

COURSE SYNTHESIS NO. 25

IS MAN IMMORTAL ?

An inner path permits us to understand that immortality is to be found outside the linear progression of time, outside of the past, present, and future. We must understand time's true meaning in order to go beyond our customary notion of time and live in a wholly different dimension.

Supposing we were to become immortal, this would mean we would no longer die. But all that is of this earth is bound to the iron law of life, deterioration, and death, and this is thus not the level at which immortality is to be found. Immortality belongs instead to the level of another world, which we can call the spiritual or higher world.

Man possesses what can be called a first body, the body he is born with. It is composed of a physical body (his instinctive and moving centers), a body of life or etheric body (his sexual center), an astral body (his emotional center), and what is called, in anthroposophy, the spirit or lower I (his intellectual center). At the moment of death, this first body – his physical body, emotions, and thoughts – disappears. Even what we hold to be great and elevated feelings, such as love, are generally connected to earthly things and accordingly disappear at the moment of death.

But there exists in man something that is more subtle. The religions and spiritualities call it the soul or spirit, and Psychoanthropology calls it the seed of the spirit or essence.

At birth this seed of the spirit incarnates in a physical body, and after death it parts from this body. This essence, being of a spiritual nature, requires spiritual nourishment in order to grow. But if it is not nourished, or not nourished appropriately, it either deteriorates or returns, at the moment of death, to the same state at which it found itself at birth. Work is possible, and necessary, in order for this essence to grow.

A second birth is thus possible beyond the earthly level, and this is not a birth of the physical body, but of something of a higher nature; Anthroposophy calls this the spiritual I, and in Psychoanthropology we call it the higher emotional center or the true soul. In order for this birth to take place, the essence must transform the lower emotional and intellectual centers.

And even beyond this, a third birth is possible, that of the higher intellectual center, which Anthroposophy calls the spirit of life, as it is born of the transformation of the forces of life of the etheric body (or sexual center). This is the birth of man's third body.

The transformation of the physical body can continue still further, giving birth to a fourth body, known as the spirit-man. In Christian mysticism this is spoken of as complete mystical union with God. When this fourth body has been created, the higher emotional and higher intellectual centers are connected with each other.

Thus each lower center may be transformed and give birth to a higher body. When this transformation has taken place completely, man has given birth to what is immortal in himself, and this part of him is no longer material, neither at the level of the physical body nor at the level of the vital energies, emotions, or thoughts. This is what Christ, in the tale of Nicodemus, calls "a second birth."

When Christ was resurrected, this did not occur in his physical body but in a body with wholly different potentialities, such as the capacity to appear physically

in certain places at certain moments. The Buddha also had this faculty, as did Saint Columban. This is simply the sign of a spirit that has acquired certain powers over matter, namely of recreating, synthesising, or reconcentrating it at will.

During his life, Christ outwardly manifested the acts that were traditionally performed in the mystery schools. His three days in the tomb, for example, correspond to an initiatic practice in which the essence or spirit was permitted to separate itself from the physical body, which remained alive although dead in appearance and preserved in a sarcophagus. Over the course of these three days, the spirit, now detached from the contingencies of a material body, was able to follow a truly spiritual teaching. At the end of the process of initiation, the spirit was permitted to reintegrate itself into the physical body once again.

But Christ carried this process even further during three-day sojourn in the tomb; when he reemerged, he was reborn physically transformed, spiritualising matter in the process. This is a principle that can be found in all spiritualities and schools of wisdom, namely the transformation (or redemption, in the language of the religions) of matter by the spirit.

We can better understand this process by examining it from the perspective of energies. The different bodies correspond to different worlds. The physical body is bound to the terrestrial world and accordingly subject to 48 series of laws. The second body, the transformed astral body or higher emotional center, is connected to the world of the planets and is under the influence of 24 laws. The third body, the life body, is connected to the forces of life, the solar forces, which are governed by 12 series of laws. As for the fourth body, the divine spark in Man, it is in relationship with the world of all suns and under the influence of 6 laws. Someone who has succeeded in developing all the elements of his higher nature is in contact with the laws of these higher worlds and is capable of having an influence on all the levels below. Thus the physical body is subject to the principle of death, and the astral world to the principle of karma, which permits reincarnation in another physical body that corresponds to the nature of one's soul. But only by developing the third and fourth bodies does man become truly immortal and escape from the cycle of time.

Our time is the time of the sun, which is in connection with the third body. This is the level of the great initiates. But when man has developed a fourth body, he is only under the influence of the six laws of the world of "all suns," the level of the Bodhisattvas who have gone beyond the limits of time and who no longer have a need to reincarnate, deciding to reincarnate nonetheless in order to help humanity in its evolution.

The human soul is a spark. It may either burn for a brief instant, the duration of one life, or it may be kindled, set ablaze with what is known as the sacred fire, the fire that consumes all that is negative in man. But this fire is kindled very rarely. Our spiritual dimension is developed only when we nourish it; otherwise it is either extinguished when our life has reached its end, or it still preserves enough force in order to reincarnate further, but this time with a more difficult karma or in another life that is identical to the preceding one.

So the atheists are right when they say that life is finished when they die, since they have themselves cultivated nothing higher. And the spiritualists are right when they maintain that something exists after death, but they often forget that this something can only really exist when it is nourished and developed. Thus everyone is right, but each at his own level.

The human mechanism functions quite well without us needing to do anything in particular. But to attain to another level, we have to make efforts; we must earn our immortality, we must deserve it. This is very much a long-term work, and we understand this the moment we have begun to follow an inner path – for man's essence has been covered over by layers upon layers since he was two or three years old, under the influence of both his education and his life experiences. In order for this essence to be born again, a long work is necessary, for this work permits us to see, one after the other, the different layers that conceal it. The first step is simply knowing that this higher dimension in oneself exists, since only with this knowledge does non-identification become possible. As long as we are identified with external things, with our unending flow of mechanical thoughts, with our automatic, reactive emotions, we have no access to our essence, and this is unfortunately the lot of most men and women. Even if they are otherwise able to realise many great and beautiful things, they do not develop their essence, since the goals of the personality and the goals of the essence are very different. At the beginning of the spiritual path, our goals are determined by our personality – we want to become better, to acquire new knowledge, and so on. But only when our essence begins to develop through the efforts we make do the genuine higher goals gradually reveal themselves.

These efforts include observation as well as meditation and understanding, which progressively shed light on the different aspects of our personality, permitting us to diminish its influence and finally overcome it altogether. Then our essence, which has become stronger and stronger in the process, can manifest itself to an ever greater extent and become aware of its real goals on the Path.

Our efforts of observation gradually lead to the creation of a new center in ourselves, our magnetic center, which is also the beginning of our Higher I, and this new center permits us to no longer react according to the whim of external events, but to orient our life according to our inner goals. We then become increasingly free with respect to our external life. Our center of gravity is no longer oriented simply toward material contingencies, but is directed toward a higher goal.

We can only progress when we gather together several little "I's" who unite at the service of a common goal, the goal of evolution. Then our essence can grow and become stronger, giving birth to the second body we spoke of. This second body, incidentally, requires energy in order to grow – not H 48, which is bound to the earth, but a subtler energy. This energy consists firstly in H 24, which is in relation to karma and the world of the planets, a certain quantity of which man already has to begin with, and secondly in H 12, an energy that is at the level of the solar world.

In conclusion, someone who contents himself merely with earthly impressions must naturally remain at the earthly level.