

# The Philosophical Research Society, Inc.

3910 Los Feliz Blvd. - Los Angeles, Calif. 90027 - 663-2167

MANLY P. HALL  
President - Founder



HENRY L. DRAKE  
Vice-President

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## The Journey To The Afterlife

Dear Friends:

Once upon a time, a Greek philosopher was on a ship when a tempest arose and the shipmaster was greatly frightened. In his alarm he asked the wise man an unusual question, "Master, how far is it from this world to the next?" The sage answered by asking another question, "How thick are the walls of this ship?" When he was told that the planks were three inches thick, the scholar observed quietly, "It is three inches from this world to the next."

The transition from our mortal state to our condition in the afterlife has been of real and immediate concern to human beings since the beginning of time. Every nation has had a philosophy of life and a mysticism about death. For the most part, the broad perspective has been optimistic, but occasionally pessimism has achieved at least a temporary victory. Our present civilization has risen from the ashes of many older cultures that have survived to us principally in their religion and arts. The spiritual convictions of the modern individual are enriched by many mingling streams of ancient faiths. We like to assume that each religion is a unique revelation, but our theologies have complicated heredities, going back to time and conditions which are but faintly recorded in myths and fables.

The state of the human soul after death naturally received the greatest attention. In those times when moral codes were simple, sin was not a positive delinquency, but a negative shortcoming. It was assumed that it was inevitable that man should make mistakes. How could it be otherwise in a world which he did not understand, created by processes which he could not comprehend, and subject to catastrophes which he was unable to foresee. He was at a disadvantage, but the guiding powers realized this and tempered their severity accordingly. Forgiveness of sin was proper to a paternal God who fully appreciated the shortcomings of the beings he had fashioned. The idea of eternal damnation seldom arose in the untutored mind, and the anxieties arising from such a belief were reserved for more sophisticated ages. Some sociologists have assumed that one reason why our ancestors were less fearful of death was because they were more fearful of the hazards of the mortal world. Having less to live for, they died in peace.

The journey to the "Other Land" was approached geographically. The earth was a rugged structure of mountains and cliffs, ravines and valleys surrounded by a vast ocean. Those

departing from here must therefore travel by water. This belief has influenced nearly every theology. Sometimes this water is represented by a storm-swept sea, or a peaceful lake, or a quietly moving river. According to the philosophy of Thales, the Grecian law-maker, the earth itself was a ship floating on the ocean of eternity, and earthquakes were caused by the Gods rocking the boat. In Nordic mythology, Midgard, the Abode of Mortals, is surrounded by a vast ocean in the depths of which is a serpent whose coils surround the world. In China the Taoist immortals, wearied of life, set sail in search of the Blessed Isles which lay beyond the Eastern horizon. On the European side, navigators inspired by prevailing myths, ventured beyond the Pillars of Hercules in search of the Isles of Hesperides, a terrestrial paradise corresponding to the Western Paradise of Amitahba.

This brings up a matter of the earth's magnetic field. It was believed in old time that outside the physical surface of the earth was a band of humid atmosphere. This was not only physical but was a kind of humid diffusion under the control of the Moon. The union of the Sun and Moon, or light and humidity, made possible the germination of life. This humidic band was probably the original ocean across which souls must pass when they departed from the physical world. Above the humid zone at the northern extremity of the earth is the mysterious Mountain of the Gods, and beneath this mountain, the subterranean passageways of the ghostly realm.

The Japanese have a ghostland divided from the physical islands of Japan by an invisible stream. The pious dead cross over a bridge; those less virtuous wade across in shallow water; but those who have committed serious offenses must struggle their way across through dangerous rapids. With a touch of sly moralism, the Japanese have a Netsuke showing the rich man being taken across the river in a sedan-chair carried by four demons. This suggests that the wealthy receive special consideration even on their way to retribution.

The Ship of Salvation is a common symbol among Oriental people. This is the *Vessel of the Doctrine* meaning that those who have accepted in their hearts the love and compassion of Amida will be carried safely across the Sea of Doubts to Sukhavati's Golden Shore. It is not necessary that those on the ship understand the journey. It is character and conduct that insure a safe passage. This is represented by an unconcerned old gentleman sitting on the back deck quietly fishing.



The philosophy of the Great Ship was given serious consideration by the Cabalists who declared that the Ark of Noah was the symbol of the Messiah, who is occasionally represented lying in the Ark as in a tomb. The correspondence between the Ark of Noah, the Ark of the Covenant and the Nave, or Ark of the Christian Church, was not accidental. The congregation is itself the Ship of Salvation, the vessel of faith.

There is scientific evidence that at a remote time, what we now call the Polar Regions, had a tropical climate. Very often when ancient glaciers melt, the broken ice brings down with it bits of tropical vegetation. A mastodon, discovered in Alaska by gold miners had been frozen for thousands of years, and in its stomach were plants found only in warm climates. This substantiates the Greek legend of the Hyperborean World which was located above the winds. This was a terrestrial paradise and the proper abode for departed souls.

The Ship of Salvation

Those who awaken beyond the foggy realms of transition, find themselves in a pleasant place and it is believed that they are always met by an appropriate guide who conducts them to their spirit home. This has become part of the belief of many modern persons who are convinced that they will be welcomed into the afterlife by those who have gone before. In the *Divine Comedy* Dante is guided by Virgil, and in the Egyptian mortuary ritual, the soul is given into the care of the Jackal-Headed God, Anubis. If we wish to accept the idea that the visible body of man is surrounded and interpenetrated by three other vehicles -- one etheric, one emotional and one mental -- we can understand the Oriental belief that the process of death is the casting off of the physical body and its etheric counterpart, and the positing of consciousness in the emotional and later, the mental body.

The etheric realm is the abode of ghosts, the emotional realm is divided into the purgatorial and the Paradisal; and the mental realm corresponds to the heavenly region where Dante and his Beatrice (spirit and soul) behold the choirs of the Infinite. The Universe of the Dead can be considered as a psychological region in which dwell the basic archetypes of existence, and those constructions of mental and emotional energy forms which arise from human conduct. Negative attitudes become personified in vibratory symbols, and punishment consists in living with oneself, with its unsolved conflicts and uncorrected faults. When these have been exhausted the center of consciousness moves to a higher emotional level where its positive achievements provide an harmonious atmosphere and we have the paradisaal state. The mental life is also divided into those parts of mentation which are essentially bound to material objects, and those higher aspects of mind which are inspirational and creative. The mind must first extricate itself from its belief in the reality of its materialistic attachment. If the higher aspects of the mind have not been developed, then consciousness fades into sleep. The Greeks express this symbolism as myriads of souls sleeping in endless rows in the gloom of a vast cavern. These sleeping souls may have contributed to the early Christian belief in Limbo.

This may all add up to a strange journey but not to a tragic one. All that happens is lawful, constructive and ultimately beneficial. There are no terrible disasters in a universe ruled by a Loving Father. Having convinced themselves that life and death as we know it, are two manifestations of an eternal existence -- two sides of the same coin -- the philosophical nations of long ago came to the conclusion that is set forth so beautifully in the Bhagavad Gita, in which the Lord Krishna is made to say, "Certain is death for the living, certain is birth for the dead; over the inevitable we shall not grieve."

This letter has become somewhat longer than usual, but the subject seems to have special meaning in times of physical uncertainty. We will all live better here and now if we face the future with a better hope.

Always most sincerely,

*Manly P. Hall*



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Teachings of Tibetan Yoga	Transl. Garma Chang	5.00
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