

Aion, Eternity, Duration



Quick overview of the terms.¹

- Eternity and “The Seven Eternities” differ.
- Cosmic Pralaya differs greatly from deep sleep.
- Duration is infinite. But time is a finite conception.²
- Duration contains time. But time has no duration.
- Space and duration are one and the same.
- One cannot image Space as not being, for Space always is.
- Aiōn (or Æon) is no “Eternity,” it is a finite period of time, and an emanation.

No philosopher in days of old ever took Eternity to mean beginningless and endless duration. Neither the Aiōns of the Greeks nor the Neroses³ convey this meaning. In fact, they had no word to convey this precise sense.

The word Aiōn, which in the Bible is translated by Eternity, means not only a finite period, but also an angel and *being*. In fact, Aiōn (AIΩ) is a permutation of the famous IAΩ. The **A** of AIΩ represents Spirit, linked to Matter **Ω**, by Mind **I**.⁴

¹ Selected by the Series Editor.

² [Cf. “The cycle of Mahāyuga, personified by Śesha — the great serpent called ‘the couch of Vishnu,’ because that God is Time and Duration personified in the most philosophical and often poetical way.

It is said that Vishnu appears on it at the beginning of every Manvantara as ‘the Lord of Creation.’ Śesha is the great Serpent-Cycle, represented as swallowing its own tail — thence the emblem of Time within Eternity. Time, says Locke (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*) — Time is ‘duration set forth by measures,’ and Śesha sets forth evolution by symbolizing its periodical stages. On him Vishnu sleeps during the intervals of rest (*pralayas*) between ‘creations’; the blue God — blue because he is space and the depth of infinity — awakens only when Śesha bends his thousand heads, preparing to again bear up the universe which is supported on them.” *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (FRAGMENT ON CYCLES AND MODERN FALLACIES) VII pp. 278-79. Also cf. “Churning the Ocean of Milk” in the same series.]

³ Naros or *Neros* (*Hebrew*). A cycle, which the Orientalists describe as consisting of 600 years. But what years? “There were three kinds of Neros: the greater, the middle, and the lesser. It is the latter cycle only which was of 600 years. (*Theosophical Glossary*: Naros)

Webster declares very erroneously that the Chaldæans called *saros*, the cycle of eclipses, a period of about 6,586 years, “the time of revolution of the moon’s node.” Berosus, himself a Chaldæan astrologer, at the Temple of Belus, at Babylon, gives the duration of the sar, or saros, 3,600 years; a *neros* 600; and a *soessus* 60. (*Isis Unveiled*, I p. 30 *fn*. See Cory, *Ancient Fragments*, pp. 32-35, 329-30: Berosus (fragment from Abydenus), “On the Chaldæan Kings and the Deluge”; and frag. from Theon of Alexandria in MS ex cod. reg. Gall. gr. No. 2390, fol. 154. Also, Eusebius, *Chronicon*, I, vi.)

As the Hindus divided the earth into seven zones, so the more western peoples — Chaldæans, Phœnicians, and even the Jews, who got their learning either directly or indirectly from the Brāhmins — made all their secret and sacred numerations by 6 and 12, though using the number 7 whenever this would not lend itself to handling. Thus the numerical base of 6, the exoteric figure given by Āryabhatta, was made good use of. From the first secret cycle of 600 — the Naros, transformed successively into 60,000 and 60 and 6, and, with other noughts added into other secret cycles — down to the smallest, an Archæologist and Mathematician can easily find it repeated in every country, known to every nation. Hence the globe was divided into 60 degrees, which, multiplied by 60, became 3,600, the “great year.” Hence also the hour with its 60 minutes of 60 seconds each. The Asiatic people count a cycle of 60 years also, after which comes the lucky seventh decas, and the Chinese have their small cycle of 60 days, the Jews of 6 days, the Greeks of 6 centuries — the Naros again. [*Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (SECRET CYCLES) XIV pp. 359-60]

⁴ Find out the difference between “Emanation and Radiation,” in the same series. For an in-depth analysis of the topic, consult “The Seven Eternities,” in our Secret Doctrine’s First Proposition Series. — ED. PHIL.

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From *The Secret Doctrine*, Stanza I, śloka 1

THE ETERNAL PARENT [*Space*], WRAPPED IN HER EVER INVISIBLE ROBES, HAD
SLUMBERED ONCE AGAIN FOR SEVEN ETERNITIES.

Space in the abstract is explained in the Proem¹ as follows:

. . . Absolute Unity cannot pass to infinity; for infinity presupposes the limitless extension of *something*, and the duration of that “something”; and the One All is like Space — which is its only mental and physical representation on this Earth, or our plane of existence — neither an object of, nor a subject to, perception. If one could suppose the Eternal Infinite All, the Omnipresent Unity, instead of being in Eternity, becoming through periodical manifestation a manifold Universe or a multiple personality, that Unity would cease to be one. Locke’s idea that “pure Space is capable of neither resistance nor Motion” is incorrect. Space is neither a “limitless void,” nor a “conditioned fullness,” but both: being, on the plane of absolute abstraction, the ever-incognisable Deity, which is void only to finite minds, and on that of *māyāvic* perception, the Plenum, the absolute Container of all that is, whether manifested or unmanifested; it is, therefore, that ABSOLUTE ALL. There is no difference between the Christian Apostle’s “In Him we live and move and have our being,”² and the Hindu Rishi’s, “The Universe lives in, proceeds from, and will return to, Brahma (Brahmā)”: for Brahma (neuter), the unmanifested, is that Universe *in abscondito*, and Brahmā, the manifested, is the Logos, made male-female in the symbolical orthodox dogmas. The God of the Apostle-Initiate and of the Rishi being both the Unseen and the Visible SPACE. Space is called, in the esoteric symbolism “The Seven-Skinned Eternal Mother-Father.” It is composed from its undifferentiated to its differentiated surface of seven layers.

“What is that which was, is, and will be, whether there is a Universe or not; whether there be gods or none?” asks the esoteric Senzar Catechism. And the answer made is SPACE.³

But why is the Eternal parent, Space, spoken of as feminine?

Not in all cases, for in the above extract Space is called the “Eternal Mother-Father”; but when it is so spoken of the reason is that though it is impossible to define Parabrahman, yet once that we speak of that first something which *can* be conceived, it has to be treated of as a feminine principle. In all cosmogonies the first differentiation was considered feminine. It is Mūlaprakriti which conceals or veils Parabrah-

¹ *Secret Doctrine*, I pp. 8-9

² [Acts xvii, 28]

³ *Secret Doctrine*, I pp. 8-9

man; Sēphīrah the *light* that emanates first from Ain-Soph; and in Hesiod it is Gaia who springs from Chaos, preceding Eros.¹ This is repeated in all subsequent and less abstract material creations, as witnessed by Eve, created from the rib of Adam, etc. It is the goddess and goddesses who come first. The first emanation becomes the immaculate Mother from whom proceed all the gods, or the anthropomorphized creative forces. We have to adopt the masculine or the feminine gender, for we cannot use the neuter *it*. From IT, strictly speaking, nothing can proceed, neither a radiation nor an emanation.

Is this first emanation identical with the Egyptian Neith?

In reality it is beyond Neith, but in one sense or in a lower aspect it is Neith.

Then the IT itself is not the “Seven-Skinned Eternal Mother-Father”?

Assuredly not. The IT is, in the Hindu philosophy, Parabrahman, that which is beyond Brahmā, or, as it is now called in Europe, the “unknowable.” The space of which we speak is the female aspect of Brahmā, the male. At the first flutter of differentiation, the Subjective proceeds to emanate, or fall, like a shadow into the Objective, and becomes what was called the Mother Goddess, from whom proceeds the Logos, the Son and Father God at the same time, both unmanifested, one the Potentiality, the other the Potency. But the former must not be confounded with the manifested Logos, also called the “Son” in all cosmogonies.²



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?

The modern astronomer knows the “ordinances of Heaven” by no means better than his ancient brother did. If asked whether he could “bring forth Mazzārōth 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?

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

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?

¹ *Theogony*, 201-46

² *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (TRANSACTIONS OF THE BLAVATSKY LODGE) X pp. 301-3

But how can an eternity be counted?

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 Aiōns of the Greeks nor the Neroses convey this meaning. In fact, they had no word to convey this precise sense. Parabrahman, Ain-Soph, and the *Zeruana-Akerne* of the *Avesta* alone represent such an Eternity; all the other periods are finite and astronomical, based on tropical years and other enormous cycles. The word Aiōn, which in the Bible is translated by Eternity, means not only a finite period, but also an angel and being.

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

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

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.”

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.

The difficulty is when the word “eternity” is used instead of “Aiōn.”

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 Pralayic eternity, if you like.

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

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.

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

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.¹



From *The Secret Doctrine*, Stanza 1, śloka 2

TIME WAS NOT, FOR IT LAY ASLEEP IN THE INFINITE BOSOM OF DURATION.

What is the difference between Time and Duration?

Duration *is*; it has neither beginning nor end. How can you call that which has neither beginning nor end, Time? Duration is beginningless and endless; Time is finite.

Is, then, Duration the infinite, and Time the finite conception?

A. Time can be divided; Duration — in our philosophy, at least — cannot. Time is divisible in Duration — or, as you put it, the one is something *within* Time and Space, whereas the other is outside of both.

The only way one can define Time is by the motion of the earth.

But we can also define Time in our conceptions.

Duration, rather?

No, Time; for as to Duration, it is impossible to divide it or set up landmarks therein. Duration with us is the one eternity, not relative, but absolute.

Can it be said that the essential idea of Duration is existence?

No; existence has limited and definite periods, whereas Duration, having neither beginning nor end, is a perfect abstraction which contains Time. Duration is like Space, which is an abstraction too, and is equally without beginning or end. It is in its concreteness and limitation only that it becomes a representation and something. Of course the distance between two points is called space; it may be enormous or it may be infinitesimal, yet it will always be space. But all such specifications are divisions in human conception. In reality Space is what the ancients called the One invisible and unknown (now unknowable) Deity.

Then Time is the same as Space, being one in the abstract?

As two abstractions they may be one; but this would apply to Duration and Abstract Space rather than to Time and Space.²



¹ *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (TRANSACTIONS OF THE BLAVATSKY LODGE) X pp. 307-9

² *ibid.*, X pp. 309-11

Suggested reading for students.



More commonly confusing words.

- ADULTERY, LUST, MALICE
- ADYTUM AND ASYLUM
- AETHER AND ETHER
- AGNOSTICISM, ATHEISM, MONISM
- APPREHENSION AND COMPREHENSION
- ASTRAL LIGHT IS A TERM VERY LITTLE UNDERSTOOD
- AURA AND MAGNETISM
- BUDDHA AND PRINCE SIDDHARTHA BUDDHA
- BUDHISM IS INNER WISDOM
- CELIBACY, CONTINENCE, MONASTICISM
- CHEMIST AND ALCHEMIST
- CHILIASTS, MILLENNIUMISTS, MILLENARIANS
- DARKNESS IS INNER LIGHT
- DEVOTION, WORSHIP, LOYALTY
- EMANATION AND RADIATION
- EMBLEM AND SYMBOL
- GRAIKOS, HELLENE, HELLAS
- HIGHER SELF AND HIGHER EGO
- IMAGINATION AND IMITATION
- JIVA AND JIVATMAN
- JNANA AND YAJNA
- KAMIC VERSUS MANASIC ACTION
- KARMA AND KRIYA
- KARMA, NEMESIS, ADRASTEIA, THEMIS
- KOSMOS AND COSMOS
- KRONOS AND CHRONOS

CONFUSING WORDS SERIES
SUGGESTED READING FOR STUDENTS

- LAUGHTER, SMILES, TEARS
- LIGHT AND HEAT
- LUST, JEALOUSY, PHYSICAL LOVE
- MAGNETISM, MESMERISM, HYPNOTISM
- MATERIALISM, SPIRITUALISM, MONISM
- MUZIRIS, MNIZURIN, MNOUZIRIS
- NIRVANA AND PARINIRVANA
- PANTACLE AND PENTACLE
- RAJA AND RISHI
- REMEMBRANCE, RECOLLECTION, REMINISCENCE
- SKANDHA, SHLOKA, STANZA, SUTRA
- SPIRIT, SPIRITS, SPIRITUALISM
- SPIRITUALISM IS A PHILOSOPHY OF YESTERDAY
- SVABHAVA AND SVAYAMBHU
- TELETE, MYESIS, EPOPTeia
- THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL OCCULTISM
- THEOSOPHIST AND THEOSOPHER
- TRANSMIGRATION, REINCARNATION, GILGULIM
- TRIRATNA AND TRISHARANA
- TRUE AND FALSE PERSONALITY
- UNITY AND DUALITY
- VACH IS NOT MERE SPEECH
- VEDANTA, BUDDHISM, THEOSOPHY
- VRIL AND BOVRIL
- WILL AND DESIRE
- YOGIS AND MAHATMAS

