny, but we are able to solve our problems, in the course of time.

So, the question is: how do we deal with the things that happen to us now? Here lay our chances to act in an ethical way. We can start immediately. We can start in the small things, in our daily life: within our family, with the neighbours, at work, with our colleagues, etcetera.

Reincarnation

Now, Karma cannot be understood without the first Jewel – Reincarnation. These form a twin teaching, so to say. The energy that you put in the refining of your character, will remain after your death, in contrast to the energy you put in transient matters. This improvement of character you take with you to a next life, in order to continue it, to penetrate ever deeper into the secrets of human Nature. You become what you think. Death loses its frightful influence, because we know that life simply goes on, albeit in a state of rest we call "death". And each succeeding life is a new chance to grow in consciousness.

Now that I know I am the Boundless, what will I choose?

These were, in a nutshell, five of the Seven Jewels. They reveal to us the Inner Path. By the processes described in these five Jewels, we are able to develop the boundless capacities that lie latent within us.

So, now we know that we are the Boundlessness, and that we have the five Jewels at our disposal that enable us to

find an explanation for whichever problem of life, and to draw our conclusions from it. But what do we choose now? You might call "inner growth" the purpose of life. But we have not yet spoken about the motive behind this growth. For what is the motive that makes you want to grow?

Two Paths

The sixth Jewel, the Two Paths, speaks about the motive, about the goal we have while passing through this growth. Both Paths lead to heights of Spiritual Splendour. But do we want that splendour only for ourselves, or for the totality?

If you want to achieve enlightenment for yourself, and liberate yourself from this world, then you go the "Path of Each for Himself". This path will lead to personal rest, perfect peace, happiness, and a life in the divine sphere. Sure, you perform acts of Compassion, you practice unselfishness, but with a very subtle selfish aim. Looking forward to your goal to enter that heavenly condition, you do everything to be able, finally, to rise above all worldly problems. This means that you break all ties with the world. Your goal has been achieved, and for you, it was all about that. This explains the name "Path of Each for Himself". And in fact, this runs counter to the unity of life. If however, you do not accept any liberation only for yourself, but dedicate your life to the service of everything that is, then you will stay in the world, although you have already outgrown it, for you cannot learn anything new here anymore. You renounce that heavenly state and keep taking responsibility for all those whose consciousness is less developed than yours. You show them the way out of the problems of this physical life, that often have to do with selfishness. This is the "Path of Compassion", the divine Path. Without the intention to reach a certain goal, but for the sake of Compassion. Not for your own benefit, but only for the benefit of the general welfare. You make yourself subordinate to the general welfare, in the service of the greater Whole of which you are a part. On this path, spiritual growth is not the motive, but a secondary effect.

You see, this choice involves moral consequences. Already now we can choose for one of the two paths. This choice lies in fact in everything we do. Take for instance this example from daily life: your evening is still unoccupied, and you wish to spend these hours for an in-depth study of the Theosophia. Then, the phone rings. You see that the caller is someone with a lot of problems. What do you do? Do you ignore the phone, or do you

answer the call? If you ignore it to continue your studies in a theosophical book, you may be spiritually busy, but you do not act compassionately. Or, do you take the call and set aside your own spiritual growth, to help someone with his problems?

What can I do right now?

Let us assume that you or I want to follow this Path of Compassion, then we would live much more according to that above-personal ideal that Patricia van Lingen has sketched before. If we keep our above-personal ideal active at the background of our actions, we will progressively become one with it. We will start to realize its deeper aspects by practicing it in daily life, and we will act accordingly. It does not matter at which level of consciousness we are now – whether you are spiritually developed or not – everyone can always choose for Compassion, in all modesty and with all our limitations.

Cooperation

There is a great need of people that express this spiritual vision in their lives, or at least, try to realize it, for only then will they really be serving the world. The best way to reach this, is by the cooperation of corresponding thinkers.

We are never on our own. There is always the inspiration of the Teachers of humanity, and of the Teacher within us, and furthermore, there are many spiritual thinkers who are in tune with each other, having the same ideal in mind. This cooperation of attuned thinkers means that all work towards the same goal. The power of a group is always greater than an individual force. The radiating influence of such a group of thinkers will attract many others, who will join and add their force of thinking.

We recognize this fact in nature. Take for instance the social structure of a bee colony. One single bee cannot achieve much on its own, but together with her colleagues, she accomplishes a lot.

If people want to cooperate, in order to develop and extend their ideal image of brotherhood, other people will join. In this way, the beneficial influence on humanity will continually expand.

The purpose of Life

What is the purpose of being a human, in the boundless? Maybe you would conclude from the first five Jewels that the purpose of life is spiritual growth. But if you include the last two Jewels too, the purpose is COMPASSION.

Then everything is based on the unity of life, and in unity individual growth does not exist.



Will computers become smarter than man?

What are computers, and which abilities do they have – presently and in the future? Are computers able to become just as living and conscious as we humans are, in the future? In this article we approach these questions from the standpoint of consciousness. This approach opens the door to deeper insights. Thus, we will be enabled to direct the astoundingly quick technological developments in a wise way.

To get a clear understanding of these questions, from the standpoint of the Universal Wisdom, the so called Theosophia, we must remember that all the teachings of Theosophia are based on one idea: behind everything or body, behind every star, planet, human being, animal, plant, mineral or chemical atom, there is an ensouling entity, that uses that form as instrument. By embodying in the outer worlds, we all get the chance to grow in consciousness, to extend our vision and faculties.

For instance, we humans, are centers of consciousness. Our bodies are no more or less than temporary instruments. And our consciousness is everlasting, as we are a child or expression of Boundless Life. Our body is a temporary instrument, but the lessons we learn while living in the outer world, we take with us, we digest and incorporate in our nature during the spiritual rest between two successive incarnations.

If all forms are ensouled, then a computer is too. However, not in the sense that there is one entity that works through a computer, but in the sense that each atom of a computer is the body of a primitive entity. The designers, so humans, have combined these entities in such a way that they behave like a unit, fulfilling a certain function in our society.

ONE Cosmic Life

A second basic idea is: all beings form together one living whole, one living, boundless organism. They are dependent on each other and need each other. Why? Their links are not only tight, they are fundamentally inseparable, because they all originate from ONE timeless Source. There is a factual unit, and every being is a little piece of the great mosaic of life. One of the most important consequences of this fact is, that all our choices that we make as human beings, will affect all other beings. Our sense of

Key thoughts

- » Technology is the child of our desires in combination with our intellect.
- » A computer is an assembly of atoms and molecules, which are ensouled by very primitive mineral and elemental beings. Those beings have no idea of the data that they are processing.
- » Elementary beings will never take over human tasks, if these tasks ask for insight, inner values, discernment and creative action.

responsibility is based on the ground structure of the Universe! We will need this theosophical key, when we start talking about the social and individual impact of ICT-applications.

Natural kingdoms: stages of our inner journey

We all carry cosmic possibilities within us. And we have the inner urge to unfold them, unpack them, manifest them, awaken them and make them active. Each being, “high or low”, has that fundamental urge to awaken its slumbering divine capacities, in order to become – at the end of the journey – full-blown gods.

Although all beings are cosmic pilgrims on the same Path, the differences in their evolutionary grade, in the point of development that they have reached, are very great indeed. We can show this in the following scheme:

Path of spiritual development

Expressed by:

- | | |
|----------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Living from unity | gods |
| 2. Spiritual insight | demi-gods |
| 3. Thinking | human kingdom |
| 4. Desires | animal kingdom |
| 5. Vitality | plant kingdom |
| 6. Senses, feeling | mineral kingdom |
| 7. Bodily form | elemental kingdom |

On the left you see all the forces and faculties that each being carries in its consciousness, as a potential or as an active force. To the right you see how far the beings belonging to a certain natural kingdom have progressed in the development of their potencies.

The *elemental* beings are the beginners on the Path, within our Cosmos. They are busy learning to form bodies of their own. In this endeavor they are stimulated by the minerals. The *mineral* entities are busy learning to grow and develop senses. They are stimulated by the plants.

The *plants* are already very sensitive creatures, but they are now learning to develop their vital powers. They are stimulated by the animals.

The *animals* are busy developing their desires, their longings. We know that animals also have desires, and that they suffer when those desires cannot be satisfied. Think of the wish of a hen to retreat to a quiet place, to lay eggs. This is not possible in bio-industry, in a large poultry house. The animals are stimulated in their evolution by mankind, and unfortunately, presently very often misused.

Humans are learning to think, to discover and use all the powers of their thinking consciousness. We have the spiritual support from beings that are beyond our stage: let us call them “demigods”.

These *demigods* are developing cosmic insight: cosmic love and understanding, supported by even further developed beings. And here we stop, because the ladder of life has no end. There is no end to our inner growth. We carry boundless possibilities within us.

What is a computer?

Each of those natural kingdoms is therefore an evolutionary school, a growth phase. When a being has completed a grade, it enters the next, higher grade. So countless beings enter, and finally leave such a “school of inner growth”. These schools remain, but the pupils in each grade make periodical progress ... just like a school in our society. During each planetary cycle, a vast period of more than 4 billion years, each being has the chance to become perfect in its own kingdom and enter the next higher one. So, we speak of a very gradual evolution, requiring cosmical periods of time.

And all those beings help each other because all kingdoms of nature need each other. Each kingdom is one link within the stream of consciousness that flows through the whole cosmos.

So, the elementary and mineral beings that ensoul the material elements of our computers – and all other physical substances – are relatively spoken *beginners on the Path*. They have not yet evolved mind, as we humans do. They have not evolved a certain measure of individual characteristics, as the higher animals do. They have not yet the ability to grow and reach to the sun, like plants can. So, they follow always the commands and impulses of higher beings. In the case of computers, those leading beings are human beings, particularly the hardware and software developers, and all the people working with computers.

What is our spiritual future?

In the first half of the “human evolutionary school” our development is generally focused on ever-increasing materialization, on building up bodies that become more and more gross material. The second half of the great cycle of our development is generally focused on spiritualization: the unfolding, developing of our higher mental and spiritual faculties. We as humanity have recently started that “upward journey”. About 9 million years ago, we passed the most material phase of our evolution, and now we

are gradually, very gradually – and with many ups-and-downs – unpacking, developing our spiritual thinking. So, there is a great promise here, if we are willing to allow spiritual insights into our lives, and to release all habits that, one day, no longer appear satisfactory to us. Evolution is not an automatic, mechanic process of “go with the flow”: each inner step we make ourselves, individually, self-guided, self-motivated.

Why is our world so full of suffering, tension, problems? Because most of us learn slowly and are ethically drawn back and forth between thinking from unity and thinking ego-centrally, between solidarity without drawing *any* limits and a kind of behavior that we can characterize as “our group first”.

Yet: we are on the ascending half of our journey, we are bit by bit unfolding our higher and more noble potencies ... leading to Buddhahood and beyond.

What is technology?

Technology is manipulating, influencing Nature, through devices. To be able to manipulate the forces of Nature, we need two things: we must have some experience and knowledge of the laws of nature, of cause and effect, and we must have the desire to use this intellectual knowledge to make all kinds of devices. In short: technology is the child of our desires, our wishes, in combination with our intellect. Remark: wisdom, deeper understanding, some sense of ethics *is not necessary* to make or use techniques ... And that immediately raises a number of questions like: how do we direct the development of technology into beneficial channels, beneficial for all humans and other creatures?

Is technical development a danger in itself?

Technology in itself is neutral, just as neutral as the natural forces that we use. Think of an electronic chainsaw: you can use it for making furniture, or to destroy large areas of forest, with devastating effects.

Our objectives, our motives determine the kind of consequences that we produce by our actions. And we will encounter all the consequences we produce: in the future, we will reap what we have sown, nothing less, nothing more. Selfless goals lead to more mutual help, selfish goals will cause an accumulation of problems, to accumulating strife or isolation. So: technology in itself is neutral. All civilizations, of whatever character or level of spirituality, had some form of technology, used some kind of instruments.

Can a computer ever become “smarter” than humans? Can robots become more mighty than men?

As said above, a computer (the hardware) is an assembly of materials, and the atoms and molecules that build up these substances are ensouled by very primitive beings, that we call *mineral* and *elemental* beings. Each chemical atom is governed and held together by a conscious being. And all the attractions and repulsions that we observe in substances, are the visible results of *beings* that interact with each other. It is comparable to the attracting or repelling influences that we humans exercise on each other. Of course, with this difference, that at an atomic and sub-atomic scale all things happen within time periods that we must count in thousandths or millionths of seconds.

Those mineral and elemental beings are unselfconscious, have hardly any free will. They cannot do otherwise than follow the impulses and commands of higher beings like humans. Therefore, applying these basic thoughts to computers and robots: *our input determines the output, nothing else.* A computer can calculate, and it does so incomprehensibly quickly. This ability has led to applications like GPS to navigate, or search engines that search thousands of documents within one second.

Can a computer be smarter than man? Each computer program has been designed by a person, the designer. It depends on the level of understanding and knowledge of that designer, how effective the instrument is, how well the computer performs some task. A computer can therefore certainly operate *seemingly* more intelligent than a large group of people, because all its operations reflect the intelligence of the designer. That does not mean that the mineral beings of the computer are as intelligent as we, but that they slavishly do what the operator forced them to do, without any understanding of our human ideas, goals and ethics — realities that belong to our thinking consciousness. So, the answer is: *no*, the beings that make up a computer will never be able to think, they will never develop any human consciousness. Not now, and not within any time period that is relevant for us.

And can a computer take over the power? In a certain way, yes, but that is obviously true for all apparatuses. Then we say nothing new. Everyone knows that we humans can lose control of our instruments if we do foolish or reckless or experimental things. Compare it to a horse that runs riot. At that moment the horse is the boss, not the rider, because the rider gave it the chance. The result is that the horse starts doing *what it is inclined to do from his own*

characteristic consciousness. The result is not that the horse gets the character and abilities of the rider.

But ... what about “machine learning”?

This is currently an intensive research area: computers that can learn themselves. These computers are able to improve their own searching and calculating methods (their “algorithms”), by trying out many of these methods, of these algorithms. They eventually choose that method that brings about the greatest success.

What is defined as “success”, is programmed *by man*. And the way the computer uses the input of data, and compares the several calculating methods, too. So, in the end, we human beings determine everything — although the processes are so complex, and the amount of data usually so large, that we cannot foretell the results any more.

Thanks to such a “self-learning” computer, the world champion GO – the Japanese thinking game – has recently been defeated. And GO is a game with even more possibilities than chess.

Can a computer now – or ever – learn?

Many people talk about a “self-learning” computer. We may ask them: what or who in the computer is learning? It is the way we humans use them, that may give some people the impression that computers act in a way that resembles learning behavior – superficially!

But from the standpoint of consciousness, the question can be definitely answered: elemental or mineral beings are not able to learn. They do not understand one bit of the processes for which they are used. One clear indication that elemental beings have no idea of the data that they are processing, are real-life experiences with “self-learning” computers and software. When such a computer processes data from our society, for instance from internet, it may quickly find correlations of all types. But part of these correlations is very superficial and often – from the standpoint of human common sense or conscience – simply stupid. For instance: if you ask a self-learning computer for a photo of a CEO, a chief executive officer, it will show you a white man of middle age. Never a black woman. The computer reflects all the prejudices of our past, as these photos are most common on internet. And this example is one of the least harmful ...

This leads, we think, to a very important conclusion: do not expect from elementary beings that they will ever take over our human tasks, if these tasks ask for insight, inner values, discernment, and creative action. And that

is the case for most human tasks in society!

Three ethical touchstones

Many ICT applications arouse ethical and social questions. Can we foretell the risks of new techniques? Can we recognize their consequences beforehand? Can we avoid problems instead of trying to repair the damage? We think we can, as we humans are able to use our deeper understanding and intellect. Yet, we will only be successful if we approach these questions *from the standpoint of consciousness*. The Universal Wisdom recognizes in each man a spiritual, mental, psychic and physical part. If we want to know the consequences of a technique, we must consider its impacts on all levels of our being.

We now propose a few touchstones. Undoubtedly, they can be further supplemented or improved, so these are only first versions. In fact: we would like to know your proposals too: please send them to the editorial secretary of *Lucifer*, and it will be a valuable step to further improvements. Each touchstone will immediately be applied to one or more of the current problems we now face.

Does the application of a technique lead to:

- a) an identification with our body or**
- b) the utilization of our body as only an instrument?**

Let us look at an example to show what we are trying to say. We can continuously scan many properties of our body by using sensors: our heartbeat, blood pressure, certain substances in our blood, and much more. For people with, for example, diabetes, it may be useful. It seems to be a technique without much risk.

But there is a hidden, yet very great spiritual effect on the long term: people will start to think they are their bodies, and that their luck and well-being depends on bodily factors – changing each second! They lose their awareness of their true, lasting eternal self: the consciousness that works through the body.

It is a harmful situation, as it will surely lead to suffering. Our body will, after its prime time, certainly become weaker. While our consciousness may become riper and broader and deeper each day of our lives, *until the day of our physical death*, our temporary departure from this outer world.

Does the application of a technique lead to:

- a) a growing psychic dependence or**
- b) psychic self-control?**

This is about our psychological well-being. We can apply

this touchstone to the deliberately built-in addictive tricks of Facebook, LinkedIn, dating sites, and so on. All these policies stem from selfishness, because these companies earn their money from advertising and selling the data about our behavior to other companies.

However, computer technology can also be used to increase our psychological self-control, about the way we can learn *to stand above* our outer attachments. Unfortunately, this is rare information on the internet. There is plenty of advice offered, and you can easily get lost in a maze of precepts, but seldom do they stimulate our higher, universal potencies, our understanding of the cosmos and ourselves, our conscience.

Does the application of a technique:

- a) broaden or**
- b) narrow our vision?**

The third touchstone is about our mental well-being, our mental evolution. It is generally known that, if we are not careful, websites mainly present us with the views and opinions with which we are already familiar. We can continuously chat on the internet with people who think the same way as we do. The internet then does not expand our view but narrows it. We live in our own isolated bubble, in our own belief system, often unconsciously so. In this way, dangerous emotions and fake news can spread around the world at lightning speed: certain suspicions and negative rumors. Those who are aware of this, will never stop thinking independently, especially when people are being stigmatized, libeled and labeled.

What does that mean, “thinking independently?” That means that you refuse to react emotionally if you are addressed emotionally, refuse to act aggressively when you are attacked. It means a calling upon your universal capacities: your love of truth, your undemanding love of all that lives. Theosophy has always stressed the importance of free will, untrammeled thinking, what Plato called: unveiled thinking. So that we may lead our lives, instead of slavishly following the attractions of our lower nature.

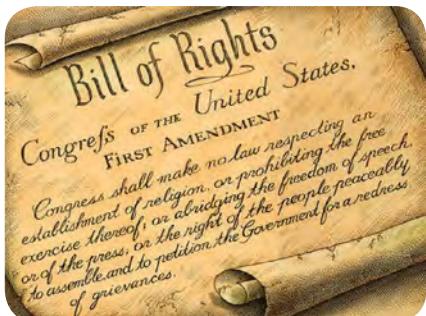
Is the future society high-tech?

First of all: technology will always be a part of our civilizations. Each civilization uses techniques which belong to its evolutionary level, and which are a reflection of the values of that civilization. So, the types of technology may vary enormously. We can expect many changes in the future! In the far future, when most humans are able to live in their *eternal* part, we will be able to accomplish things that

would now be considered “miracles”. We will know and control many powers of our spiritual consciousness, like, for instance, making contact with the minds of specific persons in a controlled way, by mutual agreement. These persons may live in a country thousands of miles away. So, each society has to learn to understand and control its techniques. The aim is always: absolute mastership, and that is the same as not being attached to them. Think for instance how strongly our present generation is attached to technical advances: for its possible economic and military applications, so, to be able to overpower other countries. But there is also an attachment brought about by an overestimation of the importance of technology. Who does not want the most modern, the most advanced technology? Many people have fallen in love with technology and try blindly to realize some material dream. The result: almost all techniques that are developed in our world now, *will be used*, will be tried out, by some people. Whether the techniques are dangerous or not, whether we know the consequences or not.

So, we live in a critical phase of our evolution. Our intellect gives us more and more power over the lower kingdoms of nature (which are entities that we humans should take care of!). But *does the development of our conscience and our understanding of the meaning of life keep pace with the rapid development of technology?*

We will end this article by getting back to the insights that Theosophia offers: our human ideals of universal brotherhood are no pipe dreams; on the contrary, they are reflections of universal facts. Unity, compassion and cooperation are the basis and “glue” of the Universe. A great love of truth and righteousness is the natural result of realizing who we are, and what our place in the cosmos is. There is a direct path to wisdom and peace. Every human being possesses all the noble, inspiring powers of consciousness: understanding, looking ahead, applying the idea of Universal Brotherhood. But what does that mean? On our way upwards, it is not necessary to suffer in order to learn, as some people wrongly think. There is never the need to create disasters by experimenting with powerful technologies. There is no need to experience a series of shipwrecks before we are able to steer our ship. For we have our higher thinking, and our ability to learn from men and women who have developed that higher thinking more than we. These faculties will never leave us, for they come from our True Self.



Freedom of expression

The attacks in Paris in 2015 were a retaliation for the insults that Muslims had been subjected to by the magazine Charlie Hebdo. This violence against journalists and writers is one of the reasons why nowadays there are journalists and cartoonists who prefer not to scoff at the Islam. This attitude evokes aversion from others.

Should anyone say and write – and also draw – what he wants, without taking into account the feelings of others? The discussion is often conducted on an emotional basis. This article tries to find a more fundamental answer.

Key thoughts

- » Because man has *in essence* boundless free will, freedom of thought and the expression of thoughts are the most essential human rights.
- » An opinion is a subjective, illusory and changing thought that is thought by the personality.
- » Everyone is responsible for his thoughts and for the acts that are the results of those thoughts.
- » The person who initiates the thought does not have to be the same person who converts it into an action.

First of all, we want to state that freedom of thought and expression is the most fundamental human right. That right is not based on sentiment. It is based on Life itself. We will try to explain that.

If you assume that a human being is consciousness that is *essentially* limitless, and that there are therefore boundless possibilities inherent in that consciousness, then in his inner nature a human is free, because being a part of the Boundless, he can choose the road he wants to walk. He can think whatever he wants. He must therefore not be prevented from expressing his thoughts. The recognition of free will is one of the highest theosophical principles.

Now we have to make a note here. Although a man has in principle boundless opportunities, we also know that we are limited. We are

limited because we live together with others. We have to take each other into account. Our freedom cannot be at the expense of others. Every society has its habitual patterns, which are reflected in laws. The penal code describes in detail which actions are not permitted. You are not allowed to steal, to commit violence, and when the traffic light is on red you must stop. There is probably no reasonable person who objects to this.

We are equally limited by natural laws. We cannot go to Mars tomorrow, if we would choose that. According to the premise that a being is in fact the boundlessness itself, he can, if he opts for it, go to Mars *one day*, but it will take a lot of time and in his present incarnation he is not able to go there. The laws of nature limit your freedom. For example, who can bypass the law of gravity and fly

through the air on his own? Anyway, within the limits of our possibilities we are free. Should we then express all the thoughts we think? Or is it not always wise to do so?

Expressing opinions

Living in a country with freedom of expression you are used to giving your opinion about everything. If you have eaten in a restaurant, you will be asked how you liked the food and whether the service was all right. Online you constantly get requests to give your opinion. You are expected to have an opinion about every news item. More and more countries are organizing referendums. In Switzerland, the opinion of the population is asked for many issues. And in democratic countries we can of course choose our representatives. So, everyone has opinions and in free countries we are allowed to express them.

But what exactly is an opinion?

It is a thought. But it is a certain type of thought, namely one that is thought by the personality. An opinion is not so much an elaborate analysis from which you have drawn a conclusion, but much more a feeling that you have regarding an event or idea. In fact, an opinion is a subjective, illusory and changing thought about a certain event. Opinions change constantly.

That is not so strange, because it is the personality, who has opinions, so who thinks this thought, and the personality is a temporary, external instrument of which the true Man makes use of in order to be able to express himself. The word "personality" is derived from the Greek *persona*, which means literal "sounding through it" and is therefore also used in the meaning of "mask". Behind the mask is the voice of the true Human.

However, contrary to what it may seem, an opinion is never without obligation. Like every thought, an opinion leads to an action, for every action is based on a thought. That is why you can call an opinion an embryonic action: it sooner or later drives us to a certain act.

So, we are free to cherish every opinion we want, but if we do that without considering others, it will lead to conflicts.

Expressing thoughts leads to consequences

Now you can say that expressing a thought (an opinion) is something different than performing an action. Perhaps this is the case for the law, but from the theosophical perspective, the expression of a thought, yes, even thinking a thought, differs only slightly from the actual performance of an action.

Although quite a few people say that thoughts are toll-free, they are not entirely so, at least not in the sense that they do not lead to consequences. You cannot think a single thought that will not, in one way or another, have an effect, small as it may be. The reason therefore is that thoughts are real, existing, living energies. Thinking and expressing a thought is giving an impulse to a certain characteristic energy, so that it can be picked up by other thinkers. That is why we influence each other. That is why expressing a thought is not without obligation.

Thoughts are powered by the human mind. The more often you think a thought, the stronger it becomes, and the more easily it is received by others. In this way even, psychological epidemics can arise.

If in the United States people express their opinion that freedom must imply that you can carry a weapon to defend that freedom, then – whether you want it or not – you contribute to an atmosphere where violence is normal. If you entertain yourself by watching violent or horror films, you also reinforce that atmosphere, even if you do not commit violence yourself.

The same applies to Salafist imams, who are very strict in their interpretation of the Islamic doctrine. They call Muslims with somewhat more liberal ideas apostates. They do not advocate violence against these, in their eyes, apostate Muslims, but they undoubtedly know that even more fanatical fellow believers think otherwise. So, when a so-called apostate Muslim is killed by a fanatic one, they are also responsible for it.

Unfortunately, we have seen something like that happen several times, for example in that horrible attack in Norway in 2011. A right-wing extremist killed dozens of left-wing youngsters. His motive was that these young people did not reject foreigners and refugees, and he wanted to keep his country free from foreign influence. His ideas were partly formed by a few right-wing politicians, who, while being themselves against violence, had turned against foreigners, and Muslims in particular, in strong terms.

Thinking and expressing thoughts must lead to performing those thoughts sooner or later. This is very well explained in *The Brothers Karamazov*, the famous novel by the Russian writer Dostoyevsky. In this great novel one of the brothers, Iwan, holds the theory that a good man may commit a murder for the sake of lofty purpose. A half-brother of Iwan, not without reason lackey by profession, kills father Karamazov, because this old man would stand in the way of the realization of an ideal. When Iwan is later confronted with this terrible act, he

is close to despair. But his half-brother yelled at him: "I did not do it, you did it. You came up with it and I was just your will-less pawn." ⁽¹⁾

The lackey was right. That does not mean that he has no responsibility. After all, he did not have to have the mentality of a lackey, he could have set himself up as an independent thinker. But Iwan had thought up the idea of a just and useful murder, yes, even cherished the idea and thereby also spread it. He is therefore even more responsible for the murder of his father. Perhaps this is not the case for the imperfect human law, but it certainly is for the Law.

Karmically, everyone is responsible for his thoughts. In other words, the consequences that will result from it will return to the person who thought the thought. So even if you place a tweet on Twitter, or anonymously ventilate your opinion on a blog, you remain responsible for what that thought brings about. If you are mocking someone or someone's deepest belief, then you also call on others, even if it is just a joke. Yes, even if you only think that thought without expressing it, you remain responsible for it.

Moreover, the person who initiates the thought does not have to be the same person who converts it into an action. The inventor of a crime is at least as guilty as the one who commits the crime.

That is why from the knowledge of Theosophia you can ask the question whether you should propagate absolute freedom of speech. If you deliberately mock someone's deepest convictions, insult a population group or otherwise hurt other people's feelings, then that may be permitted by law, but theosophically you violate the ethical law because you violate the idea of brotherhood and cooperation. That always results in disharmony. And although we totally disagree with those people who want to restore that harmony, whether violently or not, by being hostile to those who have raised such insulting opinions, the restoration of harmony must always be accompanied by a certain degree of misery. Because the consequences of an act – and that is also the expression of an opinion – will always be of the same characteristic as that opinion itself. At the same time, as said before, from a theosophical point of view, freedom of thought and speech is a very good thing and trying to limit this would be the beginning of the degeneration of society. But we should make use of it wisely. In our view, freedom of speech must lead to an open, unbiased dialogue and critical research, on the basis of equality. This gives everyone who participates the opportunity to expand his understanding of truth. This

is not to be underestimated, because it is only in such an atmosphere that the higher nature of every human being can express itself and our society can reform itself, dispose of old prejudices, and bring justice where injustice now prevails.

Expressing supra-personal thoughts

Something of the ethical truth that you should not offend others and that there is a restriction in the freedom of expression, can be found in the legislation of many countries. Because, according to quite a few national laws, you may not insult and incite hatred. This is the reflection of a real ethical awareness that must be present in the population unselfconsciously. That is why we should never think thoughts that (can) cause harm to one or more people. The freedom of one may never be at the expense of the freedom of the other.

On the other hand, we also have to be very aware that only the personal man can be hurt or offended. The supra-personal man is far above all kinds of transient opinions. They do not reach him. Of course, this is not a license for insulting others.

In short, supra-personal thinking and acting is the solution for all disharmony in society. If you want a harmonious society in which everyone can contribute their own talents for the benefit of the whole, then you should in fact only think of supra-personal thoughts that promote the welfare of all mankind, because only those thoughts do not cause disharmony.

Reference

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1. F.M. Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*. Book XI, paragraph 8.
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Questions & Answers

The earth and life atoms

In classifying the living beings in the kingdoms of nature, I wondered where the being “Earth” is classified. Galaxies and the universe I do not know how to classify either. If they belong to the divine kingdoms, do we humans ever become a planet or galaxy?

Answer

The question is: what exactly do you mean by “Earth”? Do you mean the physical sphere seen from space as blue? Or do you mean the entire planet, which is a being that consists of a divine part, a series of intermediate parts and a physical part? Just as man is much more than his physical body, a planet (or any other organism) is much more than what we can perceive with our physical eyes. According to Theosophy, a planet is a hierarchy of beings, which are embodied in seven (or, according to another classification, twelve) spheres. The physical sphere within we live, is the most material of all. These spheres differ from each other in degree of materiality. One is much more ethereal than the other. But they are all closely related and are located in about the same spatial position.

The supreme being of the earth, of all the seven globes of the entire planetary system, is a divine being. It is one of the leading forces of our solar system. So, it has cosmic consciousness. It has risen above the limitations of the “I-am-I” consciousness, for it has developed a universal view and a universal pattern

of behavior. It functions as the source of inspiration for all beings belonging to its hierarchy, and as the living link that connects our planet with even more spiritual areas.

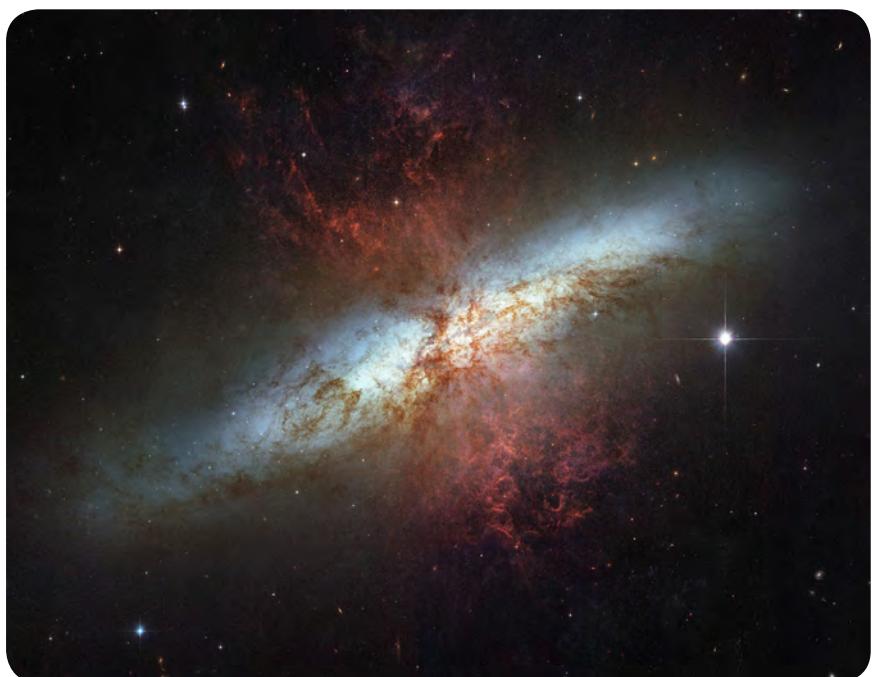
However, if you just look at the physical globe, then you may wonder whether this living organism is developed beyond humans. Humans are able to think. They have developed what is called in Sanskrit *Manas*, Mind. You should not think that the larger a being’s body, the more advanced it is. Size has nothing to do with the scope of a consciousness; an elephant has no greater range of consciousness than a human being.

It is true that the being that animates the physical sphere is cosmic in nature, but that does not necessarily mean that it is more advanced than we humans are. Among the cosmic beings there

are unconscious beings as well.

We can also apply these principles to a sun or galaxy or a group of galaxies. If by a galaxy we mean the top being of that hierarchy, then we are talking about a divine being — a being that has progressed one, a few, or many steps beyond a human being. Remember that there are gods in many grades. We use the term “god” in the sense of “a being further advanced than man”. Knowing that inner growth does not know boundaries, there are endless kingdoms of nature “above us”.

And indeed, it is the special prospect for every living being – and therefore also for us humans – to develop cosmic wisdom at some point. First, we become the top being of a planet, then that of a solar system, and so on. We take an ever-greater responsibility upon ourselves within the living Cosmos.



M82, a starburst galaxy that has ten times the star formation of a “normal” galaxy.

Question

To which kingdom of nature, for example, does the being “liver” belong? Do the livers of a human being and an animal belong to the same natural kingdom?

Answer

In order to be able to answer your question about the liver, we firstly have to give a general view. Our physical body is a collaboration of vast numbers of beings that ensoul our cells and all the small parts of our cells. We call these beings “life-atoms” in Theosophy. They have not developed any self-consciousness. They are all subordinate to human consciousness, to the leading thinking consciousness that works behind it. These life atoms differ in quality of consciousness. A heart cell has been developed further than a skin cell. In theosophical literature, the principles are given on this subject, but not very detailed. It is therefore not easy to say exactly which stage of evolution – in which kingdom of nature – the life-atoms of a liver are situated.

By thinking about these principles, we can give general indications. For example, a cell being is less developed than a rose or beech, which belongs to the vegetable kingdom. The consciousness behind a rose is capable of leading all its roots, stems, leaves and flowers, each of which in turn consists of numerous cells. A cell being cannot do that yet. So, you can think of a cell as a “low developed plant consciousness” or a “highly developed mineral consciousness”.

In order to answer your question about the consciousness of a liver, we will first have to solve this question: can we see an organ such as the liver as the embodiment of one individual being (as with a cell) or as a close union of cell beings? Compare it with an organization

or association of people: such an association is not “one individual” — even when it does work as an organic unit. Suppose that a liver is the vehicle of one individual being, then that being must be further developed than the cells it consists of. It is one step closer to human consciousness, because it is the channel of the impulses from our thinking consciousness to all liver cells. The livers of humans and mammals are very similar in function and construction. They will therefore have a similar type of consciousness — but they are not equal, because the life atoms that are attracted to a human body are of a different type than those who are attracted to an animal body. There are even differences in characteristic between the livers of two people, because every human being, and therefore every organ in the human body, yes, even every cell, is unique. That is the reason why each organ is rejected by the receiving body after a transplantation.

remains a small circle if we continue to use these terms.

Answer

One of the big problems in spreading theosophical thoughts is that we have to use words that, by many people, evoke a certain fixed conceptual image. This is especially the case with the word “god”. For God is often understood as the Supreme, Almighty Being who created the world. Although there have been philosophers who have attempted to differentiate or completely change this image – Spinoza is a clear example – the word “god” still evokes thoughts that are so correctly described by our questioner.

H.P. Blavatsky, however, never uses the word “god” in the sense of “Ruler on life and death”. In fact, she rarely uses the word “god” (singular). In *The Secret Doctrine* you will find 156 references to the word “gods” (plural). Moreover, she always writes “gods” with a small letter, indicating that we are not talking about absolute supreme beings, but about a group of beings that have evolved beyond man. That is why Mrs. Blavatsky also frequently uses synonyms for gods. For example, in *The Secret Doctrine* she uses the term Dhyān Chohans 88 times, and 44 times Dhyanis, words that you can translate with gods. Furthermore, synonyms such as Elōhīm, Pitrīs, Mānasaputras, Kumāras, Agnishwāttas are used. Although there are certainly nuances in these beings, they never have the meaning given to “god” in Christianity.

Not without reason H.P. Blavatsky uses so many synonyms. If she had used only one word, our thoughts would crystallize. Then came the idea of an anthropomorphic god outside us. All these names indicate beings who relate to us, humans, as we relate to animals. They are one or more steps higher on

H.P. Blavatsky and gods

Mrs. Blavatsky states that we all can become gods. This idea is not easy to understand. That is the reason why the concept of “gods” has kept me from Theosophy for years.

If Mrs. Blavatsky had called the Monads who had outgrown the earth, lofty or elevated souls, or heavenly beings, then undoubtedly the public attention would have been greater. After all, in the West the term “God” stands for “Ruler over life and death”, creator, judge, protector, punisher and last but not least, (see history) a God must be worshiped. In my opinion, our circle

the hierarchical ladder of life. They differ from us only to the extent that they have developed their inner, divine qualities. They have done that relatively perfectly; we have hardly begun. Moreover, gods are not separate from man, but in a certain sense form our higher nature.

The dilemma we are facing now is whether we should no longer use the word "gods" because there are people who take this word in the anthropomorphic sense and who want to worship them.

However, you can ask yourself whether this anthropomorphic vision is due to the word or to the ideas of so many people about life, death, the cosmos, etc. If we invented another word for god, that new name would evoke as many misunderstandings in people who look at it from a monotheistic or from a materialistic point of view; the problem lies mainly in the way we think. The problem is not the name but our fixed thinking patterns that hinder an open mind. "Lofty" or "elevated souls" is not a good alternative according to us. That term gives the impression that you are talking about humans; maybe about ascended souls. Perhaps people even think of dead souls. A soul is a general term: there are animal, human and divine souls. A term like "heavenly beings" also has its disadvantages. This gives the impression that they are a kind of angels who live "above us" in a vague heaven. That can be interpreted very materially, and there is a great chance that it will be misunderstood completely. That is why, following Mrs. Blavatsky, we often use Sanskrit terms, because they give the meaning in all their nuances very well, and cause less misunderstandings. But you cannot put those on a poster or flyer. Actually, the name of the divine beings is of minor importance as long as the

image is correct. Mystical Buddhists will probably talk about the inherent Buddha nature of each being and that each being will eventually become a Buddha. That is the same idea as when we say that in the core of our being we are a spiritual-divine being and that we can develop that being. That is incredibly inspiring. We humans are gods-in-the-making! This doctrine makes a strong appeal to our responsibility to develop that inner divinity.

If we changed the word "gods" because of the incomprehension in society, then the genie is out of the bottle. Then we would no longer be able to use words like "hierarchy" or "evolution" and even "karma", because there is a great chance that they will be misunderstood or because they are socially or politically "not in fashion", or perhaps they have a negative or an incorrect connotation. H.P. Blavatsky would never have named her magazine *Lucifer*. There are even people who don't like the word "brotherhood", because they say that that word excludes women, while we say that it refers to the higher nature of man which is sexless.

Anyway, all these kinds of trends and fashions come and go, but Theosophy brought by H.P.B. has existed for over 140 years – in fact, it exists of course as long as mankind exists – and it will last for many more centuries.

The Theosophical Society is set for the long term. If even Gautama the Buddha could not spread his ideas among all layers of society in his lifetime, how can you expect this from us? Nevertheless, it is our firm belief that if we hold true to the guidelines as given by the actual founders of the T.S, we will continue to exist during the coming centuries, in which more and more people come to know the theosophical ideas.

Finally, we want to say something about the small group of Theosophists. It is

true, we are a relatively small circle. A small group of sincere seekers of Truth is a greater blessing to mankind than a large group of followers. If that small group works closely together and is faithful to the original idea of the T.S., then it will exert a magnetic effect on society and bring more and more people under its influence.

Initiation

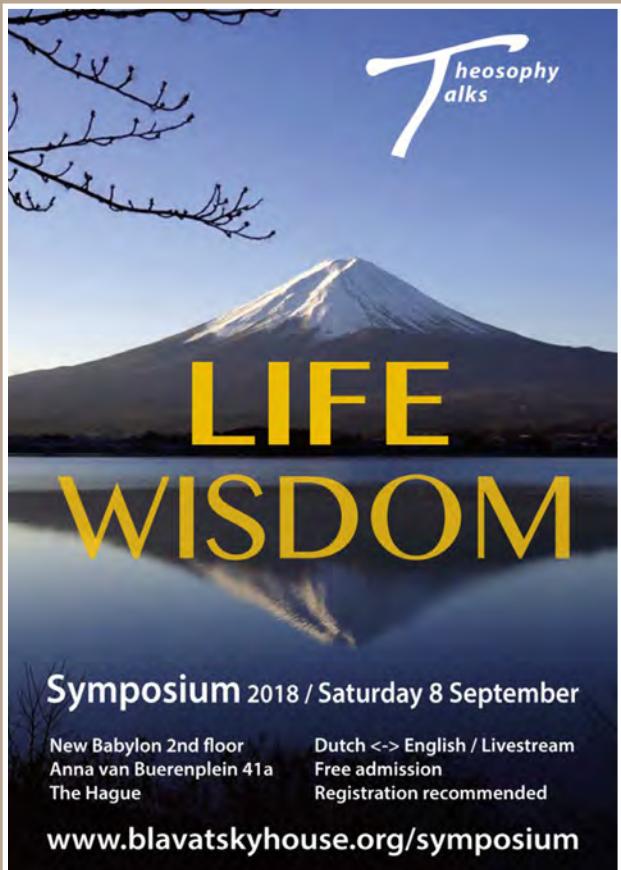
There are seven initiations. From the fourth initiation the soul of the initiator goes to the planets. Is the initiate dead during this process or is he alive?

Answer

No, the initiate himself – that is, the spirit-soul – is not dead, he is alive and kicking! It is the body – the external vehicle – that is seemingly lifeless during the initiation. It is guarded by the Teachers of the initiate.

Each human consciousness when dying, yes, even when falling asleep, goes out of the body and travels along the inner paths – the circulations – of the cosmos; the personal man or woman, however, is not aware of it. At the higher initiations the same process takes place as during death or sleep, albeit the initiated man is now conscious of it. He consciously travels through the portals of death and therefore gains firsthand knowledge.

Symposium 2018



The fantastic theosophical knowledge that offers a solution to all life issues is unfortunately little known. A wisdom knowledge that shows like no other how to find answers within yourself. During this symposium on 8 September in The Hague you will be able to discover your potential to find the answers how to solve life's issues.

The theme of this year is *Life wisdom*. We want to turn this event into an experiential symposium by giving you the opportunity to choose one or more life issues (to be decided on the spot), and to approach these together from that theosophical wisdom of life. We will not tell you what to do, but we will clarify the processes in Nature, the laws, so you can make the best choices yourself. Since we are convinced that if you have knowledge of these laws, you can make a better and more conscious choice.

We invite you take up this challenge and like to see you Saturday September 8th!

For more information:
<http://www.isis-foundation.org/symposium/>.

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Conferences**

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ITC has its annual conference this year in Berlin. The theme is: ***What is a life worth living?***

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Colophon

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I.S.I.S. Foundation

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The object of the Foundation is to form
a nucleus of Universal Brotherhood by
disseminating knowledge about the spiritual
structure of human beings and the cosmos,
free from dogma.

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brochures and other publications, and by
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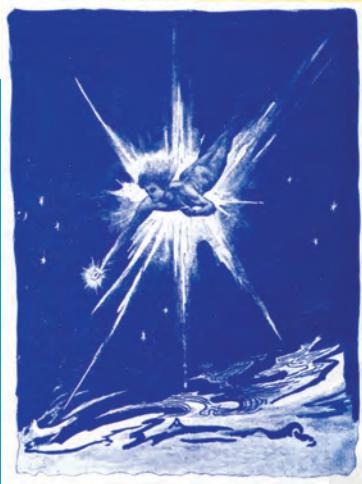
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I.S.I.S. Foundation

The activities of the I.S.I.S. Foundation (International Study-centre for Independent Search for truth) are based on:

1. The essential unity of all that exists.
2. By reason of this unity: brotherhood as a fact in nature.
3. Respect for everyone's free will (when applied from this idea of universal brotherhood).
4. Respect for everyone's freedom to build up their own view of life.
5. To support the developing of everyone's own view of life and its application in daily practice.



Why this journal is called *Lucifer*

Lucifer literally means Bringer of Light.

Each culture in the East and West has his bringers of light: inspiring individuals who give the initial impulse to spiritual growth and social reform. They stimulate independent thinking and living with a profound awareness of brotherhood.

These bringers of light have always been opposed and slandered by the establishment. But there are always those who refuse to be put off by these slanderers, and start examining the wisdom of the bringers of light in an open-minded and unprejudiced way.

For these people this journal is written.

“... the title chosen for our magazine is as much associated with divine ideas as with the supposed rebellion of the hero of Milton’s *Paradise Lost* ...”

We work for true Religion and Science, in the interest of fact as against fiction and prejudice. It is our duty – as it is that of physical Science – to throw light on facts in Nature hitherto surrounded by the darkness of ignorance ... But natural Sciences are only one aspect of SCIENCE and TRUTH. Psychological and moral Sciences, or theosophy, the knowledge of divine truth, are still more important ...”

(Helena Petrovna Blavatsky in the first issue of *Lucifer*, September 1887)