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THE CONCEPTS OF THE SUBTLE BODIES IN THE ANCIENT SPIRITUAL TRADITIONS

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Abstract. *The idea that humans are multidimensional, i.e., that beyond their physical body, humans have other, subtler bodies, through which they can interact with the universe, is very ancient. Understanding of a human as a complex multidimensional phenomenon laid the foundations for the development of many Eastern and Western esoteric schools. Contemporary spiritual teachers and researchers continue the ancient tradition. Each esoteric tradition describes a human and his/her bodies from different angles, and none fully describes it which is probably impossible. This paper aims at investigating the concepts of the subtle bodies in the ancient spiritual traditions.*

Key words: *subtle bodies, physical body, Microcosm, Macrocosm, Buddhism, Hinduism.*

The search for the “self”, purpose and meaning of life, comprehension of multidimensionality and complexity of human phenomenon largely depends on the worldview of an individual, on his/her level of spiritual awakening. Many people associate their existence only with the physical world. A “physical person” cannot realize his / her purpose and final destination perceiving only the physical dimension of the world. However, sooner or later they begin to feel the presence of something greater – the Eternal Man. Thus, they embark on the path of their spiritual development in order to return to their true self. “Despite the increasing number of social groups, organizations, social networks, modern individuals experience the feelings of loneliness, isolation, and alienation. They cannot break through to their higher potential and grasp the true meaning of life. Therefore, the questions “Why should we live life?”, “What is our final destination?” that often

arise. On the one hand, it seems that this era of commercialized life, body and soul is devoid of spirituality. However, on the other hand, a person demonstrates a burning desire to reach the spiritual pole that enriches our lives, provides us with ever new and deeper meanings – the world without envy, hatred, anger, where dreams become reality, and each of us can cling to the wellspring of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty. To get there, we have to say “Farewell” to our limited “Ego” that does not want to recognize others. This breakthrough to God, Absolute, Nirvana, Tao or the True Self is the way home. Such a breakthrough requires a revision of the entire value system of an individual” [8]. New values must go beyond a horizontal existence, in which all values are of equal significance, in order to return to the central spiritual principle [5].

Analysis of the studies and publications. The idea that humans are

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multidimensional, i.e., that beyond their physical body, humans have other, subtler bodies, through which they can interact with the universe, is very ancient.

Understanding of a human as a complex multidimensional phenomenon laid the foundations for the development of many Eastern and Western esoteric schools, such as schools of Yoga, Buddhism, Zen, Sufism, Theosophy, Anthroposophy, Occultism, Kabbalah, Pythagorean school, ancient Greek mysticism, Gnostic Christian tradition, etc. Contemporary spiritual teachers and researchers continue the ancient tradition. For example, T. Little in his book "Yoga of the Subtle Body: A Guide to the Physical and Energetic Anatomy of Yoga" [12] uses somatic concepts as grounds for exploring the subtle body. "Religion and the Subtle Body in Asia and the West: Between Mind and Body" edited by G. Samuel and J. Johnston explores subtle-body practices from a variety of perspectives [15]. G.R.S. Mead examines the doctrine of the subtle body in the West [14].

The purpose of the study. *This paper aims at investigating the concepts of the subtle bodies in the ancient spiritual traditions.*

Methodology. The authors used an interpretive research paradigm, integrative anthropological approach, and multidisciplinary analysis.

Research results and their discussion. A human being is a field of consciousness that permeates all levels of the universe, which is able to realize, develop and identify themselves. The ancient sages said: A human is, first of all, Body, Soul, and Spirit (or consciousness, information and energy). Despite the differences between religious, philosophical and other aspects of esoteric schools, there is something in common that unites them.

First and foremost, it is the representation of a human as the Microcosm, a mirror image of the Macrocosm (Universe) or, in modern language, as a holographic, "laser" reflection of the Universe. Ancient Indian, ancient Chinese and medieval European models of a human are united by the idea of "cosmism" of a human being. Thus, the model of a human in Indo-Buddhist culture reflects the levels of comprehension of the cosmic essence of a human. These ideas form the basis for various schools of yoga. In the medieval European model, a human is seen as the Microcosm that reflects the structure of the Macrocosm. In the medieval notions of "life centers" and 12 basic parts of the human body, the heart plays a major role, and seven energy centers of a human are in tune with the Christian idea of the seven deadly sins.

In the ancient Chinese worldview, a human is understood as a psycho-energetic cosmic entity, a holistic mechanism, which is determined by seven levels of interaction with the cosmos. Thus, the core of the Taoist worldview is neither matter nor consciousness, but life energy called Qi (Ki, Chi). Qi is the vital force that gives life to all forms of the Universe. It is a vibrating component of existence, continuous flow of life at the molecular, atomic, and sub-atomic levels. Everything that exists in the world is Qi and its states. Qi is a dynamic force that permeates the entire cosmos, in fact, it is the cosmos. Everything exists due to its transformations: just as water can become steam or ice, so condensing Qi becomes matter and rarefying Qi becomes spirit. There is no insurmountable boundary between matter and spirit, they are different modes of Qi. Human beings like everything that exists depend on Qi and Tao-way. When they are in harmony with the universal cosmic

law, their life is long and happy. It becomes possible if they follow the principle of Wu Wei. Wu Wei is the special kind of “joining the flow of existence”, merging of the individual “I” and Qi, unity of subject and object.

“Bearing it, rearing it

Bearing without possession

Achieving without arrogance

Raising without domination

This is called the Mystic Virtue” [17, Chapter 10].

There is neither active “I” nor object that requires efforts. The boundary between subject and object disappears.

There is just a spontaneous act according to Tao-Way. Wu Wei is a cultivation of the state of being, in which the action takes place in accordance with the natural cycles. This is a flow of life filled with great simplicity, love, and awakening. Following Wu Wei, humans respond easily to any challenge [6].

A significant parameter that indicates the commonality of the Eastern and Western ideas is the general recognition and understanding of the complex, multilayered structure of a human, the recognition of his/her multidimensionality, i.e., the presence of the several bodies. Each body lives according to its own laws – the laws of the Microcosm, and at the same time, being a holographic reflection of the Universe (Macrocosm), a reflection of the seven levels (planes) of the Universe, obeys the cosmic laws. These cosmic laws were defined by Hermes Trismegistus. These are the laws, or principles, of mentalism, correspondence, vibration, polarity, rhythm, cause and effect, gender [16].

Almost all religions claim that thought (idea) is primary and matter is secondary. It is impossible to understand the divine nature of a human without realizing his/her multidimensional structure. The structure of a human and

the universe are identical: each plane of the universe or human body has its own shell – subtle or physical. Each subtle body has its own consciousness, its own potential, due to which the ability to control certain parts of its consciousness arises.

In the ancient Egyptian tradition, a human was believed to have nine energy bodies (shells). Subtle human bodies exist separately, lead a separate life, they can think in their own way and testify against their master at the court of Osiris. The average person has seven bodies and two are separate, while a magician has all nine together. The task of a practitioner is to go through different levels of consciousness, understand and purify each body, harmonize them, take control and gather them into a single structure. Subtle bodies are divided into two groups: those that function constantly on the earthly plane, and bodies of Light that are in the gardens of Osiris. Human bodies are described in “The Egyptian Book of the Dead” [18].

In the Buddhist tradition, the classification of the subtle bodies of a human is as follows: the spirit of self-consciousness Avalokiteśvara watches everything that happens, Buddha Amoghasiddhi and Buddha Dipankara and the seven energy bodies represented by their rulers-bodhisattvas. The different animals on which the managers of energy bodies sit indicate the different qualities and properties of each energy body. In Buddhism in addition to the physical body, there are four other bodies, which are sometimes combined into two bodies. Rupakaya – the Body of Forms – consists of two bodies. They are Nirmanakaya and Sambhogakaya [11]. Nirmanakaya is the Body of Emanation, the revealed body. His Holiness the Dalai Lama is nirmanakaya. The Buddha can emanate innumerable bodies of nirmanakaya in

order to give teachings to many living beings. Sambhogakaya is a very subtle Body of Bliss. For example, the wisdom deity Manjushri is a form of Sambhogakaya. Manjushri exists in all worlds, but only the Aryans can see him and learn from him. Ordinary people cannot see him in this form. That is why Buddhas manifest themselves in the body of Nirmanakaya.

Dharmakaya is Buddha's Body of the Mind. It also consists of two forms. The first is Jnanakaya, or Wisdom Truth Body. This is the consciousness of the Buddha, which has an aspect of omniscience. The second form of Dharmakaya is Swabhavikakaya, or the Body of Pure Suchness, that is, the aspect of the emptiness of the Buddha's consciousness [19]. The bodies of the Buddha are directly related to who the practitioner should become as a result of his/her practice.

According to the Vedic tradition, the whole system called Human serves to move self-consciousness in the physical world. For this movement, a human has a physical body, which does not exist without a soul that controls the energies of desires. The Vedas state that a human at birth has a physical body, seven energy bodies of the Soul, two spiritual rulers, a double-demigod or prenatal energy and consciousness, the self-consciousness of which is a Human. This division is conditional. The seven energy bodies are the bodies of the soul, they have the corresponding rulers – the Gods, who are in the chakras (seven centers of consciousness). They control their qualities and worlds and differ in properties, degree of awareness, purpose, ability to perceive, frequency of emanations of Light. The rulers of the worlds, in turn, have helpers – the gods-spirits. All of them “grow” together with a person and can give as much Light as the

person is ready to perceive. And sometimes they even break away from a person if he/she is not in agreement with him/herself and the world. Each subtle body has its own functions, lives its own life, has its own level of awareness. The spiritual bodies of a human constitute his/her immortal essence, live their lives in their worlds and are sometimes manifested in the physical world as intuitive knowledge, prophetic dream, or altruistic act. In the process of expanding human consciousness, his/her interests and spheres of influence grow and a person experiences the awakening of the silent centers and spiritual bodies [20].

In Hinduism, the subtle body is defined as a triad consisting of the pranic, mental bodies and the body of consciousness (Pranamaya, Manomaya, Vijnanamaya). Together with the causal (or karmic) body, subtle body is reincarnated from one life to another. In Vedanta, subtle bodies are called koshas. In the Vedanta tradition, kosha is a shell that covers the “spirit”, the “higher self” and limits the levels of human consciousness. According to the Taittiriya Upanishad, human beings have five shells that coexist in the range from the coarsest to the thinnest [9]. They are also mentioned in the Sarvasara Upanishad [13]. There are Annamaya Kosha – the physical shell; Pranamaya Kosha – the pranic shell; Manomaya Kosha – the mental shell; Vijnanamaya Kosha – the wisdom shell; Anandamaya Kosha – the shell of bliss. The last one is the most subtle of the five levels of embodied self. The purpose of the Vedic spiritual practices is to transform and spiritualize Koshas.

H. Blavatsky's theosophy [4] – a syncretic religious-mystical teaching about the union of a human soul with the Deity – is based on ancient philosophical and religious teachings, mainly Vedanta,

Buddhism, and early Christianity [10]. H. Blavatsky classified human principles including the physical body, subtle bodies or means of moving consciousness and the immortal spirit. The first principle is Sthula Sharira – the physical body. The second principle is Prana – the vital principle. The third one is Linga Sharira – the astral form. The fourth principle is Kama – “the seat of emotions, desires and passions. It is center of the animal man. In the fourth and fifth principles we find the line of demarcation between mortal man and immortal man” [1]. The fifth principle is Manas – the mind, the intelligence. The sixth one is Buddhi, the spiritual soul, it is “the vehicle or instrument of Atma, the pure universal spirit. Buddhi is the feeling that we are in inner unity with the Universe. It is the source of spiritual intuition” [1]. The seventh principle is Atma – the spirit, the true self, which exists in unity with the Absolute. H. Blavatsky’s ideas were popularized in the articles of A. Besant, who described these seven bodies in detail [3]. The ideas of theosophy were transformed by A. Bailey [2] and were incorporated into the worldview of the New Age.

Conclusions. All esoteric schools, despite the differences in the interpretation of the structure of a human and his/her bodies, agreed that the average person has access to the physical body, ordinary yoga teacher has the experience of the subtle body, and enlightened yoga master has the experience of the Divine. God is one in everything and everything is in him, and the physical body of a human is imbued with the subtle bodies. There are many of them, but for a simplified understanding they can be divided into 7-9 subtle bodies. Each esoteric tradition describes a human and his/her bodies from different angles, and none fully describes it which is probably impossible.

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КОНЦЕПЦІЇ ТОНКИХ ТІЛ У ДАВНІХ ДУХОВНИХ ТРАДИЦІЯХ

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Анотація. Ідея багатовимірності людини, тобто, думка про те, що за межами свого фізичного тіла люди мають інші, тонші тіла, завдяки яким вони можуть взаємодіяти зі Всесвітом, є дуже давньою. Розуміння людини як складного багатогранного явища заклало основи для розвитку багатьох східних та західних езотеричних шкіл. Сучасні духовні вчителі та дослідники продовжують давню традицію. Кожна езотерична школа описує людину та її тіла з різних сторін, і жодна не описує її повністю, що, мабуть, і неможливо. Ця стаття має на меті дослідження концепцій тонких тіл у давніх духовних традиціях.

Ключові слова: тонкі тіла, фізичне тіло, мікрокосм, макрокосм, буддизм, індуїзм.