

Five Phases of Life Expression

NOTE: You are not expected to memorize the Hindu teaching given in the first part of this lesson. Neither is it unlikely that at this point in your studies you will be able to understand it fully. It is given for the sake of completeness, and because the terms employed will be used again and again in subsequent lessons. As you progress with this work you will gradually absorb, as it were, all these details, which now seem so formidable. For the present your chief concern is to learn the table given at the end of this lesson. Understanding comes later.

All possible modes of the Life-Power's self-manifestation are included in the operation of the three gunas or principles, which, in the preceding lesson, we identified with the three planes of consciousness. Yet we may extend our classification somewhat. If you will refer to the three divisions of the table given in lesson 2, a symbol to represent the undifferentiated Reality, which is experienced in superconsciousness, and another symbol to represent the apparent projection of these three principles in that illusive appearance named "Matter". We shall have the table of the five phases of life-expression, which is given at the end of this lesson.

We shall place the symbol of undifferentiated Reality at the top of the scale, because that which presents itself to our minds as being above superconsciousness is the Unmanifest, the Causeless Cause of all existence. The symbol for Matter, or for the innumerable combinations of the three gunas whose action and reaction builds the external world of Name and form, we place at the lower end of the scale. Our table of the five phases of life-expression will then be as follows:

- a. The UNMANIFEST, the Reality, the Causeless Cause.
- b. SUPERCONSCIOUSNESS, Sattva, Air, alchemical Mercury.
- c. SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS, Rajas, Fire, alchemical Sulphur.
- d. SUBCONSCIOUSNESS, Tamas, Water, alchemical Salt.
- e. The synthesis of b, c, and d in the various appearances of the world of Name and Form, symbolized as Earth.

Please remember that these are not five different things, but five aspects of One Thing. Remember, too, that the One Thing is LIFE, and that among all races of men this One Life has been given names that mean Breath. The current of this Great Life-Breath is called Svara in Sanskrit.

Rama Prasad tells us:

‘The proper translation of the word Svara is the current of the life- wave. It is that wavy motion which is the cause of the evolution of cosmic undifferentiated matter into the differentiated universe, and the involution of this into the primary state of non-differentiation, and so on. In and out, forever and ever. Whence does this motion come? This motion is the spirit itself.’— Nature’s Finer Forces, p.11.

In the Ageless Wisdom there has been always the knowledge that the Life-Breath presents itself to human consciousness in a fivefold manner. Presently we shall devote a considerable part of this lesson to an explanation of the Hindu doctrine on this subject, because the Hindus have stated the facts very definitely. It must not be supposed, however, that theirs is a unique statement. The same truth is expressed in many other ways. The Great Pyramid, for example, proclaims this fivefold aspect of the One Life, and even proclaims it in two distinct ways. In the first place, every pyramid is bounded by just five points; in the second, every pyramid has five faces. In the Secret Wisdom of Israel we find the number five associated with the conception of the undeviating justice of cosmic law. In practical occultism no sign has greater power than the Pentalpha or Pentagram, concerning which Eliphas Levi says:

“All mysteries of magic, all symbols of the gnosis, all figures of occultism, all kabbalistic keys of prophecy, are resumed in the sign of the Pentagram, which Paracelsus proclaims to be the greatest and most potent of all. It is indeed the sign of the absolute and universal synthesis.”

Hence the five phases of life-expression have been recognized by every school of the Ageless Wisdom, and if, in the first part of this lesson, I devote a great deal of space to the Hindu teaching, it is only because it is our experience that this particular version of the doctrine makes it easier for the student to grasp the other symbolic representations of the same truth.

In Sanskrit the five modifications of the current of the Life-Breath are called Tattvas. In Rama Prasad's Nature's Finer Forces (a book to which we shall frequently refer in this lesson), the term Tattva is thus defined:

- (i) A mode of motion.
- (ii) The central impulse which keeps matter in a certain vibratory state.
- (iii) A distinct form of vibration.

“The Great Breath gives to Prakriti (the substance aspect of Being) five sorts of elementary extension. The first and most important of these is the Akasha Tattva, the remaining four are the Prithivi, Vayu, Apas and Agni (or Tejas). Every form and every motion is a manifestation of these Tattvas singly or in conjunction, as the case may be. ”The Hindu symbols for these principles are based upon the actual operation of the five phases of the Life-Breath. I mean by this that the Hindu symbols are diagrammatic representations of the specific kinds of motion set up by the Tattvas. All day long these five phases of the Life-Breath follow each other in regular sequence, and the one that is “in course,” that is, active, at a given moment may be determined by breathing gently upon a mirror. The moisture of the breath takes the form of the Tattva then prevailing. AKASHA, first of the Tattvas, is the undifferentiated Life-Power, the source of all other manifestations of every sort and kind. For this unmanifest reality we can frame no satisfactory definition. To us it seems to be No-Thing, or we find ourselves thinking of it as perfectly empty space. On this account the sages of India say that SPACE is the property of the Akasha Tattva, and because space is omnipresent, that property is indicated by the teaching that the Akasha is all pervading.

The symbol for Akasha is a great EGG - a form which suggests the same idea as Einstein's conception that space is curved.

“The Akasha is the most important of all the Tattvas,” says Rama Prasad. “It must as a matter of course, precede and follow every change of state on every plane of life. Without this there can be no manifestation or cessation of forms. It is out of Akasha that every form comes and it is in Akasha that every form lives. (Compare this with the doctrine of the New Testament, “In him we live and move and have our being.” - P.F.C.)

“The Akasha is full of forms in their potential state. It intervenes between every two of the five Tattvas.” - Nature’s Finer Forces, p.19

Swami Vivekananda writes as follows:

“Akasha is the omnipresent, all penetrating existence. Everything that has form. Everything that is the result of compounds is evolved Out of this Akasha. It is the Akasha that becomes the air that becomes the liquids, that becomes the solids; it is the Akasha that becomes the suns, the earth, and the moon. The stars. The comets: it is the Akasha that becomes the body, the animal body, the plants, and every form that we see. Everything that can be sensed. Everything that exists.

It itself cannot be perceived: it is so subtle that it is beyond all ordinary perception; it call only be seen when it has become gross and has taken form. At the beginning of creation there is only this Akasha; at the end of the cycle the solids, the liquids, and the gases all melt into the Akasha again, and the next creation similarly proceeds out of this Akasha.” - Raja Yoga, p. 29.

The Science of Breath, a Sanskrit work translated by Rama Prasad, and published in the same volume with his book, “Nature’s Finer Forces, gives the following teachings about Akasha:

“5. Unmanifested. Formless, the one giver of light is the Great Power: from that appeared the sonoriferous ether (Akasha): from that had birth the tangiferous ether (Vayu).”

“6. From the tangiferous ether. The luminiferous ether (Agni or Tejas), and from this the gustiferous ether (Apas); thence was the birth of the odoriferous ether (Prithivi). These are the five ethers and they have fivefold extension.”

“7. From these the universe came forth: by these it continues: into these it disappears; among these also it shows itself again.”

“8. The body is made of the five Tattvas: the five Tattvas. O fair one. Exist therein in subtle form: they are known by the learned who devote themselves to the Tattvas.”

“165. The Akasha Tattva is the common surface of all, foreshadows the qualities of all the Tattvas. It gives Yoga to the Yogis. (That is. Akasha is what is perceived in the state of superconsciousness for this state is union with the One Thing which is No-Thing and that union is Yoga, or Cosmic Consciousness. P.F.C.)”

“169. Foreshadowing all colors, of the shape of an ear, bitter in taste, moving everywhere through the universe, the giver of Moksha (liberation) is the Akasha Tattva which is useless in all worldly works.”

“207. Meditate on the Akasha Tattva as formless, foreshadowing many colors, and as giving knowledge of the three times. (That is. as giving superconscious experience of the union of Past, Present and Future in an eternal NOW.)”

The Hindu symbol for Akasha, as has been said, is an ovoid, which represents the Great Egg of Chaos. Its color is given as black, deep indigo, or the deep violet-blue of the night sky.

Akasha is called the sonoriferous ether, or the subtle principle which takes form in our sense of hearing. Sound is the basic mode of vibration, because sound is produced by a smaller number of vibrations per second than is light. Thus sound-vibration is likened to the Egg from which Light is born. “Fundamentally, all forms of vibration are generated by and are transmutable into “sound” says Edward Maryon in Marcotone (p.6) “therefore sound is the origin, even as it is the architect and builder of form. Sound is the creator, preserver and also the destroyer of all forms; because all things depend upon the multiple variety of vibration for their infinite variety of form.”

This is merely a modern phrasing of an occult doctrine, which is either stated explicitly or else implied by the symbols in all the literature of the Ageless Wisdom. Precisely this is what is meant by the opening words of the Gospel according to St. John “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. By Him all things were made, and without Him was not anything made that was made.”

Practical application of the power of sound is the basis of the mighty works of those who know the secret of directing the currents of the Astral Light. To this power Patanjali refers in his Yoga Sutras, when he says, “Spiritual powers may be gained by incantations. The same power is utilized by many

primitive races, as for example by the Hopi Indians in this country, whose ceremonial dances combine sound with gesture to set up subtle nature rhythms which actually bring rain, a fact noted by more than one observer, and one which cannot be explained away by that convenient working “coincidence.”

Occult traditions with which you may have met in the course of your reading say that the mighty edifices of ancient Egypt were reared by the potency of sound vibration, and the story of Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves, in the Arabian Nights contains an echo of forgotten scientific knowledge of the same principle. Certain it is that modern electrical engineers could, without particular difficulty, make a device, which would unlock a door by transforming the sound-vibrations of the phrase, “Open, Sesame.”

The master of sound is master of every force in nature. VAYU, the tangiferous ether, or subtle principle of touch, is second in the order of the evolution of the Tattvas. Concerning it The Science of Breath says:

“Meditate upon the Vayu as being “phenomenal” sky-blue, and giving the power of movement and going space, “and flying like birds.”

The spherical form of the Vayu Tattva is that of the atmosphere which surrounds the earth. In this connection remember what Eliphas Levi says about the personal atmosphere that it is formed by the projection of the Astral Light. On the Hermetic principle of correspondence (“that which is above is as that which is below, and that which is below is as that which is above”) we may understand that the Vayu Tattva, as the earth’s atmosphere, is a projection of the current of Astral Light from the earth’s body.

Vayu is the principle of touch, not of smell, as might at first be supposed. For touch is the primary sensation from which sight, taste and smell are developed. Even hearing is loosely allied to touch, as we know from observations of the reactions of the deaf to sound. The higher sense organs are specialized from nerve centers, which respond to tactile sensations. Atmospheric sensations, such as heat or cold, the pressure of the wind, or the sensations caused by objects which modify the temperature of the air in their vicinity, are the roots of the higher senses. We have eyes because our animal ancestors felt the effect of sunlight upon their skins.

“The property of the Vayu Tattva is locomotion.” Rama Prasad says: “Vayu is a form of motion itself, for motion in all directions is motion in a circle, large or small. The Vayu Tattva has itself the form of spherical motion. When to the motion which keeps up the form of the different ethers is added the stereotyped motion of the Vayu, locomotion is the result.” — Nature’s Finer Forces, p.9.

The Science of Breath says; “The Vayu Tattva moves at acute angles, comes in flow eight fingers’ breadth downwards, is hot or cool in temperature. It gives success in those works which are transitory.”

AGNI or TEJAS, the luminiferous ether, or subtle principle of sight is thus described in The Science of Breath:

“Meditate upon the Tejas Tattva as being triangular, red, and giving the power of consuming a great amount of food and drink and the endurance of burning heat.”

The same work says: “The Tejas Tattva is red, moves in whirls, moves upwards, and comes in its flow four fingers downward, is very high in temperature. It gives birth to harsh actions.”

Expansion is the property of the Tejas Tattva. This we see when heat is applied to metals. Their molecules begin at once to expand. Hence on railroads space is always left between the ends of the rails, so that they will not buckle under the Tejas rays of the summer sun.

Similarly, the mental activities in which Tejas predominates are expansive, tending to break down barriers and liberate energy.

APAS, the luminiferous ether, or subtle principle of taste, is thus described: “White, semi-lunar, astringent, moving downwards and the causer of benefit is the Apas Tattva, which is sixteen fingers in flow. “Meditate upon the Apas Tattva as being semi-lunar, white as the moon, and giving endurance of hunger and thirst, etc., and producing a sensation similar to that of a plunge in water.”

The property of the Apas Tattva is contraction. This is the contrary activity to that of the Tejas Tattva. Apas is cool and contractile. Its tendency is to condense the units of the Astral Light, to pack them closer together. Hence it is active in every kind of concentration, physical or mental.

PRITHIVI, the odoriferous ether, or subtle principle of smell is thus described:

“Yellow (the color is really orange-yellow) and quadrangular, sweet and moving in the middle, and the giver of enjoyment is the Prithivi Tattva, which flows twelve fingers downwards. “Meditate upon the Prithivi Tattva as being quadrangular, yellow, sweet-smelling, and conferring a color as pure as that of gold, freedom from disease, and lightness of the body.”

The property of the Prithivi Tattva is cohesion. Rama Prasad writes:

“This, it will be seen, is the reverse of Akasha. Akasha gives room for locomotion, while Prithivi resists it. This is the natural result of the direction and shape of this vibration. It covers up the spaces of the Akasha.”

— Nature’s Finer Forces, p. 10

The reference to the flow of each Tattva being so many “fingers’ breadth” relates to the influence of the Tattvas upon the breath. In a state of health, the Tattva in course at a given moment may be determined by slightly moistening the back of the forefinger with the tongue, so that the exhaled breath from the nostrils may the more easily be felt. The Tattva “in course” may be determined by the distance at which the breath-stream is projected from the nostrils. In the Orient this is a good test. In Western lands, where the science of breath is almost wholly forgotten, and nearly everybody breathes abnormally, it is not so dependable.

Each Tattva has a number of special centers in the body. To give them all would only confuse you. It will be enough to mention ten. Five of these are centers of sensation, and five are centers of motor activity. (It should be said, also, that all the Tattvas are at work in every center, but that in the centers named, one particular Tattva predominates.) These attributes should be committed to memory.

The five sensory centers are:

1. Akasha: the ears.
2. Vayu: the skin.
3. Tejas: the eyes.
4. Apas: the tongue (as organ of taste).

5. Prithivi: the nose.

The five motor centers are:

1. Akasha: excretory system.
2. Vayu: the hands.
3. Tejas: organs of reproduction.
4. Apas: the tongue (as organ of speech).
5. Prithivi: the feet.

In the Western School of occultism we find a different set of symbols, and different names. But it should be understood that the same five modes of vibration are indicated by these Western emblems. The latter, unlike those of India, are not representative “diagrammatic”. They are purely conventional. Yet they convey the same basic meanings.

These terms and their symbols are taken from the literature of alchemy and magic. That literature may be traced to the syncretistic school of Alexandria, in Egypt, where that stream of Oriental occultism blended with that of the Western world.

The five phases of the Life-Breath, as enumerated in Western esoteric literature are:

1. The QUINTESSENCE, or Spirit.
2. AIR
3. FIRE
4. WATER
5. EARTH

The alchemical symbol for the quintessence is a wheel having eight spokes. Such a wheel is a very ancient form of the sun-symbol. The eight-spoke symbol, slightly modified, is also the cuneiform spelling of the old Semitic god-name *Ela* (whence Hebrew *JA* and Arabic *Allah*).

The wheel itself conveys an idea concerning the Unmanifest Reality with which we shall become increasingly familiar in the course of these lessons - the idea that in its self-manifestation the One Thing concentrates itself at a

point in space, and, because of the strain so set up, initiates a whirling motion.

Modern science, in trying to explain how matter comes into existence, arrives at practically the same conclusion. The scientific conception of an atom is that of a system of whirling points of electric energy. We see the same kind of activity in the cosmic atoms which we call solar systems. The Western symbol of the Quintessence may also reflect the direct influence of Eastern wisdom. This is suggested by the eightfold division of the circle.

For The Science of Breath says:

“The knowledge of the Tattvas is eightfold. The first is the number of the Tattvas; the second the conjunction of breath; the third is the signs of the breath; the fourth the place of the Tattvas; the fifth is the color of the Tattvas; the seventh is their taste; the eighth is the mode of their vibration.”

When we come to the lesson on numbers, we shall find other reasons why the eight-spoked wheel is an appropriate symbol of that the Hindus call the Akasha Tattva.

AIR, the alchemical symbol of the Vayu Tattva, is represented in Western occultism as an upright equilateral triangle, colored yellow, for reasons, which you will find in the lessons on the three principles. The triangle has a crossbar, to indicate that the air-symbol is a combination of the fire and water triangles, with the fiery element predominating. This element corresponds also to SAT'TVA and alchemical Mercury.

FIRE, as in the Hindu system, is represented by an upright equilateral triangle, colored red. It is usually shown in outline, however, whereas the symbol for TEJAS is generally completely filled in with red. The element of FIRE in alchemy corresponds to SULPHUR and to Rajas.

WATER is represented by a blue equilateral triangle, point downwards. Thus it indicates the contrast between the qualities of FIRE and WATER, which we have noticed in Hindu descriptions of the corresponding elements. The reversed triangle is like a cup, and is, indeed, the thing

signified by a cup in magical rituals. Discerning students may be able to trace this symbol to its source in nature. They will understand why it seems to me inadvisable to do so here.

EARTH is represented by a black inverted triangle with a crossbar, the reverse of the symbol for AIR. It shows the union of the fire and water triangles, with the WATER, (which it should be remembered, corresponds to SALT and to TAMAS) predominating.

The four elements, FIRE, WATER, AIR and EARTH are continually appearing in the symbolism of the secret sciences. Every astrologer is familiar with them, because the signs of the zodiac are subdivided into four triplicities or triads, each of which corresponds to one of these elements. In order to understand the Secret Wisdom of Israel, we need to be perfectly familiar with these elements and their symbols, and this knowledge is also indispensable to a correct understanding of the Tarot.

There is an apparent contradiction between the Oriental and Western schemes of the five phases of manifestation. Not to confuse you, I have purposely named the elements in the Oriental order in both instances; but in Western occultism the order given is:

1. QUINTESSENCE
2. FIRE
3. WATER
4. AIR
5. EARTH

At this point in your studies you are not in a position to understand the reason for the difference between the two systems, and the only reason I mention it now is to prepare you for the seeming discrepancy when you meet it later on. As a matter of fact, both classifications are true, and they can be reconciled. It may also be said that neither shows the whole truth to the causal student. Only to him who has gone beyond intellectual study, and has engaged in the kind of experimental work which gives first-hand knowledge of nature's finer forces, does this matter become perfectly clear.

For the present, then, please remember that the order of the evolution of the Tattvas, as given by the Hindu books, is perfectly correct; but bear in mind, at the same time, that you will presently be learning the details of a system of notation, so to say in which the invariable order of the elements after the Quintessence is FIRE, WATER, AIR and EARTH. One key I may give you now, even though you have not yet entered upon your studies in the Qabalah. To the letter Aleph, the first of the Hebrew alphabet, the Qabalists assign AIR or SPIRIT, (Ruach Elohim). To the twenty-first letter of the same alphabet they assign FIRE.

The number which is designated by this letter is 300, and 300 is the numeration of the words Ruach Elohim (Life-breath of the gods). Thus Qabalists hint at a concealed identity between AIR and FIRE, and they hint at something which is a clue to many practical secrets. I pass the hint on to you, and perhaps you may be able to use it. But the main thing to remember is that the surface differences between the Eastern and Western Systems of classifying the five phases of life expression are not irreconcilable. Both systems, in short, are aspects of one truth.

The important thing to remember in dealing with these Systems of classification is that they are only aids to the intellectual grasp of the theory which must precede practice in experimental work. In reality the Tattvas or elements are phases of one thing, and they not only merge into each other, but they are, in a sense, interchangeable. We have to classify them, and the classification is an apparent separation. Never forget that this is a limitation imposed upon us by the laws of mind in its operation upon the plane of intellect.

I do not mean by this that the Tattvas are nothing but names, quite the contrary. Sight and hearing, touch and taste, are different sensations, and their subtle principles are different, too. But there are states of consciousness in which the senses merge into each other, so that sounds are visible, and colors audible. For all sensation is, at bottom, the response of nerve-substance to vibration, and because of this there is a state of consciousness in which all sensation is merged into that what those who have experienced it agree in describing as an interior hearing.

When you begin to study the symbolic language of the Ageless Wisdom you are like a child beginning to learn its alphabet. At first you cannot help feeling more or less confused. As the saying is, “you cannot see the woods for the trees.” At this point in your study it is worse than useless to attempt to understand every detail, or to try to reconcile seeming contradictions.

I remember once that I was teaching a young man how to read music. His was the inquiring type of mind, which thinks it must have a reason for everything. After two or three lessons he was full of objections, and felt himself quite prepared to devise an improved system of notation. One of his objections was, “What’s the use of all these sharps and flats? Why not have a single line for each note, and have done with it?” It was in vain that I tried to point out to him the reasons for the seeming useless multiplication of symbols. He knew nothing of harmony, and still less of the practical advantage that is gained in reading music from the fact that one musical symbol represents A-flat, while another stands for F-sharp, although both designate the same note on the piano keyboard. The result of his state of mind was that he never learned to read notes, and was therefore prevented from any firsthand knowledge of musical literature.

Much the same mental attitude reveals itself among those who take up the study of the Ageless Wisdom. Time was when I thought I must try to explain the reasons for all the details, which are so confusing at first. Experience has taught me that I was mistaken. Until one learns the symbols, the reasons cannot be understood. One might as well try to explain the peculiarities of idiomatic English to a Hottentot. And the language of the Secret Wisdom has its peculiar idioms, just like any other language. Like all idioms, they have been developed gradually, and occasionally they will not bear too close inspection from the point of view of the precisionist. The point is that they convey the meanings they are meant to convey, just as “ice-cream” by usage has come to have a definite meaning, even though the purists of my school-days tried to make us say “iced-cream”.

In learning any language, the proper mental attitude to assume is that one will learn it as it is spoken and written by natives. The same rule holds good with the language of symbolism. The thing to do is to learn it just as it has

come down to us from the past. And as with any other means of communicating ideas, we must be able to think in symbols before we can hope to grasp the finer shades of meaning they convey.

In closing this lesson, let me advise you to give much thought to what is implied by the teaching that the Tattvas are the subtle principles of the senses, when this teaching is taken in connection with the other doctrine that every object in the universe – everything having name and form – is built from these same Tattvas. This is the key to the whole metaphysical system of the Ageless Wisdom. In simple language it means that the only world you know is the world of your sense experience. The only knowledge you have of trees and houses, animals and people, of the thousand and one “things” that surround you, is your knowledge of sensations, which are experienced in your nerve centers and your brain. More than this: the particular world you live in is the world of your personal interpretations of that sense-experience.

We cannot too often remind ourselves of this. If you walk down the street with a friend, you are by no means both in the same world, although you may be subjected to identical stimuli of the sensory nerves. Remember the story told of Turner, the painter, who said to a man who objected that he never saw in nature any such colors as Turner put on his canvases, “Is that so? Well, don’t you wish you could?”

In practical occultism we learn by experiment that each man makes his own world, makes it beautiful or ugly according to the degree of his understanding. Do not misunderstand me. The practical occultist wastes no time in trying to make this world beautiful. He knows it is not, but he doesn’t have to stop where the pessimists do. For he knows that this is not the only world, he knows that it is really only a veil for another, which, so to speak, it hides.

The practical occultist, therefore, learns how to throw his world, as Levi tells us, “into a chaos, and transform its face.” He realizes Omar’s dream of shattering creation into bits, and then remolding it nearer to the heart’s desire. And his first step toward that realization is the knowledge that every man’s world the sum-total of his sensations and of his interpretations of those sensations. This is the true magical knowledge which, rightly

applied, is a key which opens the gate to the Way Out this world of suffering and sorrow into the real world of joy and love and beauty, the heaven world which may be experienced here on earth by those who win to liberation.

Phase	Western Element	Sense, Guna and Principle	Hindu Tattva
SPIRIT	QUINTESSENCE (White)	UNMANIFEST (flaming Dark)	AKASHA (Indigo)
SUPERCONSCIOUS	AIR (Yellow)	Touch; Sattva, Mercury	VAYU (Blue)
SELF-CONSCIOUS	FIRE (Red)	Sight; Rajas, Sulphur	AGNI or TEJAS (Red)
SUBCONSCIOUS	WATER (Blue)	Taste; Tamas, Salt	APAS (Silver, White)
	EARTH (Black)	“MATTER”; Manifest, Smell	PRITHIVI (Orange- Yellow)