

Who Am I? The Constitution of Man

By Egon Eklund

Human beings have asked this existential question from time immemorial, and why not? Each of us is evolving in our self-conscious development as part of the greater evolving whole of humankind, although the degree of self-conscious realization varies much from individual to individual.

However, there are certain times when this question is asked more persistently, usually during times of difficulty and crisis, prompted by conflicts in the inner psychological life, as well as in our outer circumstances. And this question becomes especially important during certain incarnations when we lose interest in the outer world and become more introverted and less ambitious. It is not through weakness that we become less interested in the world around us and instead turn inward, when ready-made answers from all sides are rejected or at least not accepted without question. In the spiritual sciences this psychological state is explained as the pull of the higher Self or Soul over the more concrete lower self or personality. The higher Self attracts our attention when the outer world of form loses its strong hold on our personality and when difficulties, inexplicable things and uneasiness are present.

The most important fact is that we are composed of two selves, the immortal Soul and the mortal self, and these are not separate from one another. It is through our mortal self that we have experiences and gain wisdom through the eons. But eventually it becomes time for the immortal Self to influence us and help us find the path forward.

To understand more about human life and developing consciousness we have to consider the inner constitution of the human being and how it is built. It has been said that before physical birth the individual Soul, whose own nature is essentially group conscious and is one with all that breathes, sends down its projection for a new incarnation. This projection consists first of all of a framework for a mental body and a portion of mental matter of certain qualities. To this is added a body of astral matter, and this body of sensitivity is also designed to meet the Soul's plan for development, growth and karmic requirements. The third phase is the building of an etheric body, the function of which is to maintain physical health and strength during life and to connect the mental and astral bodies and their vibrations to life in the physical world, to our feelings and desires and to our many thoughts on the physical plane.

These inner bodies are, of course, connected progressively to the life and experience of the growing child, when life's experiences conform to the patterns that were given before birth. And we witness the effect of how we use our free wills to focus our given set of energies. The mental body is in a "semi-detached" condition in the early years and becomes fully appropriated about age 21. It continues to develop and refine throughout life. The astral body is appropriated about age 14 and is ripe for development and integration through the teen years. The etheric vehicle pervades the whole body right from the start, or when breathing has begun, but the etheric structure also takes shape progressively during the passing years, especially from the age of seven when schooling begins.

From the objective point of view we see only the physical body, and from it feelings and thoughts are generated. But seen from the subjective, mystical or esoteric point of view, there is something that expresses itself through the physical body, but that is not the physical body itself. All three parts – physical, emotional and mental – must be connected in a healthy life. The connecting link is the etheric body, which gets its sustenance from the etheric world that exists all around us and from the sun. The etheric world is an integral part of the physical world, despite the

fact that its mysterious and all-connecting nature is not seen by the majority. What we call “flesh and bone” has no life without this etheric structure. This is a fact of great importance. We are not yet so familiar with the fact of the etheric, although during the Aquarian Age much more will be learned about it.

All three parts – mental, astral and etheric-physical – constitute our personality vehicle in this life. They try to work as a whole. Together they form the lower self, but they are not so independent or self-sustaining as we might be inclined to think. The Soul and the spirit are always influencing them and, of course, the world around us. So, in fact, we have four factors that are intermingled and working together, of which we do not know very much. That is why it is difficult to explain and define these parts, but we must try to do so for the sake of understanding. It is life itself that forces us to try to understand.

The astral body could be called the body of *sensitivity*. It is the body of personal love and emotional reaction, the lower analogy to universal love and Soul love. Because of this influence we are inclined to move toward attraction and be attractive, as well as, on the other hand, be repulsed by some things and to act unresponsively to certain things. The astral body is also where *forces meet*. It is situated between the mental and physical planes and is the factor that influences the way we meet other people and with the way we are met by them. In this situation we are also “between forces.” This influence, coupled with the fact of sensitivity, makes the astral body of a human being and of humanity as a whole a meeting place of forces and energies, and *duality* is strongly felt. This results in confusion and perplexity, and often things are seen and experienced in an “upside-down” fashion. We are sensitively in touch with forces from many directions, and the astral plane can be compared with a stormy sea or with a pool of deep water. It is the place where *opposites* meet. This “stormy astral sea” can also be a dangerous place to people who are uncontrolled emotionally or who are overly sensitive to astral influence. The whirlpool of forces generated can be too strong for sound living on the physical plane. The uncontrollable person “rocks the boat” and the overly sensitive person is in a dangerous place. These situations call for mental control and discrimination, as well as life experience in how to deal with people and circumstances.

An important astral factor is *desire-aspiration*. Desire is aroused by form radiation or, in other words, by the way forms influence us when we are around them, and by moving forward toward the object of feeling or appreciation. Desire is *astral movement*. It can be movement toward worldly success and possessions, toward competition, expressions of hate or admiration, pleasure seeking or esthetic experiences, peaceful surroundings, attention of the opposite sex, etc. This desiring has the power to change us, to make us see and experience things in a particular light, and even to imprison us under certain circumstances. Desire is the great agent of instructive experiences. These desires are of many grades from coarse to refined. When the Soul or the higher mind calls to its projection in the physical world, and there is a yearning response inwards and upwards, this is called aspiration. Before this, of course, an aspirant’s astral body must be refined to a degree and freed from coarser factors, such as base instincts, hates, uncontrolled astral reactions and desires, lack of sensitivity, etc. The lower self overcomes these traits during many incarnations, and the integration of mind-feeling-acting will be affected. The lower self accomplishes this mostly by using mental powers and qualities of the mind.

What is the mind? In materialistic thinking brainpower and mind are seen as one and the same thing, but it is not so. In the case of certain brain damage or nerve diseases people become incapable of using the mind to express ideas and can even seem retarded. The same result can eventuate if one’s astral nature is quite uncontrolled and the mind’s intentions and decisions are prevented from reaching the brain in clear and precise formulations. Of course, if the mind is very undeveloped, we

also call this retardation, although the fault is not in the astral-brain connection; there is only lack of input.

The mental body, with its electrical nature, is in continual restless movement. The mind is always formulating, defining and controlling. It sorts and analyzes. It becomes more discriminating. In physical living we get our thoughts mostly from the *concrete* mind, which is the lower part of the mental vibration, but there is also a higher world of mental experiences above the mental body, which is called the *abstract* mind. The mental body formulates the input coming from “above” as well as from “below.” The formulation of that which is above is, of course, a more difficult matter. For example, a good musician can “hear” music on the mental plane. Not many people are skilled to work effectively with this higher vibration, and everyday living on the physical plane demands the use of concrete mind, since we need to express ideas in mutual intercourse in order to be understood. Thus we can appreciate the value of developing the concrete mind through education, and we can see an increase of light in the physical world. What distinguishes the human mind from the animal mind? It is the power to connect past and future to the present. The sense of passing time in relation to mental formulations is a very interesting subject.

The relation of the mental body to the astral is very significant. It is the mind that should fix, regulate and control astral reactions and happenings. Without this control no order or meaning could be created or maintained in the face of astral reactions, astral encounters and astral whirlpools of self-centeredness or fixed desires. The imagination would run riot without reason, and even the beast would find itself very imaginative. Imagination checked and directed by the mind, on the other hand, can be a great creative force. Then imagination can make things manifest! Will power is also generated via the special strength of the mind, with its capacity to move in one purposeful direction. The mind is also needed where choices have to be made. It is said that human beings are *kama-manasic* in nature; desire and the capacity to reason co-exist, and both are connected and needed in life. We are sons of desire and also sons of mind.

In religious and esoteric training, when the aspirant is prepared to receive the Soul’s messages, this astral regulating and controlling is affected by the technique of the “middle path”, using the discriminative mind, which is to a degree lighted by the Soul, to balance and to clear up the astral contents and its many opposites. This calms the astral body and creates a dispassionate inner attitude. This does not mean that a person should become insensitive to human happiness and sorrow or become devoid of feeling. A kind of passage or alignment is thus created in astral matter, and this helps the Soul’s images in mental matter pass down and transform the astral body in some measure. The higher Self can then impress the astral body and the brain with its inclusive, loving and sacrificing images, and personal desires and the emotionalism of the lower astral self lose their hold on the personality.

But it is important to remember that the mind can deceive its owner. There are many reasons for this: Perhaps the mind is not discriminating enough; perhaps there is not enough light pouring in from Soul levels; perhaps we do not want to see all the related factors in a situation, or perhaps we see things in a narrow-minded way. And sometimes a very strong desire can distort the mental factor, which counteracts that desire.

When the higher Self becomes more influential in one’s life, after we pass through that period of inner questioning, persistence in aspiration, study and meditation should be maintained. This gradually strengthens and opens the channel between the higher and the lower selves. And these disciplines are also important to overcome the resistance and avoidance that the lower self will exert against this newly initiated process, and this is understandable. The secure hold of old habits is now threatened, and the lower self denies its discontentedness by believing that everything is more or

less satisfactory, that there is no need for change, advice or illumination, and a kind of “know-it all” attitude is expressed. Other factors that are met on the path toward self-knowledge are:

1. Individual karma, which can slow progress. Karma can, for example, provide experiences that focus on the weak points in one’s constitution or responsibility to society or family, or that will push for the release of a hindering factor in one’s spiritual aspiration, such as pride.
2. The fact that we are a part of humanity and live in human society. The collective whole also limits our progress by demanding participation in collective happenings. We have to serve and assist our fellow human beings as well as our families.
3. One factor that is often overlooked is that it is not possible to become perfect in one lifetime. The Soul’s lessons are so demanding that it takes many lives to develop aspiration, right motives, unselfishness, and the power to surmount difficulties and take advantage of crises. Soul qualities and lessons build on previously attained ones, and it is the responsibility of every sincere seeker to find out which quality is currently demanded in any given incarnation.
4. What we attain in self-conscious development must also be given or sacrificed in order that that which is attained is made our own. This makes transformation possible and is worked out through the heart; the head alone is not enough. The gates are still narrow ones for the being who follows the line of greatest resistance.