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The Seven Eternities

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Q. *What are the “Seven Eternities,” and how can there be such a division in Pralaya, when there is no one to be conscious of time?*

A. The modern astronomer knows the “ordinances of Heaven” by no means better than his ancient brother did. If asked whether he could “bring forth Mazzaroth¹ in his season,” or if he was with “him” who “spread out the sky,” he would have to answer sadly, just as Job did, in the negative. Yet this in no wise prevents him from speculating about the age of the Sun, Moon, and Earth, and “calculating” geological periods from that time when there was not a living man, with or without consciousness, on earth. Why, therefore, should not the same privilege be granted to the ancients?

Q. *But why should the term “Seven Eternities” be employed?*

A. The term “Seven Eternities” is employed owing to the invariable law of analogy. As Manvantara is divided into seven periods, so is Pralaya; as day is composed of twelve hours so is night. Can we say that because we are asleep during the night and lose consciousness of time, that therefore the hours do not strike? Pralaya is the “Night” after the Manvantaric “Day.” There is no one by, and consciousness is asleep with the rest. But since it exists, and is in full activity during Manvantara; and since we are fully alive to the fact that the law of analogy and periodicity is immutable, and, being so, that it must act equally at both ends, why cannot the phrase be used?

Q. *But how can an eternity be counted?*

A. Perhaps the query arises owing to the general misunderstanding of the term “Eternity.” We Westerns are foolish enough to speculate about that which has neither beginning nor end, and we imagine that the ancients must have done the same. They did not, however: no philosopher in days of old ever took “Eternity” to mean beginningless and endless duration. Neither the Aeons of the Greeks nor the Neroses convey this meaning. In fact, they had no word to convey this precise sense. Parabrahm, Ain-Soph, and the *Zeruana-Akerne* of the *Avesta* alone represent such

¹ [Mazzaroth (Hebrew) [probably from the verbal root *nazar* to consecrate] The consecrated or holy; the twelve constellations of the zodiac. The more common form of the word is Mazzaloth [from *nazal* to flow, distil, run] with reference to the universal belief that the celestial bodies distil or flow forth influences affecting the earth and all beings on it. — *Encyclopedic Theosophical Dictionary*]



an Eternity; all the other periods are finite and astronomical, based on tropical years and other enormous cycles. The word Aeon, which in the Bible is translated by Eternity, means not only a finite period, but also an angel and being.

Q. *But is it not correct to say that in Pralaya too there is the “Great Breath”?*

A. Assuredly: for the “Great Breath” is ceaseless, and is, so to speak, the universal and eternal *perpetuum mobile*.

Q. *If so, it is impossible to divide it into periods, for this does away with the idea of absolute and complete nothingness. It seems somewhat incompatible that any “number” of periods should be spoken of, although one might speak of so many out-breathings and indrawings of the “Great Breath.”*

A. This would make away with the idea of absolute Rest, were not this absoluteness of Rest counteracted by the absoluteness of Motion. Therefore one expression is as good as the other. There is a magnificent poem on Pralaya, written by a very ancient Rishi, who compares the motion of the Great Breath during Pralaya to the rhythmical motions of the Unconscious Ocean.

Q. *The difficulty is when the word “eternity” is used instead of “Aeon.”*

A. Why should a Greek word be used when there is a more familiar expression, especially as it is fully explained in *The Secret Doctrine*? You may call it a *relative*, or a Manvantaric and Pralayaic eternity, if you like.

Q. *Is the relation of Pralaya and Manvantara strictly analogous to the relations between sleeping and waking?*

A. In a certain sense only; during night we all exist personally, and *are* individually, though we sleep and may be unconscious of so living. But during Pralaya everything differentiated, as every unit, disappears from the phenomenal universe and is merged in, or rather transferred into, the One noumenal. Therefore, *de facto*, there is a great difference.

Q. *Sleep has been called the “shady side of life”; may Pralaya be called the shady side of Cosmic life?*

A. It may in a certain way be called so. Pralaya is dissolution of the visible into the invisible, the heterogeneous into the homogeneous — a time of rest, therefore. Even cosmic matter, indestructible though it be in its essence, must have a time of rest, and return to its *Laya* state. The absoluteness of the all-containing One essence has to manifest itself equally in rest and activity.

