

## PART 5

### *The Planes*

#### **Involution of Liberating Consciousness**

When the consciousness of the soul is ripe<sup>2</sup> for disentanglement from the gross world, it enters the spiritual path and turns inwards. Its gross impressions now become less deep. They become fainter or more subtle, with the result that the soul now becomes **subtle-conscious**. This is the first step in the involution of consciousness, which is striving for liberation from the burden of impressions. A number of cycles of births and deaths in the human form have to contribute towards that ripeness of gross experience, which ultimately propels the consciousness of the soul onto the path of liberating involution, on which impressions become fainter and fainter and eventually disappear. Gross impressions become subtle impressions; subtle impressions become mental impressions; and mental impressions are ultimately wiped out, leaving consciousness free to reflect the Truth.

The process of involution is generally gradual. Man's heritage of form as well as impressions is from animals, so the gross impressions are very strong. In extremely rare cases, the gross impressions can suddenly disappear, and the freed consciousness of the soul experiences the Over-Soul. But it is more usual for the gross impressions to become fainter and fainter (thus getting converted into subtle and mental impressions), and then fade away completely. As a general rule the soul, which has started on its homeward journey, does not come back to the gross world in which it had lost itself as if in a wilderness. This does not mean that the subtle-conscious soul does not take a gross form or dwell in the gross world with its

gross body. It means that the consciousness of the soul is no longer entangled with the gross form or the gross world, and that it is chiefly engrossed in the subtle world. As a general rule the soul first snaps its link with the gross world, then with the subtle world and lastly with the mental world, and comes to realize itself as beyond all these. While it traverses this path it crosses six planes, of which the first three belong to the subtle world, the fourth is on the border line of the subtle and mental worlds, whereas the fifth and the sixth belong to the mental world. The soul, abiding everlastingly in the Over-Soul, is beyond all planes.

### **First and Second Planes**

As the gross consciousness of the gross-conscious human soul gradually involves, this involving gross consciousness experiences partially the first plane<sup>3</sup> of the subtle world through the medium of the fully developed subtle body of the soul.

At this stage the involved gross consciousness of the gross-conscious human soul gets the first glimpses of the first plane of the subtle world and experiences these glimpses or impressions partially through the gross body and partially through the subtle body. Here both the gross and the subtle senses are used simultaneously.

This is the stage when it is said that the human soul stands as it were on the line of demarcation, as shown in the sketch,\* which demarks the gross world from the subtle world. The consciousness of this human soul experiences strange things. With his gross eyes he sees glimpses of the subtle plane, with his gross ears he hears celestial music of the subtle plane, and with his gross nose he enjoys subtle scents. In short, the gross-conscious human soul, partially on the first plane of the subtle world, experiences subtle impressions with gross senses.

Gradually, with further involution of gross consciousness, the gross-conscious human soul experiences completely the first plane of the subtle world. Now the gross-conscious human soul is no longer gross-conscious but he is subtle-conscious. This subtle-conscious

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\* Facing p. 55.

human soul gradually becomes conscious of the second plane<sup>4</sup> of the subtle world. This subtle world is the domain of infinite Energy, the infinite power of God, which when translated into the finite, here manifests in the form of the infinite energy of the subtle world.

When in human form the soul has subtle consciousness, it is unconscious of the body (gross) and mind (or the mental body); but it does work through the gross body and through the mind (mental body), not directly, but on the subtle plane.

So even if the subtle-conscious human soul is unconscious of the gross body and mental body and therefore does not realize the gross and mental worlds, he can use the gross body through various aspects of the gross, such as eating, drinking, sleeping, seeing, feeling, hearing, etc.; and he can use the mental body through various aspects of mind (mental body), such as desires, thoughts and emotions.

The subtle-conscious human soul on the second plane, with greater involution of consciousness, is gradually gaining consciousness of the infinite energy of the subtle world and is capable of performing tricks, or minor miracles of lower degree. For instance, with one wish he can make a dry tree green and vice versa; he can stop railway trains and motor cars, fill a dry well with fresh water, and so forth. This subtle-conscious human soul on the second plane experiences the subtle world with the subtle senses of his subtle body. He is now totally unconscious of the gross world, although from all outward appearances he remains and functions as an ordinary man—eating, sleeping and having feelings of pain and pleasure, etc.—yet actually his involving consciousness experiences not the gross but the subtle world and creates fresh subtle impressions only of the sights, scents and sounds of the subtle world.

### **Third Plane**

Further involution of the subtle consciousness of the subtle-conscious human soul makes the soul experience the third plane<sup>5</sup> of the subtle world. Here the subtle consciousness gains greater consciousness of the infinite energy of the subtle world

and the soul experiences greater finite power. Here he is capable of performing grand miracles such as giving sight to the blind and restoring limbs to the maimed. Here this subtle-conscious human soul is also capable of experiencing the different planes and worlds of the subtle sphere, just as a gross-conscious human soul is capable of travelling from Asia to Australia or America using the gross vehicles at his disposal.<sup>6</sup>

The second and third planes of the subtle sphere are the two major planes which are solely in the domain of the subtle sphere. The first plane is partially in the domain of the subtle sphere and partially in the gross sphere. Similarly the fourth plane is partially of the subtle sphere and partially of the mental sphere. This fourth plane is known as the threshold of the **mental sphere**.

#### Fourth Plane

With a gradual and further gain in the involution of the consciousness of the subtle-conscious human soul, the consciousness of the soul inclines the soul to experience the fourth plane. On the fourth plane the soul is fully conscious of **infinite energy**. It is the very same infinite energy which is the shadowy aspect of that infinite power of God. Here the soul is equipped with full power and is even capable of raising the dead and of creating new forms and worlds\* breathing with life. On the fourth plane there are no occult powers. They are divine powers.

As shown in the sketch facing page 55, the subtle-conscious human soul on the fourth plane, possessing the key to the store of infinite power, is seen on the threshold of the mental world, confronted by the full blast of intense desires and emotions which are the aspects of Mind of the mental world. At this stage, the soul experiences, as it were, a state of the darkest night. He finds himself caught up between the Devil and the deep. The overpowering incitement by intense desires to wield and use this infinite energy at will proves a treacherous foe at this juncture when the involution

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\* The *vidnyan*-conscious souls of *Qutub* state or Perfect Masters control such a happening and see that such gross mishaps do not come to pass unless preordained.

of consciousness of this subtle-conscious human soul is unfailingly progressing rapidly towards gaining mastery over all desires.

If these desires at their zenith overpower the soul on the fourth plane, and if the powers are misused, then the experience of liberating this infinite energy invariably proves fatal at this juncture for the soul on the fourth plane. The result is that all of the consciousness gained by the soul is violently disintegrated, and the soul retains only the most finite consciousness and identifies itself once again with the stone-form. This soul then has to pass through the whole process of evolution from the stone-form onward to regain full consciousness.

The soul of the fourth plane has semi-subtle and semi-mental impressions. He is subject to most tantalizing temptations because he has intense and overpowering desires, good or bad. Being in possession of tremendous power, he is impelled to make good or bad use of it. If he misuses his power for the satisfaction of lust or for the sake of craving for name and fame or for some other low purpose, there is a sudden fall of this consciousness of the soul, causing it to revert to the stone stage of consciousness. But if, by overcoming his temptations, he makes good use of his tremendous powers, or does not make any use of his powers, he goes into the fifth plane, where he is safe and has no possibility of downfall. But also if he makes good use of the powers, he is sometimes pulled up into the sixth plane by the *vidnyan*-conscious souls of *Qutub* state or Perfect Masters (but not *Jivanmuktas* nor *Majzoobs*).

Good use of power in the gross world may be directed towards material and spiritual ends. For example, wealth might be spent for the material well-being of others, as for charitable hospitals, relief for the starving and the distressed, etc., or for their spiritual well-being, by providing them with spiritual instruction and spiritual possibilities. But in the fourth plane, good use of powers invariably consists in harnessing them only for the spiritual well-being of others. These powers can never be used to bring about material prosperity for anyone. That definitely is a bad use. We might take the following as an example of good use of the powers of the fourth plane: Suppose a spiritual pilgrim is going through a desert and

is on the point of death due to unquenchable thirst. The soul of the fourth plane can appear to him in the gross body and give him relief by giving him a jug of water and then disappear. Such use can be termed good use.

Powers can be used for individual or collective good. **But even good use binds and arrests the further progress of the soul.** That is why the fourth plane is the most difficult to cross and is fraught with greatest dangers. The person who is stationed on the fourth plane finds it most difficult to abstain from wielding the tremendous powers at his command for the fulfillment of his overpowering desires.

The fourth plane is the threshold of the mental world. On this plane, more than on any other subtle plane, the spiritual pilgrim is particularly susceptible to having a precipitous fall. The crisis which confronts the soul of the fourth plane is grave and hazardous, because he comes into the possession of stupendous divine powers before having brought his mind into complete subjugation. He cannot control his mind completely because, unless and until he rises onto the fifth plane which is of the mental world, he cannot directly experience or use his mind. Like the gross-conscious human soul, the subtle-conscious soul of the fourth plane also uses his mind indirectly. Now on this fourth plane the mind is fully alive. It is functioning in all its fully developed aspects of thoughts, feelings and desires, which are at the zenith of their overwhelming intensity. On the one hand, the soul is trying to gain mastery over its own insurgent mind and bring into subjugation the subversive forces of desires let loose. On the other hand, the limitless energy of the planes is completely at his disposal and is constantly seeking some expression or use.

If the soul yields to the overpowering temptations to put his powers to wrong use, there is an enormous psychic crash of unimaginable magnitude. The explosive forces thereby released bring about a complete disintegration of consciousness, subjecting it to a cataclysmic downfall from the heights of the subtle consciousness of the fourth plane to the very lowest depths of rudimentary stone consciousness which the soul experienced in the very beginnings of

evolution. This psychic cataclysm of disintegration is comparable to the fusing of an electric bulb due to an irreparable short-circuit. The fallen soul has now no alternative except that of again going through the long and laborious ascent of evolving consciousness, through ages of evolution and reincarnation through numberless forms, and then again gradually and patiently ascending through the planes.

This disintegration of consciousness occurs only in the case of fourth plane consciousness and that, too, rarely—only when the powers of the fourth plane are misused. It is a fact normally that when consciousness is once gained it can never be lost, but the case of fourth plane consciousness is the one exception.

If the soul does not misuse the powers at his command but uses them for good without being overpowered by desires, then, with further involution of consciousness the consciousness of the subtle-conscious human soul sometimes experiences directly the sixth plane of the mental world and skips over the experiences of the fifth plane of the mental world.\*

But if this consciousness of soul on the fourth plane of consciousness neither uses nor misuses the powers of the fourth plane, then gradually, with further involution of consciousness, the subtle-conscious human soul on the fourth plane crosses the threshold of the fourth plane and enters the mental world on the fifth plane.

### Fifth and Sixth Planes

With greater involution of consciousness of the subtle-conscious human soul on the fourth plane, the consciousness of the subtle-conscious human soul identifies itself with Mind of the mental planes and experiences the mental world.

This Mind of the mental planes has two sections. In the first section the state of Mind is inquiring or reflecting. In this state Mind functions as thoughts—high thoughts, low thoughts; good thoughts, bad thoughts; material thoughts, spiritual thoughts; and so forth.

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\* Entry into the mental world comprising the fifth and sixth planes may be compared to an entry into a room after crossing the threshold—the fourth plane of consciousness.

In the second section the state of Mind is impressive or sympathetic. In this state Mind functions as feelings—feelings of sufferings, emotions; feelings of desires, longings; feelings of pangs, separation; and so forth.

When Mind of the mental world has distinct dual functions it is necessary that the experiences in the field of Mind (*i.e.*, the mental world) must be distinctively of two kinds also.

Thus the mental world has two domains—the domain of the fifth plane of consciousness of **Thoughts** and the domain of the sixth plane of consciousness of **Feelings**.\*

Therefore the consciousness of the mental-conscious human soul on the fifth plane<sup>7</sup> identifies with the first section of Mind only and is conscious of that state of Mind which is inquiring or reflecting Mind. Thus this mental-conscious human soul of the fifth plane is the creator and master of thoughts and is capable of controlling **only the thoughts** of all gross- and subtle-conscious souls. This is often misinterpreted as **controlling the minds** of all gross- and subtle-conscious souls. (He does not control the mind as a whole but controls only that state of Mind which functions as thoughts only.)

The mental-conscious human soul on the fifth plane of consciousness, while identifying himself as inquiring or reflecting Mind, emanates only thoughts, does not identify himself with the second state of Mind and is therefore incapable of establishing mastery over feelings, emotions and desires.

However, with greater involution of consciousness, the mental-conscious human soul on the fifth plane gains consciousness of the second state of Mind of the mental world in the sixth plane and thus tends to identify himself as that Mind in the second state—the impressive or sympathetic Mind. Thus the consciousness of the mental-conscious human soul has involved sixth plane consciousness of the mental world.

\* The difference between the involving consciousness of the fifth and sixth planes may be compared to the difference between the angles of vision of a man entering a room—the mental world. On entering the room, if the man looks straight ahead of him he spontaneously sees God face to face, thereby gaining directly consciousness of the sixth plane; but if his vision happens to focus on one of the corners of the room, then he first gains only the consciousness of the fifth plane.

The mental-conscious human soul of sixth plane consciousness experiences the mental world through complete consciousness of feelings and thus has no thoughts at all, but actually feels that he is conscious of the feeling of seeing God face to face continuously in everything and everywhere. He “sees”\* God continuously but cannot see himself in God as God. Therefore he cannot reconcile his feeling-of-sight of God with his own identity with God; and thus he longs for, feels for, has pangs for union with God Whom he “sees” face to face. This identification with the second state of Mind—feeling—is the predominant aspect of divine love which ultimately leads to union with God.

The fifth plane of the mental world is the state of full consciousness of thought, hence only mastery over the control and creation of thoughts is established, whereas no mastery nor control over feelings or emotions and desires is established.

The sixth plane of the mental world is the state of full consciousness of feeling, and thus mastery over the control and creation of feelings is established and no more scope is left for even a single thought to penetrate into the domain of feelings. The sixth plane consciousness is thought-less and governs the feelings of the gross- and subtle-conscious souls. This is often misinterpreted as mastery over the hearts of all gross- and subtle-conscious souls. (A soul with sixth plane consciousness does not govern or regulate the so-called heart but controls and governs that state of Mind in the mental plane which emanates feelings of emotion and desires.)

The loving of God and the longing for His union is really and fully demonstrated in the sixth plane; when even the sixth plane of the mental world is transcended, illusion vanishes and God is realized.

In the human form when the soul is mental-conscious<sup>†</sup> it is unconscious of the gross body and the subtle body; but it does work through the gross and subtle bodies, not directly, but on the

\* This is not to be confused with our ordinary way of seeing an object with our ordinary eyes. To “see” God face to face is to apprehend God through the one and only sense of the mental plane, and this sense is of “seeing.” Here the pilgrim has the intuitive recognition of God.

† [See also Meher Baba, “Mental Consciousness,” *The Everything and the Nothing* (Myrtle Beach, SC: Sheriar Foundation, 1995), 101–104. Ed.]

mental plane. So even if the mental-conscious human soul is unconscious of the gross body and the subtle body and therefore does not realize the gross and subtle worlds, he can unconsciously utilize the gross through various **aspects** of the gross and is thus seen eating, drinking, sleeping, seeing, hearing and feeling as an ordinary gross-conscious human being, though he is all the while conscious only of the mental world with his mental sense of "seeing." Similarly, he can unconsciously utilize the subtle through various gross **aspects** of energy in the form of nuclear energies, etc., while all the time being only conscious of "seeing" with his mental sense. The mental-conscious human soul in the mental world has now only one sense and that is of "seeing."

So this mental-conscious human soul on the fifth plane experiences the first state of the mental world with the mental body or the mind and gains consciousness of the first state of Mind. Here this soul is capable of controlling the first state of Mind (*i.e.*, thoughts of the gross-conscious and subtle-conscious human souls) but is now totally incapable of performing any miracles because of his total unconsciousness of the infinite energy of the subtle world and its powers. However, as this mental-conscious human soul controls the first state of Mind of the subtle-conscious human souls, the incitement in the subtle-conscious human soul to perform miracles is checked, controlled or aggravated according to the desire and will of the mind of the mental-conscious human soul, who is capable of creating and controlling thoughts of other minds and is himself stable and can never again slide down to any lower level of consciousness.

Gradually, as the involution of the consciousness of the mental-conscious human soul progresses deeper and deeper, he experiences mastery over the second state of Mind (*i.e.*, feeling) and he now becomes fully conscious of the mind or the mental body, and experiences the whole of the mental body on the sixth plane.<sup>8</sup> This experience is of "seeing" God face to face—seeing God everywhere and in everything.

Right from the first plane up through the sixth plane the involution of consciousness progressed gradually and steadily as the

consciousness of the soul had less and less frequent experiences of multifarious and diverse opposite impressions which grew fainter and fainter. Therefore, while the involution of the soul's consciousness was in progress, the diverse opposite impressions became gradually scarcer and fainter until the involved consciousness of the soul on the sixth plane is fully conscious of the mental body and experiences the mental world in full with practically no impressions at all except a faint last trace of residual impressions of opposites. That is, the involved consciousness fully identifies with Mind, and the soul tends to realize that he is Mind; and this soul, as Mind, has a last and total impression that he "sees" God face to face in everything but he cannot see himself in God.

This mental-conscious human soul of the sixth plane, almost void of all impressions\* and only conscious of mind, now is confronted with God face to face and sees God in everything but does not see himself in God because, being still conscious of mind, he takes himself as Mind. This mental-conscious human soul associates himself with mind, and is conscious of himself as Mind, and experiences himself as still something other than God. This mental-conscious human soul on the sixth plane actually "sees" God face to face more vividly and intensively than the gross- or subtle-conscious human soul sees objects of the gross or subtle worlds.

At this stage the consciousness of the soul, which had experienced diverse, innumerable and opposite impressions, now experiences the last trace of dual impressions of the opposites. This mental-conscious human soul on the sixth plane is still conscious of duality, identifying himself as mind and differentiating himself from God.<sup>9</sup>

### Seventh Plane

This experience of duality lingers on and on until the final involution of consciousness of the mental-conscious human soul

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\* Like an aching tooth that gradually works loose but does not fall out for a long time, the false ego remains until the last stage of the first spiritual journey, although it becomes increasingly faint as the soul advances on the Path, only to vanish forever in the final *fana* of the seventh plane, to be replaced by the unlimited Real Ego.

leads the soul to dissociate itself from the mind (the consciousness of the mind had objectified God), and makes the soul associate itself with its own Self—the Soul or *Atma*.

Thus the consciousness of the soul is now said to experience at last the consciousness of the seventh plane. Here on the seventh plane the Self-conscious human soul is conscious of himself as God and experiences infinite power, infinite knowledge and infinite bliss.

For the mental-conscious human soul to cross the sixth plane and experience the seventh plane by his own efforts\* is quite impossible.<sup>10</sup> At this stage the grace of a Perfect Master is absolutely essential to help the mental-conscious human soul to dissociate himself from the consciousness of mind and to make him realize his unity with the infinite state, to experience infinite bliss consciously and to realize that he (*atma*) was eternally in bliss.

So it is that the Self-conscious human soul of the seventh plane is now fully conscious of the Self as infinite and eternal and is now also conscious of the Source of energy and mind, which were nothing but the shadowy aspects of his own infinite power and infinite knowledge.

This Self-conscious human soul which is now Self-realized or God-realized, not only experiences infinite power, knowledge and bliss, but simultaneously radiates them. Sometimes, in certain cases, such Self-conscious human souls also make use of this infinite power, knowledge and bliss directly and consciously for the emancipation of other souls from their impressions and their respective associations with the gross, subtle and mental forms and worlds.

In its travail to gain Self-consciousness the individual eternal *atma* (soul), unconscious of its infinite state in *Paramatma*, gathered and experienced innumerable diverse impressions, and all the while associated itself with finite and ephemeral existences, unfurling the gross, subtle and mental worlds while evolving gross consciousness of the gross world and while involving consciousness of the subtle and mental planes of the subtle and mental worlds.

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\* However, those in the sixth plane of consciousness realize God at the time of dropping their bodies.

Involution of consciousness of the *atma* (soul), culminated by the grace of a Perfect Master, led the *atma* to Self-realization of its infinite state in *Paramatma*.\*

Thus it is that when the consciousness of the *atma* gained Self-consciousness and experienced infinite power, knowledge and bliss, the *atma* realized that it exists—eternally; that all through the travail to gain Self-consciousness, the impressions, experiences and associations of the gross, subtle and mental bodies and worlds were nothing but a vacant dream; and that the identification with gross bodies, creatures and human beings and all the experiences of the three worlds and the six planes, with all of their paraphernalia, had their relative existences sustained and maintained as long as the consciousness of the *atma* was immature. Maturity was only gained in the seventh plane with consciousness fully involved. This led the *atma* to realize the Self, or made the *atma* fully conscious of God-realization. In other words, the *atma*'s own infinite state in *Paramatma* was consciously realized.<sup>†</sup>

It is only after the final annihilation of the mind and the wearing out of the curtain of mental impressions that consciousness can function in full freedom from all impressional bindings. This means crossing the deep abyss which separates the sixth plane from the seventh plane. The seventh plane is the formless abode of the Highest of the High.<sup>‡</sup> The Most High or the infinite God as Truth

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\* *Sav bar tahirā daman hā thoj mire aya  
Jab ānkh khuli dikhā apna hī garibāj hai.*

—AsGar

“A hundred times I felt that I held your garment firmly in my hands;  
When I opened my eyes I was amazed to discover it was my own  
garment that I was holding.”

† The God-realized man is the Almighty, plus knowledge and consciousness. He is in the perfect wakeful state. He is knowledge, knower and the known. He is love, lover and the beloved. He knows that he is in every *jiv-atma* and that everyone is in him. The God-realized man knows that he is the be-all and the end-all of existence, and that he always was and will remain the same one, infinite Ocean of Truth. But the ordinary man does not know whence he came and whither he will go.

‡ [The reader is referred to Fariduddin Attar's *Mantiq-ut-Tayr*, a Sufi allegory generally known as *The Conference of the Birds*, for a delightful description of the journey through the planes. Ed.]

can be realized only by transcending the entire realm of imagination. Only on this seventh plane does the soul fulfill the initial urge for self-knowledge by experiencing its own Self as identical with the unchanging, eternal, indivisible and formless Over-Soul, with infinite knowledge, infinite reality (Truth), infinite power and infinite bliss.

# PLANES AND WORLDS

CHART I

