

*The atom of matter is
permeated with Life and is
the vehicle of Life itself.*



Question by N. D. Khandalawala

First published in *Lucifer*, Vol. II, No. 7, March 1888, pp. 37-42.

Republished in *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (THE LIFE PRINCIPLE) IX pp. 72-80.

A few years back a very interesting controversy raged between several scientists of reputation. Some of these held that spontaneous generation was a fact in nature, whilst others proved the contrary; to the effect that, as far as experiments went, there was found to be biogenesis, or generation of life from previously existing life, and never the production of any form of life from non-living matter.

An erroneous assumption was made in the first instance that heat, equal to the boiling point of water, destroyed all life organisms; but by taking hermetically sealed vessels containing infusions, and subjecting them to such or a greater degree of heat, it was shown that living organisms did appear even after the application of so much heat. By more careful experiments, the following fact was brought to light, that spores of Bacteria, and other animalculae, which generally float in the air, can, when dry, withstand a greater degree of heat, and that when the experiments are made in optically pure air, no life ever appears, and the infusions never putrefy.

Along with the fact of biogenesis, we must note, however, Mr. Huxley's caution, when he says, that

. . . with organic chemistry, molecular physics, and physiology yet in their infancy, and every day making prodigious strides, it would be the height of presumption for any man to say that the conditions under which matter assumes the qualities called vital, may not some day be artificially brought together;

and, again, that

. . . as a matter not of proof, but of probability, if it were given me to look beyond the abyss of geologically recorded time, to the still more remote period, when the earth was passing through chemical and physical conditions which it can never see again, I should expect to be a witness of the evolution of living protoplasms from non-living matter.

Tracing inorganic matter upwards to the form which approaches most nearly to vital organisms, we come to those complex substances called "colloids," which are some-

thing like the white of an egg, and form the last stage of the ascending line from inorganic matter to organic life.

Tracing life downwards we ultimately reach “protoplasm,” called by Huxley “the physical basis of life,” a colourless, jelly-like substance, absolutely homogeneous without parts or structure. Protoplasm is evidently the nearest approach of life to matter; and if life ever originated from atomic and molecular combinations, it was in this form.

Protoplasm in its substance is a nitrogenous carbon compound, differing only from other similar compounds of the albuminous family of colloid by the extremely complex composition of its atoms. Its peculiar qualities, including life, are not the result of any new and peculiar atom added to the known chemical compounds of the same family, but of the manner of grouping and motions of these elements.¹ Life in its essence is manifested by the faculties of nutrition, sensation, movement, and reproduction, and every speck of protoplasm develops organisms which possess these faculties. The question has been asked whether this primitive speck of protoplasm can be artificially manufactured by chemical processes. Science has answered in the negative, as it knows as yet of no process by which any combination of inorganic matter could be vivified.

The law of evolution has now been satisfactorily proved to pervade the whole of the Universe, but there are several missing links, and, doubtless, the discoveries of modern science will in course of time bring many new facts to light on these obscure points which at present defy all search. Far more important than the question of the origin of species is the great problem of the development of life from what is looked upon as the inanimate mineral kingdom.

Every discovery of science, however limited it may be, affords food for thought, and enables us to understand how far we are to believe on the ground of observation and experiment, and how far we theorize in the right direction.

Science has not been able to prove the fact of “spontaneous generation” by experiment, but the best of scientists think it safe to believe that there must have been spontaneous generation² at one time. Thus far, scientific thought is in accord with esoteric teachings.

When life-energy is active, the atom of matter is “organic”; when dormant or latent, “inorganic.”

Occult philosophy has it, that motion, cosmic matter, duration, space, are everywhere. Motion is the imperishable life, and is conscious or unconscious, as the case may be. It exists as much during the active period of the Universe, as during Pralaya,

¹ Vide Mr. Samuel Laing’s new book, *A Modern Zoroastrian*. The whole of the work is well worth study, as it is as interesting as it is scientific. Several quotations have been made in this article from that excellent volume. — N.D.K.

Notwithstanding its excellency, it is a very materialistic work. — *H.P. Blavatsky*.

² Esoteric Science, holding that nothing in nature is inorganic, but that every atom is a “life,” does not agree with “Modern Science” as to the meaning attached to “Spontaneous Generation.” We may deal with this later. — *H.P. Blavatsky*.

or dissolution, when the unconscious life still maintains the matter¹ it animates in sleepless and unceasing motion.

. . . Life is ever present in the atom or matter, whether organic or inorganic conditioned or unconditioned — a difference that the occultists do not accept. . . . when life-energy is active in the atom, that atom is organic; when dormant or latent, then the atom is inorganic. . . . The “Jīva,” or life-principle, which animates man, beast, plant or even a mineral, certainly is “a form of force indestructible,” since this force is the one life, or *anima mundi*, the universal living soul, and that the various modes in which the various objective things appear to us in nature in their atomic aggregations, such as minerals, plants, animals, *etc.*, are all the different forms or states in which this force manifests itself. Were it to become, we will not say absent, for this is impossible, since it is omnipresent, but for one single instant inactive, say in a stone, the particles of the latter would lose instantly their cohesive property and disintegrate as suddenly — though the force would still remain in each of its particles, but in a dormant state. Thus the continuation of the sentence which states that, when this indestructible force is “disconnected with one set of atoms, it becomes attracted immediately by others” does not imply that it abandons entirely the first set, but only that it transfers its *vis viva* or living power, the energy of motion, to another set. But because it manifests itself in the next set as what is called Kinetic energy, it does not follow that the first set is deprived of it altogether; for it is still in it, as potential energy, or life latent.²

More than any other, the life principle in man is one with which we are most familiar, and yet are so hopelessly ignorant as to its nature. Matter and force are ever found allied. Matter without force, and force without matter, are inconceivable. In the mineral kingdom the universal life energy is one and unindividualised; it begins imperceptibly to differentiate in the vegetable kingdom, and from the lower animals to the higher animals, and man, the differentiation increases at every step in complex progression.

When once the life-principle has commenced to differentiate, and has become sufficiently individualized, does it keep to organisms of the same kind, or does it after the death of one organism go and vivify an organism of another kind? For instance, after the death of a man, does the Kinetic energy which kept him alive up to a certain time go after death and attach itself to a protoplasmic speck of the human kind, or does it go and vivify some animal or vegetable germ?³

¹ Esoteric Science does not admit of the “existence” of “matter,” as such, in Pralaya. In its noumenal state, dissolved in the “Great Breath,” or its “laya” condition, it can exist only *potentially*. Occult philosophy, on the contrary, teaches that, during Pralaya, “Naught is. All is ceaseless eternal Breath.” — *H.P. Blavatsky*.

² *Five Years of Theosophy*, original ed., pp. 534-35.

[This long passage is from H.P. Blavatsky’s explanation entitled “Transmigration of the Life-Atoms,” in reply to a letter from N.D.K., which was originally published in *The Theosophist*, Vol. IV, August 1883, pp. 286-88. The complete text will be found in Volume V (1883) of the present Series. Quoted sentences within this excerpt are from the 1st instalment of “Fragments of Occult Truth,” published in *The Theosophist*, Vol. III, October 1881, pp. 17-22. — *Boris de Zirkoff*.]

³ As far as the writer knows, Occultism does not teach that the LIFE-PRINCIPLE — which is *per se* immutable, eternal, and as indestructible as the one causeless cause, for it is THAT in one of its aspects — can ever differentiate individually. The expression in *Five Years of Theosophy* must be misleading, if it led to such an inference. It is only each body — whether man, beast, plant, insect, bird, or mineral — which, in assimilating more or less

After the death of a man, the energy of motion which vitalized his frame is said to be partly left in the particles of the dead body in a dormant state, while the main energy goes and unites itself with another set of atoms. Here a distinction is drawn between the dormant life left in the particles of the dead body and the remaining Kinetic energy, which passes off elsewhere to vivify another set of atoms. Is not the energy that becomes dormant¹ life in the particles of the dead body a lower form of energy than the Kinetic energy, which passes off elsewhere; and although during the life of a man they appear mixed up together, are they not two distinct forms of energy, united only for the time being?

A student of occultism writes as follows:

. . . *Jivātma* . . . is subtle supersensuous matter, permeating the entire physical structure of the living being, and when it is separated from such structure life is said to become extinct. . . . A particular set of conditions is necessary for its connection with an animal structure, and when those conditions are disturbed, it is attracted by other bodies, presenting suitable conditions.²

① Every atom has contained within it its own life, or force, and the various atoms which make up the physical frame always carry with them their own life wherever they travel. The human or animal life-principle, however, which vitalizes the whole being, appears to be a progressed, differentiated, and individualized energy of motion, which seems to travel from organism to organism at each successive death. Is it really, as quoted above, “subtle supersensuous matter,” which is something distinct from the atoms that form the physical body?

If so, it becomes a sort of a monas, and would be something akin to the higher human soul which transmigrates from body to body.

② Another and more important question is: — Is the life-principle, or *Jīva*, something different from the higher or spiritual soul? Some Hindu Philosophers hold that these two principles are not distinct, but one and the same.

the life principle, *differentiates* it in its own special atoms, and adapts it to this or another combination of particles, which combination determines the differentiation. The monas partaking in its universal aspect of the Parabrahmic nature, unites with its *monas* on the plane of differentiation to constitute an individual. This individual, being in its essence inseparable from Parabrahman, also partakes of the Life-Principle in its Parabrahmic or Universal Aspect. Therefore, at the death of a man or an animal, the manifestation of life or the evidences of Kinetic energy are only withdrawn to one of those subjective planes of existence which are not ordinarily objective to us. The amount of Kinetic energy to be expended during life by one particular set of physiological cells is allotted by Karma — another aspect of the Universal Principle — consequently when this is expended the conscious activity of man or animal is no longer manifested on the plane of those cells, and the chemical forces which they represent are disengaged and left free to act in the physical plane of *their* manifestation. *Jīva* — in its universal aspect — has, like *Prakriti*, its seven forms, or what we have agreed to call “principles.” Its action begins on the plane of the Universal Mind (*Mahat*) and ends in the grossest of the *Tanmātric* five planes — the last one, which is ours. Thus though we may, repeating after *Sāṅkhya* philosophy, speak of the *seven prakritis* (or “productive productions”) or after the phraseology of the Occultists of the seven *jīvas* — yet, *both Prakriti and Jīva are indivisible abstractions*, to be divided only out of condescension for the weakness of our human intellect. Therefore, also, whether we divide it into four, five or seven principles matters in reality very little. — H.P. Blavatsky.

¹ A dormant energy is *no* energy.

² *Five Years of Theosophy*, orig. ed., p. 512.

[This excerpt is from an article by Dharanidar Kauthumi, entitled “‘Odorigen’ and Jivātma,” which was originally published in *The Theosophist*, Vol. IV, July 1883, p. 251. H.P. Blavatsky appended a brief footnote to this original article, stating that Jivātma applies in this case to the 2nd principle of man, and not the 7th principle of the Vedānta School, and ought to be properly called *Jīva* or *Prāna*. — *Boris de Zirkoff*.]

③ To make the question plainer, it may be enquired whether occultism knows of cases in which human beings have been known to live quite separated from their spiritual soul?

A correct comprehension of the nature, qualities, and mode of action of the principle, called “Jīva,” is very essential for a proper understanding of the very first principles of Esoteric Science, and it is with a view to elicit further information from those who have kindly promised to give help to the Editors of *Lucifer* on deep questions of the science, that this feeble attempt has been made to formulate a few questions which have been puzzling almost every student of Theosophy.

Ahmedabad

N. D. K.¹

Reply by H. P. Blavatsky

① Modern Science, tracing all vital phenomena to the molecular forces of the original protoplasm, disbelieves in a *Vital Principle*, and in its materialistic negation laughs, of course, at the idea. Ancient Science, or Occultism, disregarding the laugh of ignorance, asserts it as a fact. THE ONE LIFE — is deity itself, immutable, omnipresent, eternal. It is “subtle supersensuous matter” on this lower plane of ours, whether we call it one thing or the other; whether we trace it to the “Sun-force” — a theory by B.W. Richardson, F.R.S. — or call it this, that, or the other. The learned Dr. Richardson — an eminent authority — goes further than words, for he speaks of the life-principle as of “a form of MATTER.” (!!) Says the great man of science:

I speak only of a veritable material agent, refined, it may be, to the world at large, but actual and substantial: an agent having quality of weight and of volume; an agent susceptible of chemical combination, and thereby of change of physical state and condition; an agent passive in its action, moved always, that is to say, by influences apart from itself, obeying other influences; an agent possessing no initiative power, no *vis*, or *energia naturae*, but still playing a most important, if not a primary part in the production of the phenomena resulting from the action of the *energia* upon visible matter.²

As one sees, the Doctor plays at blind man’s buff³ with occultism, and describes admirably the passive “life-elementals” used, say, by great sorcerers to animate their *homunculi*.⁴ Still the F.R.S. describes one of the countless aspects of our “subtle supersensuous-matter-life-principle.”

¹ [These initials stand for Navroji Dorabji Khandālawala, who was a highly respected Judge and staunch friend of the Founders. He was initiated into the Theosophical Society on March 9th, 1880, and later became President of the Poona Branch of the T.S. — *Boris de Zirkoff*.]

² [*Theory of a Nervous Ether*, p. 363]

³ [A traditional children’s game, wherein the word buff is used in its older sense of a small push.]

⁴ [Plural of *homunculus*, Latin for little man, from the masculine diminutive form of *homo*, man. The term has been popularised in 16th century alchemy and 19th century fiction, in reference to the creation of a miniature, fully formed human being.]

② And the Hindu philosophers are right. It is here that we have real need of the divisions of everything — Prakriti, Jīva, *etc.*, — into principles to enable us to explain the action of *Jīva* on our low planes without degrading it. Thence, while the Vedāntin philosopher may be content with four principles in his universal Cosmogony, we occultists need at least *seven* to enable ourselves to understand the difference of the Protean nature of the life-principle once it acts on the five lower spheres or planes.

Our readers, enamoured with Modern Science, at the same time as with the occult doctrines — have to choose between the two views of the nature of the Life-Principle, which are the most accepted now, and — the third view — that of the occult doctrines. The three may be described as follows:

- 1 That of the scientific “molecularists” who assert that life is the resultant of *the interplay of ordinary molecular forces*.
- 2 That which regards “living organisms” as animated by an independent “vital principle,” and declares “inorganic” matter to be lacking this.
- 3 The Occultist or Esoteric standpoint, which looks upon the distinction between organic and inorganic matter as fallacious and non-existent in nature. For it says that matter in all its phases being merely a vehicle for the manifestation *through it* of LIFE — the Parabrahmic Breath — in its physically pantheistic aspect (as Dr. Richardson would say, we suppose) it is a super-sensuous state of matter, *itself* the vehicle of the ONE LIFE, the unconscious purposiveness of Parabrahman.

③ It is just this. A human being *can* “live” quite separated from his Spiritual Soul — the 7th and 6th principles of the ONE LIFE or “Ātma-Buddhi”;¹ but no being — whether human or animal — can live separated from its *physical* Soul, *Nephesh* or the *Breath of Life* (in *Genesis*). These “*seven souls*” or *lives* (that which we call Principles) are admirably described in the Egyptian *Ritual* and the oldest papyri. Chabas has unearthed curious papyri and Mr. Gerald Massey has collected priceless information upon this doctrine; and though his conclusions are not ours, we may yet in a future number quote the facts he gives, and thus show how the oldest philosophy known to Europe — the Egyptian — corroborates our esoteric teachings.

¹ [See “Woe for the living Dead” in our Constitution of Man Series.]