

**THEOSOPHICAL  
MANUAL NO. VII:  
MAN AND HIS BODIES**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9781760573355

Theosophical Manual No. VII: Man and His Bodies by Annie Besant

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BY  
ANNIE BESANT.

**Theosophical Publishing House**  
KROTONA,  
HOLLYWOOD, LOS ANGELES, CAL.  
1917

## PREFACE

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*Few words are needed in sending this little book out into the world. It is the seventh of a series of Manuals designed to meet the public demand for a simple exposition of theosophical teachings. Some have complained that our literature is at once too abstruse, too technical, and too expensive, for the ordinary reader, and it is our hope that the present series may succeed in supplying what is a very real want. Theosophy is not only for the learned; it is for all. It may be that among those who in these little books catch their first glimpse of its teachings, there may be a few who will be led by them to penetrate more deeply into its philosophy, its science, and its religion, facing its abstruser problems with the student's zeal and the neophyte's ardour. But these manuals are not written for the eager student, whom no initial difficulties can daunt; they are written for the busy men and women of the work-a-day world, and seek to make plain some of the great truths that render life easier to bear and death easier to face. Written by servants of the Masters who are the Elder Brothers of our race, they can have no other object than to serve our fellow-men.*

# MAN AND HIS BODIES.

## INTRODUCTION

So much confusion exists as to consciousness and its vehicles, the man and the garments that he wears, that it seems expedient to place before theosophical students a plain statement of the facts so far as they are known to us. We have reached a point in our studies at which much that was at first obscure has become clear, much that was vague has become definite, much that was accepted as theory has become matter of first-hand knowledge. It is therefore possible to arrange ascertained facts in a definite sequence, facts which can be observed again and again as successive students develop the power of observation, and to speak on them with the same certainty as is felt by the physicist who deals with other observed and tabulated phenomena. But just as the physicist may err so may the metaphysicist, and as knowledge widens new lights are thrown on old facts, their relations are more clearly seen, and their appearance changes—often because the further light shows that the fact which seemed a whole was only a fragment. No authority is claimed for the views here presented; they are

offered only as from a student to students, as an effort to reproduce what has been taught but has doubtless been very imperfectly apprehended, together with such results of the observations of pupils as their limited powers enable them to make.

At the outset of our study it is necessary that the western reader should change the attitude in which he has been accustomed to regard himself, and that he should clearly distinguish between the man and the bodies in which the man dwells. We are too much in the habit of identifying ourselves with the outer garments that we wear, too apt to think of ourselves as though we were our bodies; and it is necessary, if we are to grasp a true conception of our subject, that we shall leave this point of view and shall cease to identify ourselves with casings that we put on for a time and again cast off, to put on fresh ones when we are again in need of such vestures. To identify ourselves with these bodies that have only a passing existence is really as foolish and as unreasonable as it would be to identify ourselves with our clothes; we are not dependent on them—their value is in proportion to their utility. The blunder so constantly made of identifying the consciousness, which is our Self, with the vehicles in which that consciousness is for the moment functioning, can only be excused by the fact that the waking consciousness, and to some extent the dream consciousness also, do live and work in the body and are not known apart from it to the ordinary man; yet an intellectual understanding of the real



conditions may be gained, and we may train ourselves to regard our Self as the owner of his vehicles; and after a time this will by experience become for us a definite fact, when we learn to separate our Self from his bodies, to step out of the vehicle and to know that we exist in a far fuller consciousness outside it than within it, and that we are in no sense dependent upon it; when that is once achieved, any further identification of our Self with our bodies is of course impossible, and we can never again make the blunder of supposing that we are what we wear. The clear intellectual understanding at least is within the grasp of all of us, and we may train ourselves in the habitual distinguishment between the Self—the man—and his bodies; even to do this is to step out of the illusion in which the majority are wrapped, and changes our whole attitude towards life and towards the world, lifting us into a sterner region above "the changes and chances of this mortal life," placing us above the daily petty troubles which loom so largely to embodied consciousness, showing us the true proportion between the everchanging and the relatively permanent, and making us feel the difference between the drowning man tossed and buffeted by the waves that smother him, and the man whose feet are on a rock while the surges break harmlessly at its base.

By man I mean the living, conscious, thinking Self, the individual; by bodies, the various casings in which this Self is enclosed, each casing enabling the Self to function in some definite region of the universe.

As a man might use a carriage on the land, a ship on the water, a balloon in the air, to travel from one place to another, and yet in all places remain himself, so does the Self, the real man, remain himself no matter in what body he is functioning; and as carriage, ship, and balloon vary in materials and arrangement according to the element in which each is destined to move, so does each body vary according to the environment in which it is to act. One is grosser than another, one shorter-lived than another, one has fewer capacities than another; but all have this in common—that relatively to the man they are transient, his instruments, his servants, wearing out and renewed according to their nature, and adapted to his varying needs, his growing powers. We will study them one by one, beginning with the lowest, and then take the man himself, the actor in all the bodies.

## THE PHYSICAL BODY

Under the term physical body must be included the two lower principles of man—called in our old terminology the Sthūla Sharira and Linga Sharira—since they both function on the physical plane, are composed of physical matter, are formed for the period of one physical life, are cast off by the man at death, and disintegrate together in the physical world when he passes on into the astral.

Another reason for classing these two principles as our physical body or physical vehicle, is that so long as we cannot pass out of the physical world—or plane, as we are accustomed to call it—we are using one or other or both of these physical vestures; they both belong to the physical plane by their materials, and cannot pass outside it; consciousness working in them is bound within their physical limitations, and is subject to the ordinary laws of space and time. Although partially separable, they are rarely separated during earthly life, and such separation is inadvisable, and is always a sign of disease or of ill-balanced constitution.

They are distinguishable by the materials of which they are composed into the gross body and the etheric double, the latter being the exact duplicate of the visible body, particle for particle, and the medium through which play all the electrical and vital currents