

THE SEVEN RAYS AND THE LIFE CYCLE

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At the very heart of the more esoteric psychology presented in the writings of Alice Bailey are the seven rays. Her system regards each individual as being qualified by particular qualities of energy. The seven rays are:

- The First Ray of Will or Power
- The Second Ray of Love-Wisdom
- The Third Ray of Active Intelligence
- The Fourth Ray of Harmony through Conflict
- The Fifth Ray of Concrete Mind
- The Sixth Ray of Devotion and Idealism
- The Seventh Ray of Ceremonial Order

Each ray energy uniquely expresses an essential quality of Life. These qualities interact and interweave to generate the rich tapestry of expression through form and consciousness that we see in the world. All that has been created expresses ray quality, whether we speak of the individual human being, a kingdom of nature or a nation of the world.

The first, second and third rays are called the "Rays of Aspect", the fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh are called "Rays of Attribute". It is outside the remit of this paper to expand on this division. The reader is referred to Esoteric Psychology Volumes I and II. One point that is worth drawing attention to, however, is that within the evolutionary process, when considered on a macrocosmic or universal scale, the Rays of Attribute are synthesized into the third ray. There is then a further synthesizing tendency with the second ray and finally with the first ray. So each life is a kaleidoscope of differentiation yet the life cycle contains a tendency towards a synthesis.

For Alice Bailey, each life is part of a greater process of spiritual development in which individual consciousness opened up to and became absorbed into a higher state of consciousness which she referred to as the

Soul, and which has also been described as the Self. The whole process of evolution as she sees it places consciousness as the primary factor. The physical, emotional and mental realms she regards as being the fields within and through which consciousness develops. They may therefore be seen as secondary.

The life cycle is seen to be divided into various stages. At a point approaching mid-life, if the necessary development has taken place, the Soul nature will then begin to exert a growing influence over the developing individual consciousness leading to fusion and a staged entrance into realms of consciousness more inclusive and universal in nature. This is again a simplification and a generalization. She acknowledges that there are individuals in which the Soul takes control at a much earlier age, stimulating profound thought and creativity in many forms. It is also a fact that many visionary thinkers gained their greatest insights at an early age, a first touch of Soul upon a mechanism that is already sensitive and receptive. Child genius may also, in some cases, result from an early connection with the Soul nature, or a connection that was not broken in the process of coming into incarnation.

Each stage in the individual life cycle involves both development and crisis. She suggests the following critical periods:

4-7 year	appropriation of the physical body
7-14 years	appropriation of the emotional body
21-25 years	appropriation of the mental body
35 years	personality prepared for the Soul
35-42 years	Soul appropriation of personality
49 years	pathway of life service should

56-63 years have been defined
decision by the Soul as to
whether life will continue

Bailey also indicates other periods of significance, mainly in relation to the "co-ordination" of the vehicles as opposed to "appropriation". Appropriation follows co-ordination. We coordinate the mechanism through our experiences in life and it is then, if it is sufficiently integrated and oriented towards the higher values, that the Soul may appropriate it for its use as a vehicle of expression.

If these stages are worked through and development takes place then by thirty-five a personality mechanism will have been developed that is suitable for the Soul to work out its own purpose. It may not be a rounded out personality for the Soul may require a certain imbalance in order to fulfill certain demands that will be made upon it. It is important to differentiate at this point between the personality mechanism and personality consciousness. The aim is for the personality consciousness to be fused with that of the Soul. The mechanism remains as the vehicle for Soul-infused expression. There are other significant factors linked to the age of thirty-five years and these will be described further on.

It should be noted that Bailey's ideas stretched beyond the concept of there being just one life. She saw a progression of lives involving a continual reincarnation through which consciousness developed. For many, personal integration is not possible, or a goal for a particular life. For others it will be. Also, many conditioning factors that emerge within an individual life to shape that person's psychological growth may also stem from karmic influences from past lives that are being used in the present life by the Soul to attract necessary experience. To go deeply into this is outside the scope of this article which seeks to look specifically at the life-cycle within an individual life, For the reader who wishes to learn more of Bailey's wider vision you are

recommended to read her writings. The two volumes of Esoteric Psychology are a good place to start.

Appropriation of the Vehicles of Expression

The life cycle contains a series of appropriations as vehicles of expression are developed and brought into activity. At each stage of appropriation, the energy of the particular vehicle being appropriated will have a dominant influence upon the development of that individual's consciousness. So, for instance, in the early years of life the ray of the physical vehicle will be a major factor in shaping the child's psyche. Much of the learning that will stimulate conscious growth flows from the physical environment. Later, as the emotional vehicle is appropriated, then it's ray quality will become the primary impulse shaping the child's world of experience. People who remain with an emotional focus through their lives will be largely qualified by this energy. This is not to say that all facets of this person's life will be wholly conditioned in this way, but energy associated with the emotional nature will be a major influence.

For the person whose mind nature is stimulated and awakened, then the ray of the mind will be brought into expression. At first, thought will be largely shaped by emotional reactions, but in time thought itself will dominate. The individual's consciousness becomes more firmly established within the mental nature. A further stage sees the integration of the personality nature with its distinctive ray energy having a conditioning influence over all the three vehicles that make up the personality. This ray energy can be directed towards extremely selfish ends, or towards altruistic endeavors. As consciousness continues to expand to touch the realm of the Soul, even in some small measure, a trend from separateness to universality is stimulated. As the Soul's nature is allowed to unfold and response to its influence increases, it's ray energy will also work through into expression, often seen most clearly as

qualifying a person's sphere of service.

From the esoteric perspective we might reflect upon the possibility that what is also occurring is that the Soul is seeking to take a firm hold of its mechanism. According to Bailey there occurs "a crisis between the thirty-fifth and forty-second years, wherein conscious contact with the soul is established; the threefold personality then begins to respond, as a unit, to soul impulse".¹ Could it be this that drives unconscious content to the surface, its perfection driving imperfection to the surface? Could it be the light of the Soul that breathes new life into the individual, inspiring him or her into a new direction? Some will respond, others will seek deeper immersion within their personality natures to avoid the discomfort of the Soul's influence.

There is also another interesting insight to be offered in the light of esoteric psychology. Bailey suggests that the first thirty-five years of life are essentially a recapitulation of the stages of consciousness reached during human evolution. At thirty-five years old individuals should, ideally, have reached a stage in which they can affirm in themselves "the stage of intelligent disciple".² So the individual, at around thirty-five, should ideally be ready to shoulder the burden of intelligent discipleship, ready and able to respond to the directing light of the Soul in ways that have been described above.

In another passage, Bailey emphasizes the importance of the period around the age of thirty-five in relation to the precipitation of a *crisis of opportunity*. She acknowledges that there are many choices made between the ages of twenty-five and forty relating to an individual's life work, place of living and associates. However, the crisis of opportunity that she is concerned with is one that "relates ever to life service". She continues by saying that "it is true in spite of karma or environing conditions. It is not a choice of the personality, based upon expedient or earthly motives, necessity or anything else. It is a choice based upon the relation of the soul to the personality and *only confronts disciples*".³ This, she

presents, as the first phase of a two phase process. The latter stage, occurring later in life, she describes as a *crisis of expression* that concerns tests and trials in relation to the demonstration of the use of Soul energy. She emphasizes that whereas other tests may have occurred with a focus on a particular level, the crisis of expression occurs on all planes at once. This may well be linked to something she says further on in the same volume concerning how an individual's life of service should be clearly defined by the age of forty-nine and that "initiation is often taken ... after passing the milestone of half a century".

From the angle of esotericism, there is an important point reached around the age of 56 too. Bailey writes that: "unless a certain measure of fusion [of Soul and personality] is established by the time fifty-six years of age is attained, it is seldom established later. After that age, a man may hold to the point achieved and foster his aspiration but the dynamic submergence of the personality to the will of the soul is rare after that time."⁴ This point of crisis leads into a period of seven years according to which, Bailey goes on to suggest "will depend the future usefulness of the person and whether the ego continues to use the vehicles on into old age, or whether there is a gradual withdrawal of the indwelling entity".⁵

Where the Soul has taken hold of its personality mechanism to some degree, then the individual should be increasingly engaged in service. Service, Bailey suggests, is the spontaneous effect of Soul contact. Identity may also be expanding in a way that transcends the individual self. The Soul is said to transcend separation. Sensitivity to the Soul brings the individual into a more inclusive and universal identity.

So throughout life there is a constant movement with fresh ray energy being drawn into the individual life expression. The ray energies qualifying each vehicle serve a definite purpose both in terms of the working out of individual karma and in meeting the requirements of a particular life to ensure a

balanced development of consciousness. This balance may not be achieved in a single life, rather it emerges over a series of lives. The experience can be very much like that of swinging on a pendulum, over developing one side of your nature, and then developing its opposite. It is an ongoing process in which the general movement is towards balance and mastery over the ray energies with which one is brought into contact. The way that different ray energies can be seen working out through particular vehicles is explored in the two volumes of *Discipleship in the New Age* as well as in the two volumes of *Esoteric Psychology*.

The Rays Governing Specific Stages in the Life Cycle

There is another possibility for the influence of the seven rays upon individual development that links them more directly to the life cycle. The esoteric thinker may find it of value to reflect upon the hypothesis that each of the seven rays may have an overarching qualifying influence over different stages of the individual life cycle. This is speculation but there is much to support it. Consider, for instance, the first years of life as being conditioned by seventh ray influence with its innate tendency to link spirit and matter and to encourage anchorage in substance. The seventh ray is very much linked to the physical plane. Could this energy play the major role in driving the spark of consciousness down into matter, into physical form and holding it there? "The seventh ray produces fixation upon the exoteric level of experience and 'anchors' ... the ray forces into form, producing concrete expression of the subjective realities or power."

The idea is that each of the rays in sequence conditions or governs, to some degree and in a way that we cannot fully explain, the stages in the lifecycle. So, for the period of latency that follows the earliest years where the focus is largely upon physical development and control, sixth ray energy would be the major qualifying influence. The emphasis

during this stage is upon the appropriation of the emotional vehicle and there is a real affinity with the energies of the astral plane. It is a time when many children experience psychic phenomena suggesting that they are open to astral contact. The child also learns to differentiate his or her own feelings and to own them for themselves. Here, the sensitive or abused child will repress feelings too painful to own, burying them within their astral natures where they continue to exist and to affect that child, then and as an adult, until the knot of painful feeling is released.

Such feelings may also be held at bay during the stage of early adulthood, which sees the development of the thinking principle. Here we can see a clear connection to the influence of the fifth ray of concrete thought. Mind becomes the focus of attention and this can often be at the expense of the feeling nature. Feelings are denied though they do not go away. Not everyone will respond to the impulse of the fifth ray and many will remain locked within their feeling natures, unable to achieve some measure of mental polarization. Consciousness gets stuck, held back by an absorption in the thrill of feeling and emotion.

The stage that follows from this is the crisis of mid-life, the period in which opposite tendencies meet, in which past experiences and future expectations conspire together, often stimulating inner conflict. Is this not a period characterized for many as a struggle to find greater harmony, to learn to work with the inner nature and to find ways of expressing themselves that harmonize with the way they are? We might also think not only of the tendency of the fourth ray to establish harmony through conflict but also how this ray energy is on what is called the 2-4-6 line. It is the feeling line and it may be that its influence during mid-life also allows earlier feelings to bubble to the surface once more. Yet repressed and suppressed feelings may not emerge to confront the mental focus achieved during adult life. Can a more whole person emerge? Can harmony be found? Can some measure of personal integration be achieved?

We would expect, if this hypothesis is correct, to see third ray energy of active intelligence qualifying the individual life-expression following the midlife period. Perhaps the scope for truly intelligent activity is most likely at this time for those who have negotiated mid-life and established within themselves a tendency towards greater wholeness. From their integrated state and with increasing responsiveness to the Soul nature, they can carry their life forward with intelligence.

The third ray is linked to the plane of the higher mind. If midlife has seen the achievement of some measure of Soul contact then the potential is there in that life to extend the individual thought life to the higher levels of the mental plane. This is facilitated by third ray influence at this time. It is worth reminding ourselves, too, of the tendency towards synthesis mentioned earlier. The fruit of past experience and development is synthesized, ray qualities that have become 'fixed' within the individual are in some way blended with the third ray quality now seeking greater expression.

As we move towards late life, love-wisdom, the energy of the second ray, provides a major stimulus. Who do we see as the wise ones? Those who have experienced life, who have worked through the earlier stages and gained knowledge and understanding and whose consciousness has moved on through the different stages of growth. They will have had much to assimilate and to synthesize into the second ray at this stage. Those who have much to bring into this process at this time of life will blend their intelligence and knowledge with love and guide others by their wisdom. They will have understood their experiences in the light of the Soul. They will provide others with light on their paths through words of wisdom.

It is perhaps a great tragedy of Western life that there is little respect from the young for the elderly. A bridge across the generations is desperately needed; a blending of youthful idealism with the wisdom of experience. It

should be possible to bring them closer, especially if one considers that there is a common energy line linking young people (sixth ray) with those responding to the second ray impulse at this stage of later life.

The final stage of life, which leads up to death, is to be seen to be largely shaped by the energy of Will. Is this not the goal of a full life, to align with Will? Not everyone reaches this. We all find our natural level and carry that energy into the rest of our lives. But for those who arrive at this period with the capacity to respond to Will, it is truly a life of fulfillment. And, of course, what is it that finally breaks the connection and allows the individual consciousness to pass through the transition which the world calls death but which the wise know as entrance into 'life more abundant'? The energy of Will.

Like all that has been considered in this paper, the idea of the rays governing periods in the life-cycle in sequence is a model to help us understand what happens and why we may experience and act as we do at different stages. Of course, this outline of ray influence on the life-cycle assumes progressive development for the individual leading to some measure of spiritual awareness. What of those who have not been fortunate to reach this stage or to respond in a way that is characterized by such an expansion? Do they also come under the influence of the ray energies in their sequence? Perhaps, yet in a way that stimulates not spiritual development so much as a personal focus. If there is not an expansion of consciousness towards the Soul nature, perhaps the ray energies manifest more fully in their lower expression. Consider, for instance, the latter half of life. The third ray might be seen as more manipulative, devious and selfish in its expression. It may not stimulate a raising of thought to the plane of the higher mind, but rather stimulate any crystallizing tendency that has begun within the individual thought-life. The second ray energy as it influences later life might be distorted into greater self-love or even self-pity, particularly if despair obscures any measure of

experienced ego-integrity. It may also be directed towards a love of the past or towards the expression of sentimentality. The final stage may then see a powerful self-will manifesting. It may be positive, driving the individual on in a constant and at times desperate struggle to retain physical life. It may turn in on the individual, driving them towards an even greater self-centred focus before the final release.

Having said the above, do not think that it is quite so distinctive. The extreme expressions may well occur, but there is going to be a good mixture of ray expression within each individual, some positive and Soul qualified, some conditioned by personality reactions of a separative nature. Only an achieved state of perfection can hope to provide a vehicle for carrying ray energy into its fullest and most positive expression. Few are perfect. We all color ray impulse by our imperfections.

Higher and Lower Expression of the Three Rays of Aspect

It is worth considering, in tabulated form, some of the lower and higher expressions of these three ray energies. In the final analysis, the lesser expression leads to the higher though this may not necessarily work through in an individual life. These expressions or ray energy are described by Bailey. The following, taken from her writings, provides a flavor of the different ways ray energy may manifest through human attitudes and activity. Only the three Rays of Aspect are included here, but the Rays of Attribute are also described by Bailey.

The third ray of Active Intelligence -- lower expression:

Force manipulation through selfish desire
 Intelligent use of force with wrong motive
 Intense material and mental activity
 The realization of energy as an end in itself
 Longing for glory, beauty and material objectives
 Submergence in illusion, glamour and maya

The third ray of Active Intelligence -- higher expression

The manipulation of energy in order to reveal beauty and truth
 The use of forces intelligently for the furtherance of the Plan
 Ordered rhythmic activity in cooperation with the Whole
 Desire for right revelation of divinity and light
 Adherence to right action
 The revelation of glory and goodwill

The second ray of Love-Wisdom -- lower expression

The power to build for selfish ends
 Capacity to sense the Whole and to remain apart
 The cultivation of a separative spirit
 The hidden light
 The realization of selfish desire
 Longing for material well-being
 Selfishness, and subordination of all soul powers to this end

The second ray of Love Wisdom -- higher expression

Building wisely, in relation to the Plan
 Inclusiveness
 A longing for wisdom and truth
 Sensitivity to the Whole
 Renunciation of the great heresy of separateness
 The revelation of light
 True illumination
 Right speech through generated wisdom

The first ray of Will or Power -- lower expression

Dynamic one-pointedness
 Destructive energy
 Power realized selfishly
 Lovelessness
 Isolation
 A longing for power and authority
 Desire to dominate
 Expressed strength and self-will

The first ray of Will or Power -- higher
expression

A dynamic use of energy for the furtherance of
the Plan

The use of destructive forces in order to
prepare the way for the Builders

The will to power in order to cooperate

Power realized as the major weapon of love

Identification with the rhythm of the Whole

The cessation of isolation

Some of the above needs explanation. What is meant by the Plan? The Plan is best described as the energy pattern of light and love, existing at a deep level (some might think of it as being at an archetypal level) which provides the blueprint of, and for, evolutionary achievement. As the individual opens their consciousness more fully to the impulse of the Soul, the life expression tends increasingly towards cooperation with the Plan. At first, this is an unconscious urge. Later, as the individual's mind expands and the Soul-mind-brain connection is strengthened, it becomes a more conscious process.

As far as the individual is concerned, the Plan contains their next step and the next step for their group, nation or humanity as a whole upon the Path of conscious growth and development. Our minds cannot grasp the whole Plan, but we can, in our highest moments, touch it to a degree that enables our path to be illumined, even though it may be but briefly.

Who are the Builders? They are those whose orientation is towards constructive activity in terms of carrying the Plan through into expression and towards fulfillment. The universe is full of constructive and destructive forces. Both are vital. The individual human being is also subject to the play of these opposing forces. Yet they actually work in cooperation. Where would we be if all form were indestructible? For a start, the planet would be jammed full of physical bodies. But not only are physical forms subject to these forces, so too are our thoughts and feelings.

Ideas are built up in mental substance, yet when they lose their relevance they are broken up and the 'mind-stuff', as it has been called, returns to the general storehouse of mental substance. It could be argued that certain obsessive tendencies and the condition of 'idee-fixee', or over intense emotional devotion, can be the result of a thought-form that has been created and has been allowed to grow in potency to an extreme degree when it might have been more appropriate for it to have been broken up. So there exist destructive forces along with the constructive building forces. Many of life's challenges revolve around controlling these forces and using them wisely and appropriately.

It is clear that thoughts and feelings can dominate an individual life and continue to exert an influence even though they may no longer be appropriate. In terms of understanding the life cycle, it is of value to consider the forms that have been created in the past and whether it is of value to carry them into the future.

Where a Life is Cut Short

What happens where a life is cut short? In cases of accident or disaster in which the individual life is shortened in a way that cuts through the lifecycle, then certain stages will not have been experienced and perhaps may be extended in a future life as compensation. Where a life has a kind of natural shortness, perhaps the stages are more concentrated rather than some simply not taking place. It seems likely that through a natural life, whether long or short, each energy phase will occur, though it may have widely differing effects. And certain stages may be lengthened or shortened to promote balance or growth, or even to take advantage of the availability of energies from other sources. It also seems reasonable to avoid setting definite time periods for these ray influences. Their cyclic flow has to be seen in relation to consciousness and not to the time-bound form.

If the ray energies do govern particular stages in life, we must remember that the

individual vehicles are also governed by ray energy. So care must be taken when seeking an understanding of psychological development. To appreciate the subtlety of this view of psychology does not call on the intellect as much as it does upon the intuition. There is a role for reason *and* for feeling. To discriminate between the subtle energies that shape us requires great sensitivity. It also requires us to be sensitive to a more universal perspective upon our lives. The life cycle may be broken down into stages, but in truth it can only be understood when seen as a whole, and in its context of a series of lives.

For the individual who seeks deeper understanding and self-knowledge, there is only one psychological reality -- the here and now. As we learn to know ourselves more fully in the present moment, whatever stage of life we may be at, we open doors and touch the unrealized possibilities that are the seeds of our psychological future. An appreciation of the role of Ray energy will help us to understand what may be taking place in our psychological development and what unrealized potential exists, seeking expression in and through our lives and relationships.

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