

THE SIX REALMS OF SAMBARIC EXISTENCE

CHAPTER ONE THE SIX REALMS OF SAMBARIC ¹ EXISTENCE

"As we go along from moment to moment, day to day, life to life, awareness and our thoughts keep shaping the life we lead. Cumulatively, the effect is tremendous. We can create for ourselves a tunnel lined with rags and deprivation or an open world of wealth and genuine communication - dark worlds, bright worlds, moderate worlds - so many different worlds can be created based on karma ² we keep creating through our thoughts and projections." ³

*"Big fleas have little fleas
upon their back to bite 'em;
And little fleas have smaller fleas
and so ad infinitum" ⁴*

The Buddha noticed that everything arises, lasts for a while, and then goes away. Everything. Whether you believe in a solid, permanent ego or not, it still works that way from birth, to living and through to death. Each thought or feeling is that way too. It arises, it goes along for a while and then something else comes up - perhaps you suddenly fall off your bicycle - or a pterodactyl lands in your lap! The key word here is 'everything': people, flowers, buildings, bees, love affairs, football games, breakfasts, lunches, picnics, moods, moments, conversations, dinosaurs, planets, stars and solar systems. Everything. This is a simple but also profound point. The very last statement that the Buddha uttered before dying was: "whatever comes together falls apart."

Egos also seemingly arise, dwell and then cease. According to the Buddha, sentient beings - those beings who are alive, who feel things, who are born, live and then die - dwell for a while in the following worlds, or realms, known as the Six Realms, one of which is the Human Realm. These realms too arise, dwell and then cease no matter how real and permanent they might feel. They are the living dreams in which we play out our lives. We mentioned passion, aggression and ignorance as being perhaps the driving force behind evolution. From the point of view of the teachings which follow, the realms are the many dramas they direct and produce, the creative force which results in the endlessly ongoing cycle of birth, dwelling and dying.

These Six Realms of Existence are a description of where we find ourselves now as human beings. They can be regarded as a scientific definition of the external world, ⁵ but it is not necessary to do so. If you find the following descriptions of the hell or god realms unbelievable, that is fine. In fact - and this is definitely the most helpful way to

¹ *Entering the Stream, p66, Shambhala Publications.*

² *Karma means action, also known as the law of cause and effect. See Chapter 11.*

³ *Entering the Stream, p66, Shambhala Publications.*

⁴ *Edgar Allen Poe.*

⁵ *For those who like cosmology : according to Buddhist cosmology, we are in Jambudvipa, the Realm of Desire. Desire is that we want things, we want to live. See Prologue, The Birth of the World..*

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look at them - they also describe the six main emotional states that we go through as humans, day after day, mood after mood, moment after moment.

The Buddha's teachings help us to understand and really appreciate our human-ness rather than encourage us to 'transcend' it. As you will see, the main saving grace about being human is that we have such a broad range of experience. The palette with which each of us paints our lives offers a complete range of emotional states leading from hell to heaven and back again. Indeed, it is said that humans are the only beings who taste all six; that is what is so special about them, since only in a realm where you are not completely stuck do you have a chance to wake up out of the dream.

However, all is not rosy. It is said that all of these realms are part of the 'desire realm'. The problem with desire is that it creates an endless cycle, or self-perpetuating loop, of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Before you get what you want you have a sense of need, which is also a form of insecurity. After it is over, you again feel insecure and want something else. So there is constant need and alternation between satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

Simply put, these six realms are descriptions of various levels of intensity from the most subtle, mental, exquisite and pleasurable to the most intense, solid, excruciating and painful. Although somewhat a factual description of our world, their main service is to point out the endlessly cyclic nature of our minds and experience. For example, your household may be somewhat stuck in one type of realm or atmosphere, and then you go off to school which is another; then you have a jolly meeting with a group of friends and that is yet another. They can be described and experienced separately, but, like primary colours, they can mix themselves one with the other to create endless combinations.

In the title to this chapter, you might have noticed the word *samsaric*, which comes from *samsara*. Samsara literally means 'journeying', but in this context it also means 'cycle of existences'. It is as if we are on a spinning wheel. Sometimes we are on top and everything is fine and heavenly, but then, gradually or suddenly, we are going deeper and deeper down and everything is negative or hellish. It is constant. It never stops. The Hindu beliefs were that if one did good deeds, one could end up on top of the heap and stay there forever, which is similar to beliefs about heaven in so many other traditions. What the Buddha discovered was that because all states of mind are impermanent you cannot find a permanent resting place even in a trance or god realm; sooner or later you have to come down again, which is why it is described as a spinning wheel rather than a one-way ladder going up to heaven.

By cutting through the chains of desire that bind us to the constant craving for experience, we get off this wheel altogether. But that is later on. First, we need to examine our spinning journey on the wheel. Just for fun, let's start at the bottom...

Questions:

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1 Have you ever noticed how your mood affects how you see things? Give some examples.

2

*Who ever lived so happy for a day
As to have been unmoved by any sense
Of guilt or rage, unvexed by some affray,
By pride or envy, passion or offence?"⁶*

Comment on these verses.

Exercises:

- Look at a tree for just one minute without doing anything else. Can you do it without getting side-tracked? Try again.
- Look at yourself in the mirror and make angry faces and then happy faces. What happens?

⁶ Chaucer, *The Man of Law's Tale*, Penguin edition.

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CHAPTER TWO THE HELL REALM

"Each intense torture is a psychological portrait of oneself." ⁷

*"Thou are a soul in bliss; but I am bound
Upon a wheel of fire, that mine own tears
Do scald like molten lead." ⁸*

In this realm, everything is intensely claustrophobic and either extremely hot or extremely cold. *Extremely*. There is no room for feeling any pleasure or relief whatsoever because everything is constant torment. If there are other people in here with you, they are your enemies - or the gaolers who torture you. The same excruciating things happen over and over again because there is no way out. Hell beings live in places filled with flame, ice, molten iron and horrible gaseous fumes. Their bodies, though made of the same type of substances, are extremely sensitive to pain and covered with tattoos as well as the scars of endless wounds - not to mention boils, blisters and festering sores. You find yourself in manacles and chains, being constantly whipped, beaten and tortured.

As a human, this is the sort of emotional space you experience along with intense anger or suffering, like when you are being tortured. Some city neighbourhoods, for example, are hellish in that everyone around is unfriendly, you have the feeling that your life can be on the line at any moment, that there is no safety or comfort at all. This sort of negative intensity can also happen in seemingly ordinary and lovely surroundings. As a child, for example, when your brother took your ice cream away that one time too many maybe you suddenly felt completely frozen in hurt and anger.

Whenever you are very angry, there is always intense claustrophobia along with it, a fear or sense of being trapped. That sense of 'cannot stand it', of being trapped and imprisoned, that is the hellish aspect. There seems to be no way out of resentment and pain. It has happened. That is that. In Hell, you are trapped, in pain, frozen, angry. Not nice. All desires for pleasure, for relief, for freedom, for space, are completely frustrated. You are trapped in an intensified burning or freezing situation. It is extremely painful and there is no way out.

If you think about it, this is how you feel when you get very angry: either boiling over or freezing up. Your heart is compressed. Everything is claustrophobic. Although still very much alive and a human being, at the same time, it feels like hell. Indeed, we can even say that you are in 'human hell'.

Questions:

⁷ Chögyam Trungpa, Rinpoche, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, Shambhala Publications.

⁸ Shakespeare King Lear 1605.

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- 1 "Each of us bears his own hell." ⁹ Comment on this quotation.
- 2 Describe places, cities or countries you know of that are like hell.
- 3 Describe your personal hell realms.
- 4 If the hell realm is partly produced by our 'projection' of it, what is a projection?

Exercises:

- Look at yourself in the mirror and make intense angry faces, gestures and noises for at least one minute. What happens? Now answer question 4 again.

⁹ *Virgil, Aeneid, 70-19 B.C.*

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CHAPTER THREE THE HUNGRY GHOST REALM

"In the hungry ghost realm, there is a tremendous feeling of richness, of gathering a lot of possessions; whatever you want you do not have to look for, but you find yourself possessing it. And this makes us more hungry, more deprived, because we get satisfaction not from possessing alone but from searching. But now, since we have everything already, we cannot go out and look for something and possess it. It is very frustrating, a fundamental insatiable hunger." ¹⁰

"To the hungry soul, every bitter thing is sweet." ¹¹

"Without hope, we live in desire." ¹²

In this realm, you constantly yearn for a satisfaction you cannot have - or so it seems. Traditionally, a hungry ghost, or *preta*, is depicted as having an enormous belly as large as a mountain but a mouth with an aperture only the size of a pin-head; imagine trying to satisfy your hunger with so big a stomach and so tiny a mouth! You are constantly wanting more, needing more, craving for more, but your mouth is not big enough to satisfy your desire. Even if your mouth were bigger, you would not be able to find enough because of course you are somehow always in a place where there is not enough of whatever it is you want.

As a human you feel helpless and lacklustre, or the victim of cravings over which you have no control. If you are poor, you yearn for wealth but feel unable to attain it, you are not smart enough, not brave enough, your education was all wrong; you are consumed by your own poverty mentality. You have no friends even though you want them because you are not worth knowing and the more you feel that way the truer it becomes. You have become a human hungry ghost, haunting the fields of your life - wherever you hope for happiness (including perhaps your past or your future) - and yet feeling that you do not deserve such a thing. Even when you get everything you want, you are constantly on the prowl for more because you know there must be more somewhere. But where?

Not nice either, although you want so much for it to be better. It is also the realm where you might be born in a very poor country where there is no food and you have to watch yourself or your child slowly starving to death, withering away in the cruel sunlight of this cruel world.

This is a miserable and wretched realm, where not anger, but compulsiveness and depression rule the day - or rather our life. It is the realm where you are addicted, or you want to stop smoking but you cannot, you want to have a good time but you cannot, you

¹⁰ Chögyam Trungpa, Rinpoche, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, Shambhala Publications.

¹¹ *The Holy Bible Proverbs 27:7.*

¹² Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy (1310-1321)*, *Inferno*.

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want to touch your lover but you cannot, you want to be, to have, to do, to think etc. etc. etc. but whatever it is: you cannot. So in this realm, your desire is frustrated because you don't have or get what you need in order to be satisfied. Everything is just out of reach. That is why you are a ghost. You have a body, but you cannot really touch or communicate except with other ghosts, but that is no fun since they are all miserable too. You can haunt others, but you cannot make real contact. You always feel left out. You are the ghost of the person you really want to be.

Questions:

- 1 "Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more." ¹³
Comment on this quotation.
- 2 Describe people, situations, countries, cities or neighbourhoods which feel or which make you feel hungry-ghost-like.
- 3 Describe what things in life you think you can't do because they are too much, too difficult, out of reach.
- 4 What problems do you have with your looks as a man or a woman?
- 5 The first quotation that describes how you possess everything you want but always want more, and much of the description in this chapter about not being able to get what you want, seem to be contradicting each other. See if you can put them together somehow.

Exercises:

- Look at yourself in a mirror and make miserable faces and noises for at least one minute without stopping. What happens? Then make very greedy, passionate faces, like you can never get enough of something delicious or desirable. What happens?
- Try going to one of the most expensive stores or areas in town and see if you feel any sense of poverty, of not belonging, of being left out. Don't dress up before you go. Then try it another time a few days later, but this time dress up.

¹³ *The Holy Bible Proverbs, 31:7-7.*

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CHAPTER FOUR THE ANIMAL REALM

"Anything unpredictable fundamentally threatens the basic pattern. So that apparently sane and solid situation without a sense of humour is the animal realm." ¹⁴

*"Third Fisherman: 'Master, I marvel how the fishes live in the sea.'
First Fisherman: 'Why, as men do a-land; the great ones eat up the little ones.' " ¹⁵*

"Man is a successful animal, that's all." ¹⁶

"The behaviour of an individual is therefore determined not by his racial affiliation, but by the character of his ancestry and his cultural environment." ¹⁷

If you are born as an animal, you may have lots of different characteristics. There are hundreds of thousands of species of insects alone, and zillions of each particular one. Animals come in a truly amazing variety of shapes and sizes but all of them share the same common limitations: their behaviours are basically fixed from the time they are born, determined by their bodies and environments; and their environments are perceived according to their physical and behavioural makeup. Animals come with different colourings, skills, mating rituals, habitats, diets, ways of doing things but as endless as it all is, each one has few real choices as to what to do. If you are an ant, you cannot be a butterfly. As splendid as all of your skills are, they have a mechanical quality: you have to do what you are told by your programming, your genetic code.

Many animals live in constant fear of having their life threatened or ended. If you are a fish, nine times out of ten you spend your entire life trying to eat someone else or avoid being eaten. All your neighbours are out to get you in the great competition known as 'the survival of the fittest' - unless you are sufficiently boring, ugly or poisonous in which case they just might leave you alone. Or you are a slave, a beast of burden, or your skin is used for shoes or belts and suchlike and your other body parts may be used for glue or soap or even musical instruments; or your flesh is somebody's breakfast; or your tusk is somebody's earring or knife handle.

Animals are limited in this way, but that does not mean there is no intelligence involved. Look at the tail of a peacock. What an extraordinary thing! Look at the organisation of an ant-hill or a bee-hive. Imagine how marvellous it must be to fly like a goose across the ocean navigating by sheer instinct, or like the beaver being smart enough to build a dam to make a lake and then knowing how to build a house under water - all without having to

¹⁴ Chögyam Trungpa, Rinpoche, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, Shambhala Publications.

¹⁵ Shakespeare, *Pericles* 1608.

¹⁶ Remy de Gourmont 1858 - 1915, *Promenades Philosophiques*.

¹⁷ Franz Boas 1858 - 1942, *Race and Democratic Society* 1945.

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go to school or pass an exam or get a license! There is no end to what animals can do, to how they can manifest.

But unlike humans who go through all six states constantly in terms of fast-changing emotional and cultural atmospheres, animals tend to be stuck with who and what they are born as. Nevertheless, they too express all six realms; there are god-like and hellish animals and everything in between. That is yet another reason why they are so fascinating and why we learn so much by observing them.

But, despite the evidence of great intelligence in their creation, with all animals there is a definite limitation. Some moths, for example, grow wings that look exactly like the faces of the owls that might otherwise eat them. How do they know to do this? It has been proven statistically that this is much more than just random genetic mutation and indeed many regard this as proof of the existence of a higher power, a god of creation. But no matter what the explanation or belief, the fact remains that the moth's personal level of intelligence and the sophistication of its design seem to have almost nothing to do with each other. In other words, the moth has no idea why its wing has grown that way and no ability to change it. That is why animals are limited: they are cut off from their innate intelligence by the sophisticated solidity of the extraordinary life form in which they are trapped; their behaviour is defined and limited by the bodies in which they have taken birth.

Of course, as humans, we tend to share these physical limitations. How many of us can grow a second nose just by wishing for one? Again, though, what is more interesting here, as with all of the realms, is to consider the ways in which we are animal-like in terms of emotional styles. For example, 'human animals' are like this too. They may be very intelligent, well-dressed and sophisticated but they are just behaving or performing - 'going through the motions'. It is not so much their bodies that limit them but the situations which seem to shape and control them, including their good and bad habits. This is similar to the animal's body situation. Sometimes, of course, they are not intelligent, but sleepy and stuck. In fact, all human animals are stuck, imprisoned by their beliefs and their behaviours, their 'cultures'. Most of us experience this again and again throughout our lives, every day: we just go ahead and do that same dumb thing without even thinking about it for a second, or we find ourselves in the same old situation again, or honking out that same silly laugh, twitching that same funny twitch. In other words, we may begin by assuming a style, a way of being, but then after a while, it seems to take over and we are no longer in charge of our own behaviour. Instead of playing the part, the part plays us!

One of the main characteristics of the animal state, is lack of humour. A human animal might enjoy telling jokes at the bar and slapping his thigh with each boisterous guffaw, but his laughter is sort of mechanical and forced - a bit like a donkey's bray for example - and you get the feeling that he has laughed at this same joke or the same type of joke for years now. Indeed, if you were to come back on another Wednesday night five years from

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now, you would probably see him there again, pretending to have a sense of humour by parroting the same basic jokes (most of which, funnily enough, are often about how people and animals behave in predictable, typecast ways).

There is a fundamentally ignorant quality to this seriousness or pseudo-humour. The animal is seemingly unaware that he or she is trapped in a style - although humans become quite embarrassed when their behaviour is exposed because that challenges them to open up beyond the usual limitations they like to 'nest' in.

So basically, the animal realm is populated by creatures of habit and the sad part is that this is where most of us live all the time. We have physical habits - ways of making noises, moving our heads, reacting, laughing, eating, sleeping, things we like and don't like - that control us all the time. Indeed, traditionally it is said that the vast majority of us with human bodies are basically human animals, not 'real' humans. It is as if we have turned ourselves into a computer program, a machine, that has lost any connection to its heart. Maybe it is human (see next chapter) to have had the creativity to invent and operate such a thing, but it is very animal to actually be like one, to follow one's programming, as it were.

Habits are a form of slavery, of self-imposed limitations and boundaries. Habits can be physical, mental, emotional or cultural. True freedom is not just having opportunity in terms of circumstance and legal codes, it is being truly awake and open. As Trungpa, Rinpoche said: "The warrior never becomes a slave of his deeds." ¹⁸

Another favourite animal realm behaviour pattern is playing deaf and dumb. Human life is extraordinarily rich and brilliant, filled with possibilities, with the splendour of life in all its myriad forms and dynamics. 'Human animals', however, often just ignores all this and pretends that nothing is going on. They are much more interested in the chatter of a talk show than the sunshine playing on the leaves outside the window of their dark, cosy den; or they just sulk and pretend that they are not really in the room when you come in to say 'hello'.

The animal-realm human : much better than the first two, but still pretty grim. Have you ever actually seen a monkey chuckle? In the same way, have you noticed that the laughter of some people is more a noise than a true expression of humour and delight? That is animal behaviour and is not the same as a true sense of humour. There is a hint of choice here because at least there is variety, but once you are in a body, you are stuck and in many cases, you are so dumb that you don't even see the variety that is all around you, pulsing, dancing. For example, although some animals can be trained to perform, they cannot really dance artistically, just as a dog can howl along with the radio but never really sing in tune with it. They may mate, for example, but they cannot make love. Similarly, 'human animals' may laugh at jokes, but they don't really have much of a sense

¹⁸ *Chögyam Trungpa, Rinpoche, Shambhala, The Sacred Path of the Warrior, Shambhala Publications.*

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of humour about real life - especially their own. No matter how sophisticated their performance, their costume and perfume and so on, it is no more than that: a performance. They can never be real artists. They are terrified of improvisation, of change, of surprises, or even, heaven forbid, of the joke being on them!

Questions:

- 1 Describe any habits you have in terms of body habits, speech habits and mental habits.
- 2 Describe human cultures or behaviours you find especially animal realm-ish.
- 3 Describe first sophisticated, then dumb 'human-animal' behaviour.
- 4 What do you do when you suddenly bump into someone in the street?
- 5 What is your first experience every day when you wake up, then what do you do?

Exercises:

- Look carefully at what happens when you say 'hello' to someone.
- One minute mirror exercise. Just look at yourself whilst you are brushing your teeth and combing your hair, or putting on your makeup. Or act like any animal you know. What happens?

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CHAPTER FIVE

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THE HUMAN REALM

"There is something extra connected with the human realm, a very strange kind of suspicion which comes with passion, and which makes human beings more cunning, shifty and slippery. They can invent all sorts of tools and accentuate them in all sorts of sophisticated ways so as to catch another slippery person, and the other slippery person develops his or her own equipment of anti-tools... Finally, we are unable to accomplish such a big undertaking. We are subject to birth and death. The experience can be born, but it can also die; our discoveries may be impermanent and temporary." ¹⁹

"I am the man, I suffered, I was there." ²⁰

"Man is a tool-using animal... Without tools he is nothing, with tools he is all." ²¹

*"A poor degenerate from the ape,
Whose hands are four, whose tail's a limb,
I contemplate my flaccid shape
And know I may not rival him
Save with my mind." ²²*

"Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty." ²³

The human realm is the lowest of the 'Three Higher Realms'. The previous three are known as the Three Lower Realms because you are just going down or stuck somewhere that is either unpleasant or limited. In this realm, unlike the previous three, there is a lot of choice, a lot of flexibility, a lot of creativity. There is promise. You are still earthbound and there are limitations, of course, but you can choose your behaviour. You don't just have food, it can be 'cuisine'. You don't just survive, you could have enlightened society. You don't just walk around naked, you can wear fine clothes, and even when you go to the bathroom, there is a special room for it. Indeed, in modern Japan, in some well-to-do establishments, music automatically plays when you sit down on the toilet!

How interesting the human realm is! It is constantly changing. The other realms, even the higher ones, are stuck with their body or state of mind for a whole life. A pig, although one of the most intelligent animals around, is always a pig, with only a narrow range of feelings and situations that engender feeling; but a human has lives within lives. Each day we go through so many realms; in our lives, we can change roles and identities in terms

¹⁹ Chögyam Trungpa, Rinpoche, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, Shambhala Publications.

²⁰ Walt Whitman, 1819 - 1892, *Song of Myself*.

²¹ Thomas Carlyle 1795 1881.

²² Aldous Huxley, 1894 - 1963 *First Philosopher's Song*.

²³ J.F. Kennedy 1917 - 1963, *Inaugural Address, Jan 20 1961*.

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of jobs, countries, relationships, styles. Indeed, the human realm is the only one where we can experience all six and keep going around and around.

The human is sophisticated, intelligent, energetic, witty, and constantly preoccupied with what to do next. Life is filled with choices. The dominant emotion, or atmosphere, is passion: passion for other people, ideas, books, money, travel, food, sex, knowledge, power, insight, science, a better lawn than my neighbour's, a better pillow, a bigger bomb, a better pancake recipe. It is endless.

Also, in the human realm we can feel love - not just for the attractive members of the other sex - but for all beings; we can laugh, we can have a genuine sense of humour, we can be inquisitive, we can enjoy ourselves, we can feel real delight; and we can cry. Most importantly, this is the only realm where we can experience genuine heartbreak, not to mention full-blown compassion.

Because of all this, the human realm is in many ways regarded as both the most intelligent as well as the most painful. In the human realm we can be aware that we are born, we live for a while and we die. This is because we are aware and can observe that we are always going through changes. In other words, we can compare this and that, and this 'now' from that 'then'. We have discriminating and evaluative memory and intellect so we can understand that life does not go on forever, that things are not as solid as we might first have thought. We are not actually stuck, even though we might be overly driven by our endless curiosity, passion, sense of exploration, intrigue, intelligence, whatever.

This might not seem like much, and to tell the truth most of us ignore it all the time as if we will live forever or our scientists will find a way for that to happen; but it is important: it means that we have the intelligence and the opportunity to liberate ourselves from being trapped from birth in a particular body or mind-set.

We are constantly experiencing change: change in the weather, in our ages, in our friends, in our feelings, in our opinions, in our money - in our everything. Because of this, we can look at ourselves, at the shift from happiness to sadness, pleasure to pain. Indeed, we love looking at ourselves, which is why there are so many stories, books, films, dramas and television broadcasts in this realm. Most animals can only see things in terms of their survival but humans love to see things in terms of their meaning, their implication, their storyline. Animals just see the outer object, not the inner subject matter. Have you ever seen an animal watching a movie? It is interesting: although we know that such things are an illusion, still we can get swept away in them, identifying completely and personally with the images, the story. Have you ever been terrified whilst watching a horror film? This is how the 'real-life' realms seem so real.

One of the main characteristics of the human realm is a sense of humour because we can see the many-sided aspects of pain and pleasure. We also see how they go together and

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therefore get glimpses that the whole thing is a mirage and so our point of view is always changing. That is why Buddhas can teach here, because this is the realm where we can actually wake up out of the dream. Because we see birth, old age, sickness and death we can learn to flavour the tasty food of our changing, multifarious experiences with the spices of wisdom and discipline in order to take full advantage of the precious opportunity that this life affords.

Questions:

- 1 What are your great assets as a person, and what are your dreams for a good life?
- 2 Write a poem about eating breakfast, or going for a walk, or breaking up with your lover, or losing a loved one, or autumn.
- 3 Recall and record all the emotional states you went through in one day.
- 4 How many different roles in life do you have to play every day (lover, student, wife, boss etc.).
- 5 Comment on the following poem:

*"In looking at objects of Nature while I am thinking,
as at yonder moon dim-glimmering through the dewy window-pane,
I seem rather to be seeking, as it were asking for,
a symbolic language for something within me that already and forever exists,
than observing anything new." ²⁴*

Exercises:

- Go to a cafe with a friend or on your own for a little while. Then later, write about every thing that happened in just one five minute period during that time. Try to remember as much as you can about what you saw, heard, smelled, tasted, said and even thought. How many pages could you fill? Now write about five minutes of worm life.
- Look out of your window and describe what you see that is obviously human vs. any other realm that might have been out there.
- Mirror exercise: Talk to yourself about how good you are, or be someone else, or be someone else telling you how good you are. Make a speech as if you were king or queen, or poet, or scientist. Or your best friend. Tell a joke. Have a little fun with it. What happens? 'what happens' also means notice the changes from before, during and after the exercise.

²⁴ S.T. Coleridge, *Anima Poetae* 1805.

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CHAPTER SIX THE JEALOUS GOD REALM

"The realm of the jealous gods is the highest realm as far as communication goes; it is a very intelligent situation... It is as if a person were born as a diplomat, raised as a diplomat, and died as a diplomat." ²⁵

"What is not clear, is not French." ²⁶

"Princes are like to heavenly bodies, which cause good or evil times, and which have much veneration but no rest." ²⁷

"I am holier than thou." ²⁸

"There are people whom one should very well like to drop, but would not wish to be dropped by." ²⁹

"The Pope! How many divisions has he got?" ³⁰

*"Envy that glowers at favour like a thief
And gloats to see another come to grief." ³¹*

Jealous Gods (*Asuras* in Sanskrit) are dominating and ambitious. They know that if they aim straight and make the right moves, one day they will be on top like those who have got it made, like the more superior gods whom of course they envy. They are frightfully intelligent and they are the centre of their world. Their intelligence never sleeps so they are like a watchtower with a 24 hour guard; their job is to make sure that nobody gets in and that nobody climbs higher and faster than they do, that they don't get out-ranked. Of course, they always live at the best addresses, the ones that everyone else would like to have on their custom-made stationery.

The dominant emotion in the Jealous God realm is paranoia and high-level competitiveness. They are jealous if you do something that they cannot see because it might be a threat and also it means that they are not the centre of your world the way they believe you and everyone else thinks they should be. They are jealous because they aspire to become completely happy and at their ease like the Gods of the next realm and they are in a constant state of struggle to get there.

²⁵ Chögyam Trungpa, Rinpoche, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, Shambhala Publications.

²⁶ Antoine de Rivarol, *Discourse sur L'Universalite de la Langue Francaise*, 1784.

²⁷ Francis Bacon, 1561 - 1626 *Essays, Of Empire*.

²⁸ *The Holy Bible*, Isaiah 65:5, *Lamentations*.

²⁹ Samuel Johnson 1709 - 1784, *Boswell's Life of Johnson*.

³⁰ Joseph Stalin, quoted by Winston Churchill, *The Gathering Storm* 1948.

³¹ Chaucer, *The Physician's Tale*.

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Still, they are gods because anything less is beneath them or their ambition and because they do have real power, real accomplishment, a considerable degree of mastery over mind and body. Because they have to struggle so hard, they feel that everyone else is either a threat or a possible threat (which is the same thing) - or a useless worm not worthy of their attention. That is why they are so paranoid: they have to be on guard all the time. That is also why they can never relax, which is why they cannot be really relaxed gods. Asuras are either in their tower, shooting arrows at attackers from their specially designed slit windows, or they are storming somebody else's. Of course, in a realm such as this, there is a lot of quarrelling in the air, too, not to mention the invigorating clash of rapier upon rapier!

The 'human asura' might be a powerful person in his school or village, a famous international businessman in Hong Kong, a crime boss in Tokyo (perhaps that is a somewhat hellish version of asura) or a politician patrolling the corridors of power in Washington D.C. Power and paranoia: that is the name of the game. The canyons of Wall Street are filled with asuras, who in days, hours or minutes even are constantly fighting for the same piece of the pie, struggling to outsmart, outwit and outdo each other to get that pot of gold at the God's end of the rainbow, to make their fortune (whilst more than likely taking it away from someone else).³² And, of course, as with all these realms, asura-type feelings are experienced by all of us in all walks of life in many ordinary ways in the form of jealousy, competitiveness, paranoia, restless ambition etc.

In terms of humour: when they find something funny, it is usually about how stupid somebody else was, about how they failed; for some reason they find this amusing. An asura in fine form will not be able to understand that others may not share their ambition and success; as soon as the cellular phone is introduced on the market, for example, the asura will of course be one of the first customers. Even if they have only been out a month or so, he will simply not understand how anyone else could do without one. In any case, they don't really care about others except in so far as their paranoia must need guard against attack from them. Suffering and sensitivity are forms of weakness, of failure.

In this realm, perhaps, are also many dedicated religious people who believe they have found the true path and that all others are beneath them, even possibly deserve death for not believing in the true faith. If they die in service to the True Faith, it will only serve to help create the splendid world that an asura is dedicated to achieving by any means possible. Success is what counts. A glorious realm if you like that sort of thing, but heartless and cruel, glittering and brittle.

³² *Of course, this is not to imply that everyone is like this in Wall Street. This is just an example.*

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Questions:

- 1 Who do you despise and/or envy and why? Be honest.
- 2 How would you define being successful?
- 3 What do you have in your character that is better than others?
- 4 Do you like to win? How do you imagine it before it happens and then what does it feel like when it does happen?
- 5 Describe cultures or civilisations that you think are particularly asura-like.

Exercises:

- Go on another shopping trip. This time, really dress up and go to some places where you can feel truly superior. Live it up! Give the sales assistants a hard time!
- Mirror exercise: Be superior and lecture to someone who you know is a real 'dweeb' about how to shape up. Posture. Be superior. Get into it. What happens? Do you really know you are? Are you really all that together? Get paranoid. Really. What happens?

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CHAPTER SEVEN THE REALM OF THE GODS

"That maintaining oneself is a state of samadhi, perpetually living in a state of absorption and peace; it is the realm of the gods, which is known as the realm of pride.... in other words, it is intoxication with the existence of ego." ³³

"Can heavenly minds yield to such rage?" ³⁴

"Fortune is like the market, where many times, if you can but stay a little, the price will fall." ³⁵

"Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall." ³⁶

"Ever the latter end of joy is woe." ³⁷

"I almost had to wait." ³⁸

When you are a God, you've 'got it made' - of course, because you're the one who made it! There is no struggle any more. Basically, you dwell in self-satisfied pride. Actual gods do not have solid bodies for they exist in realms of perfect pleasure and ease. They sit on soft clouds. Every smell is transcendent perfume, every taste is pure nectar. Time seems to have stopped - or is just one exquisite drop of glistening, delectable ambrosia after another. It is said that one day in the god realm takes as much time as several million years in hell and several hundred years for a human. The main emotion here is one of self-absorption, or pride. Complete satisfaction rules, usually of a very sophisticated and pure type - but on the human level it can also be just the sense of having what you want, of being satisfied.

Sometimes, human-gods can be hard to spot. They have nothing to prove, and their life is safe and pleasant. This is sort of an animal human-god. However, this can also be a highly sophisticated state, such as that of an advanced meditator who has learned to tune in to endless inner bliss - or in some sense any other highly trained expert. Or it could be a millionaire/king who has everything done perfectly: a perfect garden, a perfect butler, a perfect wife, a perfect meal, a perfect bank balance. 'Just Perfect'. 'How lovely!' 'How Nice.' Or again it can be an ordinary (animal god) person who goes to work, has a regular paycheque and is thoroughly happy with everything. This is the realm without worry, where there actually is peace and contentment, so it can just be a fantastic mood, or an experience of great pleasure during which you are thoroughly absorbed in feeling good.

³³ *Chögyam Trungpa, Rinpoche, The Tibetan Book of the Dead, Shambhala Publications.*

³⁴ *Virgil, Aeneid 70-19 B.C.*

³⁵ *Francis Bacon, 1561-1626 Essays, Of Delays.*

³⁶ *The Holy Bible, Proverbs.*

³⁷ *Chaucer, The Nun's Priest's tale in the Canterbury Tales.*

³⁸ *Louis XIV, attributed to a remark when a coach he had ordered arrived just in time.*

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Even though it may not last long, whilst it does you are in a sort of god realm, enjoying the ice cream nectar-flavour of the moment.

The only problem with all of these of course, whether a permanent birth or a fleeting mood, is that they don't last. At some point even if you are an actual god, it is said that your cloud starts to bulge or sag, that your ambrosia is not right, that your body is beginning to smell bad; then you become desperate and either you slip down into the asura realm trying to make it back up to the happiness you thought was yours forever, or you go straight to hell, frozen or burnt by intense anguish and resentment, unable to get out, overwhelmed by a sense of loss and entrapment.

Similarly on the human level, your ongoing condition, be it the life of a pampered millionaire or a fleeting mood, starts to change. Before, everything was perfect, everything fit together; now suddenly, things feel 'off': the flowers on the mantelpiece are drooping; one's perfect world is collapsing; one's perfect state of bliss, or just one's good mood is melting away - including of course, that ice cream! In nearly every love affair this is the inevitable progression. As is often said, and just as often experienced: "the honeymoon is over."

Perhaps it is not actually ending but you start to worry about how to make sure it lasts; and as soon as you do that you realise that it has already ended in some sense and now you are being a jealous god, not a god anymore, and then you start to play through all the tactics you might use to get around this predicament and you are a human and then you repeat mindlessly what you have been doing so you become so deadened and numb by the constant survival pressures that you find yourself becoming an animal, and then you become miserable and convinced that you can never get anywhere even if you do survive and you are now a wretched ghost, hungering for existence that you can't ever really enjoy and then you become twisted, resentful, hardened, bitter and perhaps even harsh and wicked and you end up in hell.

This is the awful thing about the god realm whether exalted or ordinary: it has to end, and since there is an ignorant quality throughout in that as long as you are happy you are quite willing to ignore anything else, when it is time to wake up it is quite painful and the anguish you feel can be intense enough so that you freeze in fury or fear in which case you don't even have to slip down one at a time but you just go straight to a hot or cold hell where the whole things starts over again.

To review: once again, the main point in contemplating these six realms is not to worry about whether or not they are a scientifically accurate definition of the physical universe. In terms of our experience, if we cannot perceive them physically then their existence is only theoretical anyway. The main point is that we do live in and journey through realms such as these: good ones, bad ones, indifferent ones. The cycle is simple and endless: by fixating on feeling good, we create realms that alternate between exquisite pleasure on the

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one extreme and exquisite pain on the other with endless millions of combinations in between.

These realms exist both in different places and times and also simultaneously. For example, to the hell realm being, water is a boiling or freezing source of torment; to the hungry ghost it is pus and poison; to the animal it is something you instinctively drink in order to survive (or indeed 'home' if you are a fish); to the human it is good for quenching thirst or making into wine or as a tool, i.e. for manufacturing computer chips; to the asura it is a treasure that must be captured or worshipped; to the god it is divine, ambrosial nectar. We all get tastes of this in our lives as humans. To different people, the same sunny day may feel very, very different: for some hellish, for others fantastic.

Also, our lives contain many realms on a regular basis. Your family life might involve lots of anger and disappointment, a form of hungry hell; then you go to your job or school where you are very competent and competitive - perhaps asura-like; at the end of the day, you go to a movie with some friends and no matter what the subject matter - violence or romantic love - whilst you are in the movie theatre it is a form of god realm in that no harm can befall you, you are entertained and happy for a while (or perhaps animal realm in that you feel safe and neutral).

The bottom line - or rather the spinning wheel around which all realms revolve - is that as real as they feel whilst we are in them, none of them last. Until we stop identifying with them so much, it just goes on and on and round and around forever: this spinning wheel of samsaric existences.

God Realm Questions and Exercises:

- 1 Describe your idea of being perfectly happy yourself, and then someone you know or who have read about that seems perfectly happy.
- 2 Describe situations or cultures that seem to embody the god realm.
- 3 Describe the happiest moment of your life.
- 4 Describe the ideal holiday. After that, analyse it in terms of the realms.
- 5 Have you ever felt like everything was going your way and then suddenly something came along to mess it up? Describe.

Exercises:

- Mirror Exercise: Look at yourself and see how splendid you are. Take time. Your eyes, your lips, your nose, your skin, your intelligence. You are not a worm or a gargoyle. Appreciate yourself, your body, your mind. Love yourself. What happens? Then look at everything terrible that you can see. What happens?

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Six Realm Questions:

- 1 Describe a day when lots of things happened and you went through many emotional states or a tie when you suddenly changed from feeling one extreme feeling one minute to a very different one soon after. Now see which realm, if any they seem closest too.
- 2 Try to think of realms that are not covered by the above six. Now, try to see if you can fit them in somehow.
- 3 Describe a god-realm type animal, a hungry ghost god, an asura human, a hellish human, a hellish animal, etc etc.
- 4 Describe a meal with six people, each of which is a different realm type. What would they order, how would they dress and how would they talk together?
- 5 Describe different animals that reflect each of the realms and why.
- 6 Pick which realms you feel most relate to passion, which to aggression and which to ignorance and explain why.
- 7 Describe a realm in terms of a) a mood b) a city c) a lifetime.
- 8 Analysing films from the point of view of which realm they mainly deal in is a lot of fun. Many of us wonder why there is so much sex and violence on film. Maybe it is because this is the type of lower realm projection that we find most attractive. Comment.

Six Realm Exercises:

- Look in a mirror and smile, then laugh (if you can do it genuinely). Now frown and then shout. Now look sad and wretched. Take your time. Can you feel your emotions building up? (That's how realms happen. We take them - and ourselves - too seriously.)
- Sit quietly for a while and see where you go in your mind. Describe the journey in terms of the basic theme, and then in terms of which realm you think it best approximates.
- Go to a public place and watch people. What realm are they in? Are they aware of it?