

## The Astral and Causal Bodies

The first references to the Astral and Causal Bodies are found in the Upanishads the Ancient Philosophy of India. Historians have put the date of composition of the Upanishads to between 800 - 400 BC.

The founder of Theosophy Helena Blavatsky also refers to the Astral and Causal Bodies. Theosophists C.W. Leadbeater and Annie Besant, equated the Astral Body with Blavatsky's principal of 'Kama' (desire) and called it the Emotional Body.

The terms Astral Body, Desire Body, and Emotional Body have become synonymous. The Astral Body in later Theosophical writings is said to be 'the vehicle of feelings and emotions' through which 'it is possible to experience all varieties of desire'.

The Astral and Causal Bodies are also mentioned in the writings of Alice Bailey. Her books were written between 1919 and 1949. Her books were telepathically dictated to her by the Tibetan Master Djwal Khul. The texts describe him as a member of the 'Spiritual Hierarchy', or 'White Brotherhood', he is one of the Masters of the Ancient Wisdom, defined as the spiritual guides of mankind.

### **Mandukya Upanishad**

The Mandukya Upanishad refers to the 'Self' (Soul) as having four "feet" or states of consciousness. These are - waking, dreaming, dreamless sleep, and the transcendent (Turiya). Each of these is associated with both an individual state of consciousness and a cosmic state. These four states of consciousness are linked to the four bodies – Physical, Astral, Causal and the Soul.

### **Koshas**

According to Vedantic philosophy the Soul or Atma has five coverings or sheaths. These are called the Koshas. The Koshas relate to the five levels of human experience. These layers range from the dense physical body to the more subtle levels of emotions, mind and spirit. The Koshas are mentioned in the Mandukya Upanishad, the Taittiriya Upanishad and the Moksha Gita. The Koshas are listed below: -

#### **Annamaya Kosha**, food-apparent-sheath – Physical Body

This is the sheath of the physical self, named because it is nourished by food.

#### **Pranamaya Kosha**, air-apparent-sheath – Etheric Body

Pranamaya means composed of prana, the vital principle, the force that vitalises and holds together the body and the mind. Prana pervades the whole organism; its manifestation is the breath.

#### **Manomaya Kosha**, mind-stuff-apparent-sheath – Astral Body

Manomaya means composed of manas or mind. The mind (manas) along with the five sensory organs is said to constitute the Manomaya Kosa.

#### **Vijnanamaya Kosha**, wisdom-apparent-sheath – Mental Body

Vijnanamaya means composed of vijnana, or intellect, the faculty that discriminates, determines or wills. Vijnanamaya is the combination of intellect and the five sense organs.

### **Anandamaya Kosha**, bliss-apparent-sheath – Causal Body (Karana Sarira)

Anandamaya means composed of ananda, or bliss. In the Upanishads this sheath is also known as the Causal Body. In deep sleep, when the mind and senses cease functioning, it stands between the finite world and the Self. The Anandamaya Kosha is a reflection of the Atman (Soul) which exists in a state of absolute bliss.

Sri Ramakrishna considers the Causal Body to be the Anandamaya Kosha. Through it one enjoys the bliss of God.

### **The Etheric Body**

The etheric double or etheric body is distinct from the Astral Body. The etheric body disappears when the physical body dies.

### **The Astral Body**

The Astral Body is an exact replica of the physical body but composed of finer matter. We travel in the Astral Body in sleep and in out-of-the-body experiences. The Astral Body is the instrument of passions, emotions and desires and is the medium through which these are conveyed to the physical body.

When the Astral Body separates from the physical body during sleep, or under the influence of drugs or anaesthetic, or as the result of accidents it takes with it the capacity for feeling. Only on its return can pain or other feelings be felt.

The Astral Body is the seat of feeling and desire. Negative emotions and thoughts produce darker colours in the Astral Body. Rage creates a red colour in the Astral Body. Higher emotions and thoughts appear in the Astral Body as pastel colours. The Astral Body is constantly changing colour depending upon our mood.

The Astral Body is not composed of physical matter but astral energy. The Astral Body reflects the emotional nature of a person. Grosser, darker thoughts and feelings lower the vibration of the Astral Body. Positive, caring feelings and thoughts raise the vibration of the Astral Body.

After death the person lives in their Astral Body and is drawn to one of the many Astral Worlds, an Astral World that matches their level of vibration.

Astral consciousness is primarily awakened through the stimulation of desire. The Astral Body allows us to have desires, emotions, imagination and psychic abilities. It gives power to our thoughts and is essential for effective action and manifestation.

The Astral Body allows us to experience the full range of emotions from fear, hate and sorrow to love, peace, happiness and ecstasy. It allows us to experience the full range of desires: -

1. Selfish and destructive desires
2. Common personal desires
3. The desire to serve others (selfless service)

The Astral Body allows us to experience dreams, fantasies, out of body experiences, near death experiences, hallucinations, imagination and visions.

The five astral senses are: Clairaudience (astral hearing), Psychometry (astral touch/feeling), Clairvoyance (astral sight), Imagination (astral equivalent of taste), and Emotional Idealism (astral equivalent of smell).

The Astral Body is similar in shape to the physical body and is usually egg shaped. The Astral Body has an aura that extends about 4 to 9 feet from the physical body. It has 7 major energy centres, 21 minor energy centres and many smaller centres, just like the etheric body.

Awareness of the Astral Body is awakened by meditation, psychic development techniques, out of body travel techniques, shamanic practices, lucid dreaming, medical drugs, psychedelic drugs and certain pranayama practices.

The Astral Body is the body in which all our emotions, feelings and sentiments are stored. Each cell has a memory of its own and stores emotional experiences, along with impressions and sensations.

The Astral Body stores all the emotional experiences that we have accumulated throughout our many lifetimes. The Astral Body holds the memory of emotions and traumatic events that we have experienced. These emotions are stored in layers in the Astral Body causing a contraction on our energy field.

Past memories and emotions are triggered by events in our life. When these emotions are triggered we have an opportunity to heal them.

To balance our Astral Body we need to transmute the dense emotions of anger, shame and guilt and replace them with compassion, healing and forgiveness.

### **Astral Planes**

In his book ‘The Autobiography of a Yogi’, Paramahansa Yogananda provides details of the astral planes learned from his resurrected guru Sri Yukteswar. Yogananda says that most people enter the astral planes after death. There they work out the seeds of past karma through astral incarnations, or (if their karma requires) they return to earthly incarnations for further refinement.

Sri Yukteswar says, “The astral body is not subject to cold or heat or other natural conditions. The anatomy includes an astral brain, or the thousand-petaled lotus of light, and six awakened centres in the sushumna, or astral cerebro-spinal axis. The heart draws cosmic energy as well as light from the astral brain, and pumps it to the astral nerves and body cells, or lifetrons (prana). Astral beings can affect their bodies by lifetronic (prana) force or by mantric vibrations.”

“The astral body is an exact counterpart of the last physical form. Astral beings retain the same appearance which they possessed in youth in their previous earthly sojourn; occasionally an astral being chooses, like myself, to retain his old age appearance.”

“Unlike the spatial, three-dimensional physical world cognised only by the five senses, the astral spheres are visible to the all-inclusive sixth sense-intuition.”

“By sheer intuitional feeling, all astral beings see, hear, smell, taste, and touch. They possess three eyes, two of which are partly closed. The third and chief astral eye, vertically placed on the forehead, is open. Astral beings have all the outer sensory organs - ears, eyes, nose, tongue, and skin, but they employ the intuitional sense to experience sensations through any part of the body; they can see through the ear, or nose, or skin. They are able to hear through the eyes or tongue, and can taste through the ears or skin, and so forth.”

Sri Yukteswar says, “There are many astral planets, teeming with astral beings.” “The inhabitants use astral planes, or masses of light, to travel from one planet to another, faster than electricity and radioactive energies.”

“The astral universe, made of various subtle vibrations of light and colour, is hundreds of times larger than the material cosmos. The entire physical creation hangs like a little solid basket under the huge luminous balloon of the astral sphere. Just as many physical suns and stars roam in space, so there are also countless astral solar and stellar systems. Their planets have astral suns and moons, more beautiful than the physical ones. The astral luminaries resemble the aurora borealis, the sunny astral aurora being more dazzling than the mild-rayed moon-aurora. The astral day and night are longer than those of earth.”

“The astral world is infinitely beautiful, clean, pure, and orderly. There are no dead planets or barren lands. The terrestrial blemishes, weeds, bacteria, insects, snakes are absent. Unlike the variable climates and seasons of the earth, the astral planets maintain the even temperature of an eternal spring, with occasional luminous white snow and rain of many coloured lights.”

“Astral planets abound in opal lakes and bright seas and rainbow rivers. Psychic phenomena (ghosts, telepathy, clairvoyance, telekinesis, etc.) originate here. The astral plane is divided into the lower and upper astral planes. The lower astral plane is where a soul who has lived an evil life would go upon clinical death. There are demonic entities in the lower astral realms. Christians would describe the lower realms as purgatory.”

Autobiography of a Yogi - Paramhansa Yogananda - Chapter 43 The Resurrection of Sri Yukteswar - <http://www.crystalclarity.com/yogananda/chap43.php>

THE VEHICLES OF THE SOUL				
MENTAL PLANE	HIGHER MENTAL LOWER MENTAL	CAUSAL BODY	TO EVOLVE WITH	IDEALS — ABSTRACT THOUGHTS
		MENTAL BODY	TO THINK WITH	IDEAS — CONCRETE THOUGHTS
ASTRAL PLANE		ASTRAL BODY	TO FEEL WITH	EMOTIONS — DESIRSES
PHYSICAL PLANE		PHYSICAL BODY	TO ACT WITH	SENSORIAL REACTIONS — ACTIONS

FIG. 28

The Astral Plane can be visited consciously through astral projection, meditation and mantra, near death experience, lucid dreaming. People can train themselves to travel in their Astral Body at will. This is a highly dangerous practice and can lead to the person becoming trapped in a Lower Astral World and not being able to get back to their body.

### The Causal Plane

Theosophists say that the Mental Plane consists of seven subplanes, also popularly referred to as the "seven heavens." Of these the last three are known as the Causal Plane.

The Causal Plane is the location of our Akashic records. These records are a detailed account of all our past, present, parallel and future lives. The progression of our soul's spiritual growth is reflected in these records. Each lesson we have failed to learn is also recorded.

### The Causal Body

The Causal is named "Causal" because it is the originating source of each personality that incarnates in each lifetime. When your personality ends, the essence of your personality is absorbed back into the Causal Body. The Causal Body is the highest level of our individual self. The Causal Body is also called the Higher Mental Body, the real being, the thinker.

The Causal Body exists for many millions of years, during our journey as a human being through many lifetimes. Animals have yet to obtain a Causal Body and Higher Beings that are liberated from the cycle of rebirth can discard the Causal Body and move on to higher levels.

The Causal Body is the final sheath around the Soul. Once the individual has worked out their causal karma the Soul is free to return to God/Oneness.

The Causal Body is the depository for all consciousness and virtues cultivated in each lifetime. The Causal Body stores the will/power, love-wisdom and creative intelligence that we have developed in our many lives. It is built out of all the experiences of our past lives. It is the treasure chest that keeps safe the fruits of all past experiences. It is the vehicle that facilitates the unfolding of our consciousness.

The Causal Body is the focal point of consciousness for the human being. Human beings experience through many levels of consciousness - physical, etheric, emotional/astral, mental/intellectual. As we awaken spiritually we become aware of other souls on our own level and we begin to function from a soul level rather than from a personality level. The Soul's life is one of unity, group consciousness, love, wisdom, bliss and higher purpose.

The Causal Body has two senses: Response to Group Vibration (used to find its Soul Group), and Spiritual Telepathy (used to communicate with other Souls).

Viewed from a three dimensional perspective a fully evolved Causal Body appears as a radiant orb of white and golden light, a miniature sun, approximately 30 feet in diameter. It has vortices on the top and bottom, lines of light and sparkling energy throughout. Most people have areas missing that appear dark or empty where there are areas of our consciousness still to be developed.

The halo that we see in paintings of Saints is a representation of the Causal Body.

The Causal Body has a total of five spatial dimensions. Viewed from a fifth dimensional perspective the Causal Body appears as a radiant, beautiful flower of light that is continually blossoming and turning in upon itself. It has 12 petals, each of which is a vortex that is rotating and expressing different aspects of our being.

As a person evolves through an average of 777 lifetimes (an esoteric number – see index for explanation) these petals or vortices open and become radiant and fully functional. As the petals open they radiate subtle hues of the colours: orange, blue, yellow, indigo, green, violet and rose.

Causal/Soul consciousness is awakened through life experiences and meditation practices.

The Causal Body is the vehicle of the Human Soul and its vibration is higher than that of the other bodies. In the present state in the evolution of humanity, it is sad that most individuals are not at this level of consciousness. Most people have only a fraction of their consciousness active at this level.

The Causal Body is composed of matter from the three upper sub-planes of the mental plane. It is the body of the abstract ideas, high ideals and holds the record of the actions carried out in past lives. The Causal Body contains a record of the qualities, virtues and defects acquired by the individual soul during its periods of incarnation.

The Causal Body is indestructible, and it lasts as long as the evolution of the individual soul lasts. Its name comes from the fact that this body is reflective of the causes that generated effects in the lower planes of existence. The collection of experiences accumulated by the reincarnational self is stored inside of the Causal Body.

We gradually work towards a position where the Soul controls the personality and the personality identifies fully with the Soul.

The development of the Mental, Astral and Physical Bodies depends upon the building of the Causal Body. There is, in fact, no complete Human being until this body is complete, because it contains in itself the essence of what individuality is from a Soul level.

The Causal Body is the body that holds the effects of our actions and functions as our karmic bank (karma - the law of cause and effect). We can accumulate spiritual grace and power through many reincarnations. Only the highest vibrational energies are stored in the Causal Body.

One of the objectives of the Casual Body is to provide happiness and wellbeing to the Soul through the activity of the sixth chakra (chakra of spiritual vision). To help the development of this body, we will need to visualise positive images and cultivate positive thoughts and actions.

It is also in the Causal Body that we will find a record of the virtues and aptitudes that we have misused. To heal this misuse will need to re-incarnate and use these virtues and aptitudes wisely.

### **Emotional / Mental Body**

We have an emotional body while we are in a physical body. This is part of our Astral Body. When we die the unresolved emotions/attachments to people held in the emotional body will then be held in the Astral Body. While in the Astral Body we will live in one of the many Astral Worlds. When we are ready we will be reborn onto the Physical World.

We also have a mental body while we are in a physical body. This is a part of our Causal Body. When we die the strongest thoughts/beliefs that we have will then be held in the Causal Body.

### **Alice Bailey**

“In considering the causal body (this “Temple of the Soul”), we are dealing specifically with the vehicle of manifestation of a solar Angel who is its informing life and who is in process of constructing it, of perfecting it, and of enlarging it, and thus reflecting on a tiny scale the work of the Logos on His own plane.” (Alice Bailey - A Treatise on Cosmic Fire - p. 1110)

“The content of the causal body is the accumulation by slow and gradual process, of the good in each life. The building precedes slowly at first, but towards the end of incarnation — on the Probationary Path and on the Path of Initiation — the work proceeds rapidly. The structure has been reared, and each stone quarried in the

personal life. On the Path, in each of its two divisions, the work of completing and beautifying the Temple proceeds with greater rapidity.” (Alice Bailey - Letters on Occult Meditation - p. 32)

“At a later stage upon the Path of Initiation, the causal body also disappears, and the initiate stands free in the three worlds. The Astral body and the Causal bodies have a temporary reality during the evolutionary process. Having served their purpose, and having endowed man with certain required assets — consciousness, feeling, sensitivity, and ability to establish and register contact they pass away, and the initiate remains, possessed of power over form, and a fully awakened consciousness. He is a Soul, and the fusion is complete.” (Alice Bailey - The Rays and the Initiations p. 162)

### **Annie Besant**

“All of the positive experiences, successes and wisdom gained during all your lifetimes within this universal experience are stored within your Causal Mind. When your Energetic Signature reaches a certain frequency level, you automatically begin to tap into the gifts/information/wisdom that are stored within your Sacred Mind and also within the mind of your Higher Self residing on the Mental-Causal Plane” (Annie Besant - The Ancient Wisdom)

“No effort, not even the smallest, is lost, but is followed by its full effect, and every contribution gathered and handed inwards is stored in the treasure-house of the causal body for future use.” (Annie Besant - The Ancient Wisdom)

### **Sri Yukteswar**

In the book ‘The Autobiography of a Yogi’, Sri Yukteswar describes the Causal Plane.

“Souls in the causal world recognise one another as individualised points of joyous Spirit; their thought-things are the only objects which surround them. Causal beings see the difference between their bodies and thoughts to be merely ideas. As a man, closing his eyes, can visualise a dazzling white light or a faint blue haze, so causal beings by thought alone are able to see, hear, feel, taste, and touch; they create anything, or dissolve it, by the power of cosmic mind.”

“Causal-bodied beings feast only on the ambrosia of eternally new knowledge. They drink from the springs of peace, roam on the trackless soil of perceptions, swim in the ocean-endlessness of bliss. Lo! See their bright thought-bodies zoom past trillions of Spirit-created planets, fresh bubbles of universes, wisdom-stars, spectral dreams of golden nebulae, all over the skiey blue bosom of Infinity!”

“Many beings remain for thousands of years in the causal cosmos. By deeper ecstasies the freed soul then withdraws itself from the little causal body and puts on the vastness of the causal cosmos. All the separate eddies of ideas, particularised waves of power, love, will, joy, peace, intuition, calmness, self-control, and concentration melt into the ever-joyous Sea of Bliss. No longer does the soul have to experience its joy as an individualised wave of consciousness, but is merged in the One Cosmic Ocean, with all its waves-eternal laughter, thrills, throbs.”

### **Charles Leadbeater**

“Still higher and infinitely more beautiful, where at all clearly developed, is the living light of the causal body, the vehicle of the higher self, which shows the stage of development of the real ego in its passage from birth to birth. But to see these the pupil must, of course, have developed the vision of the levels to which they belong.”  
(Charles W. Leadbeater, *The Astral Plane*)

“So long as the reincarnating ego remains upon the plane which is his true home in the formless levels [the Causal Plane], the vehicle which he inhabits is the causal body, but when he descends into the form-level [the Mental Plane - he descends when journeying into his new incarnational, physical body] he must, in order to be able to function upon them, clothe himself in their matter; and the matter that he thus attracts to himself furnishes his mind-body.” (Charles W. Leadbeater, *The Astral Plane*)

Leadbeater calls the Causal Plane our “true home” during our reincarnational cycles: “Let us now pass into the ‘formless’ divisions of the mental plane (the Causal Plane), the region which is man’s true home during the cycle of his reincarnations, into which he is born, a baby soul, an infant Ego, an embryonic individuality, when he begins his purely human evolution.” (Charles W. Leadbeater, *The Astral Plane*)

When we stop needing to be reborn, we are said to be ‘liberated’ from birth and death. The level of enlightenment that puts an end to the need to be reborn is called ‘Nirvikalpa Samadhi’.

Nirvikalpa Samādhi is a state of absorption without self-consciousness. It is a merging of the mental activity in the Self, to such a degree, or in such a way, that the distinction of - knower, act of knowing, and object known becomes dissolved, “as waves vanish in water, and as foam vanishes into the sea”. The difference to the other samadhis is that there is no return from this samadhi into lower states of consciousness. Therefore this is the only true final Enlightenment.

This is the stage of enlightenment that Jesus was referring to when he said, “him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out.” (Book of Revelation 3:12)

### **Understanding Time**

Time is both objective and subjective. Objectively it is the linear progression of universal change. Subjectively it is how we perceive the world around us.

The higher our level of consciousness, the faster time goes by. The lower our level of consciousness the slower time goes by. When we are happy, time flies. When we are depressed, time drags.

Higher states of consciousness use subtler (lighter and quicker) energy and lower states of consciousness use denser (heavier and slower) energy to process our experiences. Thus, when we are in a higher state we process experiences faster and when we are in a lower state we process experiences more slowly.

Higher states of consciousness change much quicker than lower states. Thus higher states ‘eat’ physical time at a faster rate, giving the experience of physical time flying by. Lower states ‘eat’ physical time at a slower rate, giving the experience of physical

time passing slowly. Also, acceptance of experience speeds up the processing rate and resistance to experience slows down the processing rate, acceptance speeds up the experience of time and resistance slows down the experience of time.

The higher our level of consciousness, the more expansive and inclusive it is of the past and the future. The higher the state, the greater is our ability to learn from the past and create a more positive future. The past is set and does not change. What is changing is how we view the past, how we frame it.

No event is inherently bad, everything is subject to interpretation as bad or good or neutral. What needs changing is how we view the past, how we interpret it. When the past is resisted, it is interpreted as a detriment and acts upon the present as a detriment. When the past is increasingly accepted, valued, and learnt from then it is interpreted as a resource that empowers the present and the future. This is how we purify our consciousness.

As we grow in consciousness, we are able to harvest increasing quantities of valuable lessons from the past. Events are temporary but the valuable consciousness gained from the events lasts forever. The potential future is continually being improved as we harvest lessons from the past. We continually see better ways of doing things, as time passes.

Time generally speeds up for an older person (life goes by faster) if they learn from the past. Thus the higher our level of consciousness, the faster time goes by.

### **Alice Bailey - 777 Incarnations**

In the book ‘Treatise on Cosmic Fire’ channelled by Alice Bailey Djwal Khul refers to 777 Incarnations. This refers to the journey of the Soul through the different bodies and planes of existence. The number 777 is symbolic and is not the actual number of incarnations we have.

#### **The 700 Incarnations – Physical Body**

We are unaware of our spiritual nature and blindly go about trying to satisfy our selfish desires. This is the longest period. We are mainly focussed on the Physical body in these 700 lives.

#### **The 70 Incarnations – Astral Body**

In this period we become more spiritually aware and attempt to live a more spiritual life. We are mainly focussed on the Astral body in these 70 lives.

#### **The 7 Incarnations – Causal Body**

The soul guides the destiny of the ego/personality self and we fulfil our soul’s purpose. We embark on the path of service. We are mainly focussed on the Causal body in these 7 lives.

## **Books**

Alice Bailey (1973) A Treatise on Cosmic Fire: Lucis Press Ltd  
Alice Bailey (1972) Letters on Occult Meditation: Lucis Press Ltd  
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Paramhansa Yogananda (1946) The Autobiography of a Yogi: The Philosophical Library, Inc.

## **Web Sites**

The Koshas

[http://www.sriramchandra.org/books/pg/pgchap\\_21.htm](http://www.sriramchandra.org/books/pg/pgchap_21.htm)

Atma Bodha (Self-Knowledge) by Adi Sankaracharya, 788-820 CE

<http://www.swamij.com/shankara-atma-bodha.htm>

Lessons on the Upanishads by Swami Krishnananda - Chapter 7: The Mandukya Upanishad

[http://www.swami-krishnananda.org/upanishad/upan\\_07.html](http://www.swami-krishnananda.org/upanishad/upan_07.html)

Moksha Gita by Swami Sivananda Commentary by Swami Krishnananda - Chapter 9: The Five Sheaths

[http://swami-krishnananda.org/moksha/moksh\\_09.html](http://swami-krishnananda.org/moksha/moksh_09.html)

The Essence of the Aitareya and Taittiriya Upanishads by Swami Krishnananda - Chapter 4: Cosmology

[http://swami-krishnananda.org/aitt/ait\\_4a.html](http://swami-krishnananda.org/aitt/ait_4a.html)

Autobiography of a Yogi - Paramhansa Yogananda - Chapter 43 - The Resurrection of Sri Yukteswar

<http://www.crystalclarity.com/yogananda/chap43.php>

Atman is Distinct from the Three Bodies by Swami Sivananda

[http://www.sivanandaonline.org/public\\_html/?cmd=displaysection&section\\_id=746](http://www.sivanandaonline.org/public_html/?cmd=displaysection&section_id=746)

## **Chinese Medicine**

According to Chinese Medicine different organs in the body hold different emotions -

Spleen - worry, dwelling too much on a particular topic

Lungs - grief, sadness, feeling detached

Liver - anger, resentment, frustration, irritability, bitterness, "flying off the handle"

Heart - lack of enthusiasm and vitality, mental restlessness, depression, insomnia, despair

Kidney - fearful, weak willpower, insecure, aloof, isolated

To give two examples - excessive mental work will injure the Spleen. As the Spleen becomes depleted we worry more and our ability to concentrate gets worse. Fear injures the Kidney and as the Kidney becomes depleted we become more fearful.

## **Ten Realms/Worlds in Buddhism**

Ten realms/worlds of existence are identified in Buddhist teachings. These realms can be understood on a psychological level, or as real places. The Ten Worlds comprises of Six Lower Worlds and Four Higher Worlds. The Six Lower Worlds/Realms are (from highest to lowest):

Heaven (Gods), Asura (Demi-Gods), Humans, Animals, Hungry Ghosts, Hell Realms

The Four Higher Worlds, Four Noble States are (from highest to lowest):

Buddhahood, Bodhisattva, Pratyekabuddha, Shravaka

The worlds of Shravaka and Pratyekabuddha are collectively known as the Two Vehicles. The Buddha admonishes people in these two realms: if they choose to be complacent and remain where they are without the aspiration for Buddhahood, they will be stagnant and stuck at their present spiritual levels.

Detailed information about the Ten Worlds are mostly found in the Pali Canon such as Majjhima Nikaya, Anguttara Nikaya, Samyutta Nikaya, Digha Nikaya, Khuddaka Nikaya etc.

## **Shamanism**

According to Shamanic cosmology, there are three inner planes of consciousness: the Upper, Middle, and Lower Worlds. Shamans did not invent these inner realms; they discovered them. Far from being a human contrivance these archetypal worlds are inherent in the collective unconscious, the common psychological inheritance of humanity. They are a part of our psyche, a part of us whether we choose to become aware of them or not.

According to Shamanism the Upper World is the unseen realm of unmanifest potential, higher knowledge, and enlightenment. The Upper World is the realm of gods, goddesses and evolved teachers. It is in this inner realm that the archetypal patterns that are the blueprints for all things exist. Highly evolved spirit guides also inhabit the Upper World.

Lakota Shaman Nicholas Black Elk says, “The Upper World is the real world that is behind this one, and everything we see here is something like a shadow from that world.” The Upper World forms the matrix of energy out of which our world manifests. It is the world of archetypes. Every event in the visible world is the result of archetypal patterns in the unseen world.

The Upper World is more ethereal than our world; the colours are brighter and iridescent. There are cities made of crystal and subtle music plays. This is the place of wise sages and angels.

Shamans journey to the Upper World to acquire knowledge, to have a vision or to influence events in the material world. Shamans also go there for inspiration, insight or to find ways to restore balance in the world.

According to Shamanism the Middle World is the spiritual counterpart of the material realm and the region that is most like our world. In this parallel world exist the spirits that are the essence of everything in the material world. The Middle World is parallel to the world in which we live.

In Shamanism the Lower World is the realm of animal spirits. It is the place to which some people travel after death. This Lower World is the place of tests and challenges but also the realm of power where guardian animals or Helping Spirits are acquired.