



Spiritual Awareness Centre

(incorporating South Auckland Spiritualist Church)

Basic Spiritualist Terms

It is common experience to meet with words in current use the definition of which so various as to cause utter confusion. In Spiritualism there are a number of such words. Some of the more important or, at least, more widely used of these terms are defined in the following paragraphs, but it must be stressed that interpretation is always a matter of personal opinion.

The words 'soul' and 'spirit' are often employed indiscriminately to describe the invisible and immaterial part of man as distinguished from his visible and material body. However, one should be treated as separate from the other for each has a distinct meaning in relation to its function as an animating principle.

The Divine Essence

The spirit is the divine essence of all life. It is the source from which all created things emanate the power by which they are preserved and the condition to which they return. It is self-existent and impersonal. The soul or psyche is the individual self as distinguished from the universal self of which it is the reflection.

The universal self is identical with the spirit. In so far as the soul is the individual self it shines with the reflected light of the spirit or universal self. In this particular sense the soul is the same as the spirit and may be regarded as a particle of spirit, which has detached itself in order to pursue its individual development.

This development takes the form of a descent into matter for the purpose of learning by experience how to cope with and prevail over adverse or difficult circumstances. Having extended the range of its consciousness and gains a more profound insight into its own nature, the soul escapes from the bondage of ignorance and desire. The final stage of its evolution is a return to the source whence it came.

It may be said that from the time of its becoming an individual entity to the time of its being reunited with the supreme spirit the soul passes through four successive stages of evolution. The first is its descent into matter. The second is its acquisition of self-knowledge through suffering. The third is its deliverance from the limitations of the material universe. The fourth is its reunion with the supreme spirit or ultimate reality.

Having digested the fruits of its experience the soul fulfils its destiny by returning to the source of its existence. It enriches the supreme spirit with the knowledge it has acquired and the wisdom it has achieved. Its ultimate goal is the attainment of divine consciousness and the enjoyment of eternal bliss.

The Wheel of Rebirth

Its incarnation may have to be repeated many times before the soul is capable of liberating itself from imprisonment in the flesh. The wheel of rebirth continues to revolve until the soul has acquired sufficient knowledge of itself and sufficient insight into the nature of reality to make further incarnation unnecessary.

Between incarnations and before it has rejoined the supreme spirit, in an indissoluble mystical union, the soul continues to exist in a superphysical world where it assimilates the lessons it has been taught in its recent earthly life. When the process of assimilation has been completed the soul is ready to return to the earth and resume its spiritual education.

The next word to be examined for the purpose of correct definition is 'body'. This signifies a vehicle of consciousness. The soul possesses consciousness but, in order to know the objects of its consciousness, it requires having a means of relating itself to these objects, that is to say, a body.

The soul has several bodies and, as it exists on more than one plane each corresponds to a particular level of consciousness. Apart from the gross physical body there are gradations of more subtle embodiment.

When consciousness operates on a certain level the corresponding plan of existence becomes an objective world to the soul who perceives it.

Death brings to an end each incarnation. Shedding its physical body, the soul moves to another plane where the appropriate vehicle of consciousness is made of finer substance. This is called the astral body. All bodies consist of matter and all matter is simply solidified energy.

Since there are degrees of solidification the astral body is normally regarded as being less solid than its physical counterpart. But the solidity of matter is always relative to the plane on which it appears and, therefore, the astral body is as solid to the astral senses as the physical body is to the physical sense.

Two other terms remain to be defined. These are 'mind' and 'ego'. The mind is the inner instrument of the soul, which forms into ideas the impressions conveyed by the sense organs. It arrives at conclusions by a chain of reasoning. Its knowledge is indirect and ABOUT things rather than OF them. In this respect the mind is synonymous with the intellect.

The soul can obtain immediate insight into the nature of things without reasoning. Such direct perception of truth is called intuition.

Whether or not intuition is a mental or intellectual faculty is arguable but it certainly dispenses with the application of learning and logic. It is both an instantaneous recognition of reality and a spiritual illumination of the soul.

The Soul's Evolution

In so far as the ego is the individual self, which thinks and is conscious of its individuality, it represents an aspect of the soul. However, to the extent that the ego fosters false beliefs about selfhood by encouraging everything, which favours its own idealisation, it shows the soul, as a spiritual being, to be far removed from both its origin and its goal.

The soul's evolution requires the development of individuality. As this unfolds the ego is born. Since the nature of the ego is to be different from others, its growth indicates an essential stage of the process whereby the soul becomes aware of itself through discovering what is not itself.

Beyond a certain point the growth of the ego is detrimental to the soul's progress. The barriers with which the ego surrounds itself have to be broken down in order to allow the soul to blend with the greater life of the spirit. Getting rid of separateness diminishes the ego but this has to be done so that the soul can achieve its destiny which is identification with the absolute or ultimate reality.

It is to this reality that people refer when they speak of "God". To attempt any definition of God is absurd because what is absolute cannot be confined within the narrow range of human thought. If God is to be apprehended at all, it must be by means of intuitive perception rather than discursive reasoning.

*Taken from the Spiritualist Assn of Great Britain
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