

THE ASTRAL PLANE

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[The Astral Plane](#)

[Preface](#)

[INTRODUCTION](#)

[SCENERY.](#)

[INHABITANTS.](#)

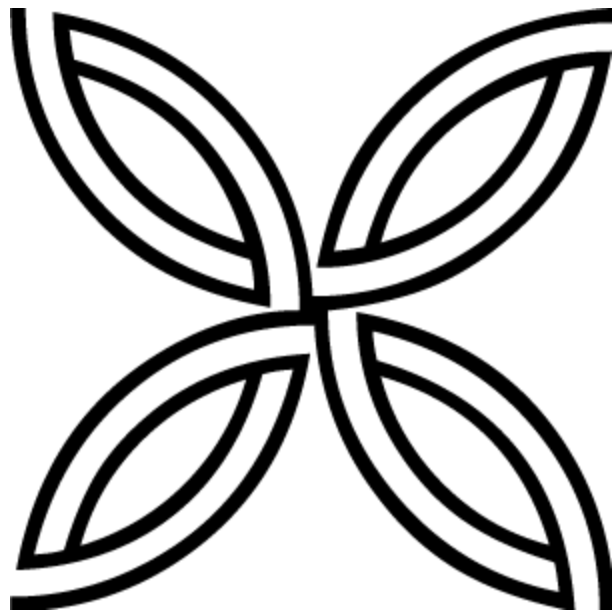
[PHENOMENA.](#)

[CONCLUSION.](#)

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Preface

The history of western magic started about 4000 years ago. And since then it has been adding something to western magic. Originally, the Latin word magus nominated the followers of the spiritualist-priest class, and later originated to elect 'clairvoyant, sorcerer' and in a judgmental sense also 'magician, trickster'. Thus, the initial meaning of the word 'magic' was the wisdoms of the Magi, that is the abilities of attaining supernatural powers and energy, while later it became practical critically to deceitful wizardry. The etymological descriptions specify three significant features in the expansion of the notion 'magic': 1) Magic as a discipline of celestial natural forces and in the course of formation 2) Magic as the exercise of such facts in divinations, visions and illusion 3) Fraudulent witchery. The latter belief played a significant part in the Christian demonization process. The growth of the western notion 'magic' directed to extensive assumptions in the demonological and astrophysical argument of the Neoplatonists. Their tactic was grounded on the philosophy of a hierarchically ordered outer space, where conferring to Plotinus (C205-C270 AD) a noetic ingredient was shaped as the outcome of eternal and countless radiation built on the ultimate opinion; this in its chance contributed to the rise of psychic constituent, which formed the basis of the factual world. Furthermore, these diverse phases of release came to be measured as convinced forces, which underneath the impact of innocent and evil views during late ancient times were embodied as humans. The hierarchical cosmos of Iamblichus simply demonstrates the legitimacy of this process. In his work, the Neoplatonic cosmology has initiated a channel through the syncretism distinctive of the late antiquity and in the essence of Greco-

Oriental dualism. Superior productions are taken closer to inferior ones by various midway creatures. The higher the site of the mediators, the further they bear a resemblance to gods and whizzes; the minor they are, the nearer they stand to the psychic-spiritual part. The aforementioned group of intermediaries has been settled in order of series on the origin of cosmic gravity. Proclus (c410–485 AD) has described the system of magic origin conversed above in better aspect: in the hierarchical shackles of cosmic rudiments the power and nature of a firm star god disturbs everything mediocre, and with growing distance the impact slowly becomes weaker. The Humanists approached the Platonic notions from the outlook of the bequest of late antiquity, and were thus first familiarized to the Neoplatonic form of the doctrine. And since Ficino's work has been inscribed in the spirit of emanation theory, and the author has been persuaded of the existence of the higher and lower spheres of magic and powers defined in Picatrix, he claims that planets and cosmic movements have much to do with power and magic spirit. Today's occult marketplace also offers, in addition to books, multifarious paraphernalia for practicing magic: amulets, talismans, pendulums and magic rods. Though added with modern essentials and pseudoscientific advices to give some weight to the fundamentals, they are nothing but the leftovers of the western ethnicities of magic.

INTRODUCTION

Reference to the astral plane, or Kâmaloka as it is called in Sanskrit, has frequently been made by Theosophical writers, and a good deal of information on the subject of this realm of nature is to be found scattered here and there in our books; but there is not, so far as I am aware, any single volume to which one can turn for a complete summary of the facts at present known to us about this interesting region. The object of this manual is to collect and make some attempt to arrange this scattered information, and also to supplement it slightly in cases where new facts have come to our knowledge. It must be understood that any such additions are only the result of the investigations of a few explorers, and must not, therefore, be taken as in any way authoritative, but are given simply for what they are worth. On the other hand every precaution in our power has been taken to ensure accuracy, no fact, old or new, being admitted to this manual unless it has been confirmed by the testimony of at least two independent trained investigators among ourselves, and has also been passed as correct by older students whose knowledge on these points is necessarily much greater than ours. It is hoped, therefore, that this account of the astral plane, though it cannot be considered as quite complete, may yet be found reliable as far as it goes.

The first point which it is necessary to make clear in describing this astral plane is its absolute reality. Of course in using that word I am not speaking from that metaphysical standpoint from which all but the One Unmanifested is unreal because impermanent; I am using the word in its plain, every-day sense, and I mean by it that

the objects and inhabitants of the astral plane are real in exactly the same way as our own bodies, our furniture, our houses or monuments are real—as real as Charing Cross, to quote an expressive remark from one of the earliest Theosophical works. They will no more endure for ever than will objects on the physical plane, but they are nevertheless realities from our point of view while they last—realities which we cannot afford to ignore merely because the majority of mankind is as yet unconscious, or but vaguely conscious, of their existence.

There appears to be considerable misunderstanding even among Theosophical students upon this question of the reality of the various planes of the universe. This may perhaps be partly due to the fact that the word "plane" has occasionally been very loosely used in our literature—writers speaking vaguely of the mental plane, the moral plane, and so on; and this vagueness has led many people to suppose that the information on the subject which is to be found in Theosophical books is inexact and speculative—a mere hypothesis incapable of definite proof. No one can get a clear conception of the teachings of the Wisdom-Religion until he has at any rate an intellectual grasp of the fact that in our solar system there exist perfectly definite planes, each with its own matter of different degrees of density, and that some of these planes can be visited and observed by persons who have qualified themselves for the[3] work, exactly as a foreign country might be visited and observed; and that, by comparison of the observations of those who are constantly working on these planes, evidence can be obtained of their existence and nature at least as satisfactory as that which most of us have for the existence of Greenland or Spitzbergen. The names usually given to these planes, taking them in order of materiality, rising from the denser to the finer, are the physical, the

astral, the devachanic, the sushuptic, and the nirvânic. Higher than this last are two others, but they are so far above our present power of conception that for the moment they may be left out of consideration. Now it should be understood that the matter of each of these planes differs from that of the one below it in the same way as, though to a much greater degree than, vapour differs from solid matter; in fact, the states of matter which we call solid, liquid, and gaseous are merely the three lowest subdivisions of the matter belonging to this one physical plane.

The astral region which I am to attempt to describe is the second of these great planes of nature—the next above (or within) that physical world with which we are all familiar. It has often been called the realm of illusion—not that it is itself any more illusory than the physical world, but because of the extreme unreliability of the impressions brought back from it by the untrained seer. This is to be accounted for mainly by two remarkable characteristics of the astral world—first, that many of its inhabitants have a marvellous power of changing their forms with Protean rapidity, and also of casting practically unlimited glamour over those with whom they choose to sport; and secondly, that sight on that plane is a faculty very different from and much more extended than physical vision. An object is seen, as it were, from all sides at once, the inside of a solid being as plainly open to[4] the view as the outside; it is therefore obvious that an inexperienced visitor to this new world may well find considerable difficulty in understanding what he really does see, and still more in translating his vision into the very inadequate language of ordinary speech. A good example of the sort of mistake that is likely to occur is the frequent reversal of any number which the seer has to read from the astral light, so that he

would be liable to render, say, 139 as 931, and so on. In the case of a student of occultism trained by a capable Master such a mistake would be impossible except through great hurry or carelessness, since such a pupil has to go through a long and varied course of instruction in this art of seeing correctly, the Master, or perhaps some more advanced pupil, bringing before him again and again all possible forms of illusion, and asking him "What do you see?" Any errors in his answers are then corrected and their reasons explained, until by degrees the neophyte acquires a certainty and confidence in dealing with the phenomena of the astral plane which far exceeds anything possible in physical life. But he has to learn not only to see correctly but to translate the memory of what he has seen accurately from one plane to the other; and to assist him in this he is trained to carry his consciousness without break from the physical plane to the astral or devachanic and back again, for until that can be done there is always a possibility that his recollections may be partially lost or distorted during the blank interval which separates his periods of consciousness on the various planes. When the power of bringing over the consciousness is perfectly acquired the pupil will have the advantage of the use of all the astral faculties, not only while out of his body during sleep or trance, but also while fully awake in ordinary physical life.

It has been the custom of some Theosophists to speak[5] with scorn of the astral plane, and treat it as entirely unworthy of attention; but that seems to me a somewhat mistaken view. Most assuredly that at which we have to aim is the purely spiritual plane, and it would be most disastrous for any student to neglect that higher development and rest satisfied with the attainment of astral consciousness. There are some whose Karma is such as to enable them to develop the purely spiritual faculties first of

all—to over-leap the astral plane for the time, as it were; and when afterwards they make its acquaintance they have, if their spiritual development has been perfect, the immense advantage of dipping into it from above, with the aid of a spiritual insight which cannot be deceived and a spiritual strength which nothing can resist. It is, however, a mistake to suppose, as some writers have done, that this is the only, or even the ordinary method adopted by the Masters of Wisdom with their pupils. Where it is possible it saves much trouble, but for most of us such progress by leaps and bounds has been forbidden by our own faults or follies in the past: all that we can hope for is to win our way slowly step by step, and since this astral plane lies next to our world of denser matter, it is usually in connection with it that our earliest superphysical experiences take place. It is therefore by no means without interest to those of us who are but beginners in these studies, and a clear comprehension of its mysteries may often be of the greatest importance to us, not only by enabling us to understand many of the phenomena of the séance-room, of haunted houses, etc., which would otherwise be inexplicable, but also to guard ourselves and others from possible dangers.

The first introduction to this remarkable region comes to people in various ways. Some only once in their whole lives under some unusual influence become sensitive enough to recognize the presence of one of its inhabitants, and perhaps, because the experience does not repeat itself, come in time to believe that on that occasion they must have been the victims of hallucination: others find themselves with increasing frequency seeing and hearing something to which those around them are blind and deaf; others again—and perhaps this is the commonest experience of all—begin to recollect with greater and