

Spirit and Perispirit



**Spirit proper is the potency of the divine man.
Perisprit is the potential of the worldly man.¹**

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THE SAXON SPIRITUALISTS ARE RATHER CONFUSED between the spirit and the périsprit. Perhaps they do not distinguish the one from the other, describing the first by the word soul, the second by spirit. Theosophists do the opposite; for them the spirit proper is *Nous*, the spirit. The périsprit or *Psychē*, is the soul.

Theosophists accept no dogmas, *i.e.*, preconceived ideas or principles, to which everything must be subordinated. They seek truth with wisdom and in good faith, and are willing to accept it from whatever source, even at the cost of the sacrifice of what they have hitherto accepted. Whatever they may teach at the present moment, they are far from thinking that they have settled everything. Such a claim would be that of omniscience; it would be ridiculous. On the day when a new Oedipus shall have found the *complete* solution of that riddle of the ages: “What is man?” on that day the ancient and modern doctrines, the approximations of the Spiritualists themselves, will, like the ancient Sphinx, be flung into the ocean of oblivion.²

Theosophists, like the ancient philosophers and their pupil Paul, who said that the physical body was penetrated and kept alive by the périsprit, *Psychē*, consider man as a trinity: body, périsprit, spirit.

The Buddhists, who distinguish these three entities, divide the périsprit still further into several parts. Nevertheless, on the point of approaching perfection — Nirvāna — they hardly admit more than one of these parts: the Spirit.

The Greeks did the same, dividing the périsprit into life and the passional nature, or *Thumos*. The périsprit is thus itself a combination:

The physiological vitality, *Bios*;

The concupiscible nature, *Epithumia*; and

The ideality, *Phren*.

The périsprit is constituted of the ethereal substance that fills the universe, hence it is derived from the cosmic astral fluid, which is not spirit at all, because although intangible, impalpable, this astral fluid is objective matter as compared with spirit.

¹ [The former is Plato's *λογον*; the latter, Plato's *αλογον*. — ED. PHIL.]

² [Cf. “Oedipus and Sphinx unriddled,” in the same series. — ED. PHIL.]

Owing to its complex nature, the périsprit can ally itself intimately enough with the corporeal nature, to escape the moral influence of a higher life. In the same way it can unite closely enough with the spirit to partake of its potency, in which case its vehicle, the physical man, can appear as a God, even during his terrestrial lifetime. If such a union, of the spirit and the périsprit, does not take place, a man does not become immortal as an entity: the périsprit is sooner or later dissociated.

Plutarch says that at death, Proserpine separates the body from the soul (périsprit), after which the latter becomes a genius or *Daimōn*, free and independent. A second dissolution has to occur, under the action of *The Good*. *Demeter* separates the périsprit from the spirit. The first in time is resolved into ethereal particles; the second ascends, assimilates with the divine powers, and gradually becomes a pure divine spirit.

Kapila, like all the Oriental philosophers, made little of the périsprital nature. It is this agglomeration of gross particles, of human emanations teeming with imperfections, weaknesses, passions, the very human appetites, able, under certain conditions, to become objective, that the Buddhists call *Skandhas*, groups, the Theosophists, soul, Allan Kardec, the périsprit.

The Brāhmanas and the Buddhists say that the human individuality is not secure so long as man has not left behind with the last of these groups, the remaining vestige of terrestrial colouring. Hence their doctrine of metempsychosis, so much ridiculed but so little understood by our Orientalists themselves. Science teaches, indeed, that the material molecules that compose the physical body of man are, by the process of evolution, replaced by Nature into lower physical forms. Well, the Buddhists say the very same in regard to the particles of the astral body; they assert that the semi-material groups of the périsprit are appropriated to the evolution of lower astral forms and unite with them according to their degree of refinement. Consequently, so long as a discarnate man contains a single particle of these *skandhas*, some *parts* of his périsprit will have to enter the astral bodies of plants or animals. So if the astral man is composed of such material that Demeter cannot find a particle of spirit, the individual is dissolved, bit by bit, in the crucible of evolution. This is what the Hindus typify by a period of a thousand years spent in the impure bodies of animals. Theosophists are in essential agreement with this idea.¹

To Theosophists, the great characters, the geniuses, the poets, the true artists, are spiritually inspired, and are not — at least in general — simply mediums, passive instruments in the hands of their guides. They are, on the contrary, souls (périsprits) richly illuminated, *i.e.*, possessing the spiritual element in a high degree, and therefore able to collaborate with pure Spirits for the spiritualization and elevation of mankind.

In what relates to the phenomena of the périsprit and of mediumship, we believe that the purely passive medium cannot discern good spirits from bad, that to do so he must become a conscious mediator. We also know that though the incarnated man, even if a high adept, cannot compete in power with pure Spirits, who, being liberated

¹ [Cf. "Transmigration, Reincarnation, Gilgulim," in our Confusing Words Series. — ED. PHIL.]

from their *skandhas* have become subjective to the physical senses, they can at least equal and even surpass in the matter of phenomenalism what is produced by ordinary mediums.

Can a child, *i.e.*, a not completely developed man, who passes into the other world, exist there in the conditions prepared for the perfected types of his species, any more than a plant or an animal?

The child does not yet possess a spirit, so to speak; he is merely a soul, and his education has only affected his astral nature, has only dealt with externals.

The cycle of man is not complete so long as he has not passed through terrestrial life. Not one stage of trial or experience can be skipped; he must have been a man before he reaches the state of pure Spirit.

A dead child then is a failure of nature; it must be born again; the same *périsprit* must in such a case pass through the interrupted trial by means of another birth. The same for the congenital idiot. *These are the only cases of human reincarnation.*

If the child, indeed, who is only a duality, were immortal, why not the animals also? The triad alone survives.

At death, the *périsprit* becomes the outermost body; within it is formed a more ethereal body, and the whole is more or less overshadowed by the Spirit.

The Elementaries of the human body are, however, not always dissociated at bodily death; it may happen that by a supreme effort they are able to retain some of the third element, and in that way, slowly and with trouble, to ascend from sphere to sphere, throwing off at each step the heavier garment, and becoming clothed in more radiant vestures; finally arriving at perfection, disencumbered of every material particle, and becoming *unities*, Gods.

We said that the man who has not one spark of the divine spirit to save him after death can scarcely be distinguished from the animals.¹

There are some sad cases of this kind, not alone among the depraved but also among the wilfully blind and the out-and-out deniers. It is, indeed, the will of man, his sovereign power, that partly rules his destiny, and if a man persists in believing in annihilation after death, it will take place. The conditions of the physical life, the kind of death, very often depend on the will.

There are some persons who merely by the force of their resolution, escape the embrace of death, while others yield to trifling maladies. Now, what a man can do with his body, he can also do with his astral body, *i.e.*, with his discarnated *périsprit*.

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¹ Cf. "Woe for the living dead" in the same series. — ED. PHIL.]