

*Aleister Crowley on Death:  
Philosophical, Technical and Practical Aspects*

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# *Aleister Crowley on Death:* *Philosophical, Technical and Practical Aspects*

RICHARD KACZYNSKI

On June 28, 2008, New York's Tahuti Lodge sponsored an EGC-based bereavement seminar following the deaths of two long-term core members, Sister Lena Bender and Brother James Garvey. It wasn't the first time, and certainly won't be the last, that O.T.O. lost beloved members. But the subsequent seminar underscored the need for material to help our brothers and sisters to better understand and cope with death within our small Thelemic communities. I had the honor of speaking at that seminar, and my presentation today is based on that talk. We will be looking at death from three perspectives:

- **Philosophical:** How do the Holy Books (and Crowley's commentaries) look at death?
- **Technical:** What does Crowley say about death, soul, reincarnation and related subjects?
- **Practical:** What magical exercises did Crowley recommend for understanding and coping with death?

Although my remarks will be largely confined to what appears in the Holy Books and in Crowley's writings, it is useful to assemble those scattered references into one place. I hope it provides food for thought, comfort and magick to those confronting the Greater Feast of a loved one.

## **Philosophical: Death in the Holy Books and Commentaries**

The meaning and significance of death must be understood in its context with life. Respect for life, and the right of everyone to accomplish their True Will, are fundamental to Thelema. Ideally, death should therefore occur only *after* the accomplishment of one's True Will. As we read in *The Book of the Law*,

II:73. Ah! Ah! Death! Death! thou shalt long for death. Death is forbidden, o man, unto thee.

II:74. The length of thy longing shall be the strength of its glory. He that lives long & desires death much is ever the King among the Kings.

Of these verses, Crowley explains,

“Death” [...] is forbidden, observe, to “man.” That is, then, the formula must not be used by one who is still an imperfect being. [...] To long for death is to aspire to the complete fulfilment of all one’s potentialities. And it would evidently be an error to insist upon passing on to one’s next life while there were hawsers unhitched from this one.<sup>1</sup>

The last sentence above suggests that suicide would be “an error” for “an imperfect being.” As Crowley elaborates on *The Book of the Law’s* statement that “Death is the crown of all” (II:72),

For a life which has fulfilled all its possibilities ceases to have a purpose; death is its diploma, so to speak; it is ready to apply itself to the new conditions of a larger life. Just so a schoolboy who has mastered his work, dies to school, reincarnates in cap & gown, triumphs in the trips, dies to the cloisters, and is reborn to the world. [...]

“Death” is, to the initiate, an inn by the wayside; it marks a stage accomplished; it offers refreshment, repose, and advice as to his plans for the morrow.<sup>2</sup>

To persevere past the point of fulfilling all possibilities, to long for a death that remains far-off, seems in verse II:74 to be a virtue of a “King among the Kings.” (These ideas exist in logical tension alongside *Liber Oz’s* enumeration of the fundamental human right “to die when and how he will.”)<sup>3</sup>

Thelema’s sacred texts also consider death to represent a form of cosmic love, the absorption of the ego into the infinite. *The Book of the Law* assures us that “there is no dread hereafter. There is the dissolution, and eternal ecstasy in the kisses of Nu” (II:44) and that “Thy death shall be the seal of the promise of our agelong love” (II:66). Along these lines, Crowley writes that “death itself is an ecstasy like love, but more intense, the reunion of the soul with its true self.”<sup>4</sup> Finally, in his *Confessions*, Crowley advises that,

<sup>1</sup> Aleister Crowley, *The Law is for All: The Authorized Popular Commentary to The Book of the Law*, ed. Louis Wilkinson and Hymenaeus Beta (Tempe, AZ: New Falcon, 1996), 148. Kabbalists, gematricians and cryptologists may note that these verses are followed by the famous cipher in *Liber AL*, II:76, 4 6 3 8 A B K 2 4 A L G M O R 3 Y X 24 89 R P S T O V A L. Here one can find repeated in its digits 24, the path number of the Death card on the Tree of Life, i.e., 4x6, 3x8, 24, and 3x24=8x9.

<sup>2</sup> Crowley, *The Law is for All*, 144.

<sup>3</sup> [Aleister Crowley], *Liber Oz* (London, 1941).

<sup>4</sup> Therion [Aleister Crowley], *The Law of Liberty: A Tract of Therion that is Magus 9°=27°* (London: O.T.O., 1917; rpt. *The International*, January 1918, 12(1): 27–8 and as “Liber DCCXXXVII” in *The Equinox* 1919, III(1): 45–52.

As soon as we learn that everything is only half, that it implies its opposite, we can let ourselves go with a light heart, finding just as much fun in the red leaves of autumn as in the green leaves of spring. What is interesting is the complete cycle. Life itself would be deplorably petty were it not consecrated by the fact of its incomprehensibility and dignified by the certainty that however petty, futile, baroque and contemptible its career may be, it must close in the sublime sacrament of death. As it is written in *The Book of the Law*, “—death is the crown of all.”<sup>5</sup>

These lessons, naturally, are taught in O.T.O.’s system of initiation.

Given this view of death—that of the soul “graduating” to another level of existence—it follows that the Old Aeon view of death is but an illusion. Crowley addresses this point in *Liber Aleph*, in the epistle “De Corpore Umbra Hominis”:

[T]he Formula of the past Aeon was of the Dying god, and was based upon Ignorance. For Men thought that the Sun died and was reborn alike in the Day and in the Year; and so also was the Mystery of Man. Now already are we well assured by Science how the Death of the Sun is in Truth but the Shifting of a Shadow; and in this Aeon (o my son, I lift up my Voice and I make Prophecy!) so shall it be proven as to Death. For the Body of Man is but his Shadow, it cometh and goeth even as the tides of Ocean; and he only is in Darkness who is hidden by that Shadow from the Light of his true Self.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, while Crowley admits that we do not “know” what awaits in the hereafter, he suggests that the true self survives bodily death.

In summary, the right of all living things to fulfill their True Will is of paramount importance in Thelema. Death ideally follows the completion of one’s Will, and to endure beyond this completion point is a “Kingly” virtue. Thelema views death as a form of love, where the deceased is dissolved into the eternal kisses of their beloved, the body of Nuit. As such, the Old Aeon view of death as a tragedy falls away before the realization that death represents the soul completing its journey for this lifetime and proceeding onto its next stage of existence. All these points Crowley succinctly summarizes in “Liber CVI: Concerning Death,” to which the reader is referred.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Aleister Crowley, *The Confessions of Aleister Crowley: An Autohagiography*, ed. John Symonds and Kenneth Grant (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969), 603–4.

<sup>6</sup> Master Therion (Aleister Crowley), *Liber Aleph Vel CXI; The Book of Wisdom or Folly, in the Form of an Epistle of 666, the Great Wild Beast, to His Son 777, Being the Equinox Volume III No. VI* (West Point, CA: Thelema, 1962), 99.

<sup>7</sup> Baphomet [Aleister Crowley], “An Epistle of Baphomet to the Illustrious Damozel Anna Wright, Companion of the Holy Graal, Shining Like the Moon, Concerning Death, that She and Her Sisters May Bring Comfort to All Them That Are Nigh Death, and Unto Such as Love Them,” *The International*, December 1917, 11(12): 365; rpt. As “Liber CVI [Book 106]: Concerning Death” in *The Equinox* 1986, III(10): 119–21.

## Technical: What Happens When We Die?

What happens when we die? Do we have a soul? Do we reincarnate? In *Magick Without Tears*, Crowley says, “We certainly do not know enough of what actually takes place to speak positively on any such point.”<sup>8</sup> Similarly, the final Collect in O.T.O.’s central ritual, the Gnostic Mass, seems to hedge its bets and leave the possibilities open:

Unto them from whose eyes the veil of life hath fallen may there be granted the accomplishment of their true Wills; whether they will absorption in the Infinite, or to be united with their chosen and preferred, or to be in contemplation, or to be at peace, or to achieve the labour and heroism of incarnation on this planet or another, or in any Star, or aught else, unto them may there be granted the accomplishment of their wills; yea, the accomplishment of their wills.

AUMGN. AUMGN. AUMGN.<sup>9</sup>

Despite not knowing *for sure* what happens, Crowley certainly has his suspicions of how things work. For instance, in his commentary on *The Book of the Law*, Crowley explains,

When death is as complete as it should be, the individual expands and fulfils himself in all directions; it is an omniform *samadhi*. This is of course “eternal ecstasy” in the sense already explained. But in the time-world *karma* reconcentrates the elements, and a new incarnation occurs.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, while dissolution of the ego into the body of Nuit may represent “an omniform *samadhi*,” the more common post-death event is reincarnation.

Indeed, Crowley claimed to be the reincarnation of French occultist Éliphas Lévi, who died in 1875 six months before Crowley’s birth. This statement affirms his belief in transmigration and the survival of the soul after death. (It also implies that the soul may attach itself to a fetus months after conception.) His explanation presumes familiarity with the kabbalah’s five parts of the soul and their mapping onto the Tree of Life. The traditional five parts of the soul consist of:

- *Nephesh* (life, self, person, emotion, passion)
- *Ruach* (breath, wind, spirit)
- *Chaya* (vital energy)
- *Neshamah* (breath, spirit)
- *Yechidah* (singular one)

<sup>8</sup> Aleister Crowley, *Magick Without Tears*, ed. Israel Regardie (St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 1973), 246.

<sup>9</sup> [Aleister Crowley], “Ecclesiæ Gnosticæ Catholicæ Canon Missæ,” *The International* 1918, 12(3): 70–4; rpt. *The Equinox* 1919, III(1): 247–70 and *Magick in Theory and Practice* (Paris: Lecram, 1929–1930), 345–61.

<sup>10</sup> Crowley, *The Law is for All*, 125.

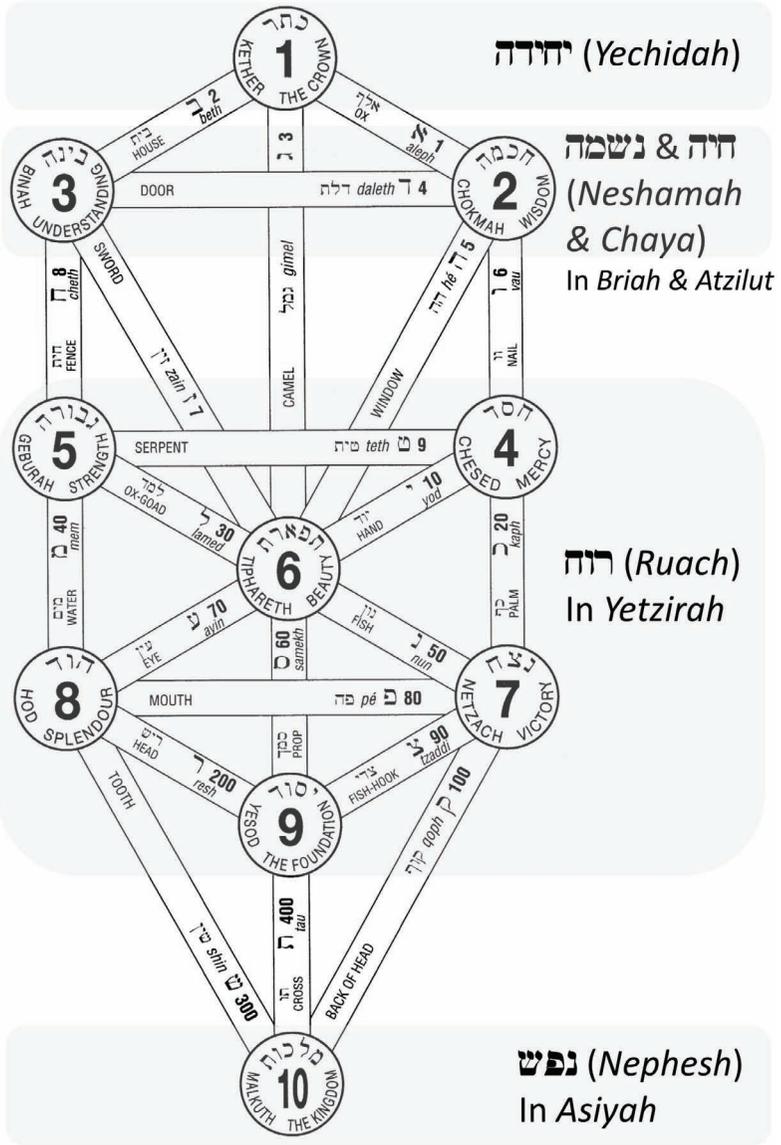


Figure 1. Tree of Life with Hebrew attributions from Aleister Crowley, Mary Desti and Leila Waddell, *Magick: Liber ABA, Book 4, Parts I-IV*, ed. Hymenaeus Beta, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed. (York Beach, ME: Weiser, 1997), 544 [reproduced by permission of Ordo Templi Orientis], over which the Hebrew parts of the soul are overlaid by the author of this paper.

These, in turn, can be mapped onto the four worlds of creation (*Atzilut*, *Briah*, *Yetzirah* and *Asiyah*) and the Tree of Life. Figure 1 illustrates all these elements combined.

With this structure in mind, we may turn to Crowley's explanation of death and reincarnation from *Magick Without Tears*:

[T]he Supernal Triad constitutes (or, rather, is an image of) the "eternal" Essence of a man; that is, it is the positive expression of that ultimate "Point of View" which is and is not and neither is nor is not etc. Quite indestructible.

Now when a man spends his life (a) building up and developing the six Sephiroth of the Ruach so that they cohere closely in proper balance and relation, (b) in forging, developing and maintaining a link of steel between this solid Ruach and that Triad, Death merely means the dropping off of the Nephesh (Malkuth) so that the man takes over his instrument of Mind (Ruach) with him to his next suitably chosen vehicle. The tendency of the Ruach is of course to disintegrate more or less rapidly under the impact of its new experiences of after-death conditions....

So then we have a man not only very well prepared to reincarnate at once—this means about six months after his death, for his vehicle will be a fetus about three months old, but to extirpate more deliberately all impressions that may assail its integrity.<sup>11</sup>

Neither is the soul limited to a single incarnation. Using the Pali term *sankhara*—English has no cognate, but it denotes "volitional formations" of mental processes—Crowley speculates how these collections of "tendencies" that make up a personality can produce multiple concurrent incarnations.

[S]uppose two or more people claim simultaneously to have been Julius Caesar, or Shakespeare, or—oh! always one very great gun! Well, fifty or sixty years ago or more there was a regular vogue for this sort of thing, especially among women. It was usually Cleopatra or Mary Queen of Scots or Marie Antoinette: something regal and tragic preferred, but unsurpassable beauty the prime essential as one would expect.

Of the Mary Queen of Scots persuasion was old Lady Caithness, who seems moreover to have had a sense of humour into the bargain, for she gave a dinner-party in Paris to twelve other ladies, each of whom had also been the luckless victim of Henry VIII's failure to produce of his own loins a durable male succession. [...]

Well, that was a big laugh, of course; it tended to discredit the whole theory of Reincarnation.

Quite unnecessarily, if one looks a little deeper.

What do I mean when I say that I think I was Éliphas Lévi? No more than that I possess some of his most essential characteristics, and that some of the incidents in his life are remembered by me as my own. There doesn't seem any impossibility about these bundles of *Sankhara* being shared by two or more persons.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Crowley, *Magick Without Tears*, 244–5.

<sup>12</sup> Crowley, *Magick Without Tears*, 246.

Today, we might replace “Mary Queen of Scots” with “Aleister Crowley” and still have a big—albeit unnecessary—laugh.

Still other possibilities remain for the departed soul. Hauntings, for instance, can result from the mind holding the ego together (temporarily) after death. As Crowley writes in his epistle “De Morte” from *Liber Aleph*,

If then the mind be attached constantly to the Body, Death hath no Power to decompose it wholly, but a decaying Shell of the dead Man, his Mind holding together for a little his Body of Light, haunteth the Earth, seeking a new Tabernacle (in its Error that feareth Change) in some other Body. These Shells are broken away utterly from the Star that did enlighten them, and they are Vampires, obsessing them that adventure themselves into the Astral World without Magical Protection, or invoke them, as do the Spiritists. For by Death is Man released only from the Gross Body, at the first, and is complete otherwise upon the Astral Plane, as he was in his Life.<sup>13</sup>

Such recently-departed spirits represent the entities that Spiritualist mediums contacted in their seances. As for how long such a haunting can continue, Crowley tells us in *Magick Without Tears*,

The “Medium” gets into communication with the “Shells of the Dead”—Qliphoth, the Qabalah calls them. A month or so, perhaps a year or so in the case of minds very solidly constructed or very passionately attached, and the Shells’ “Messages” begin to be less and less coherent, more and more fragmentary, more murderously modified by the experiences it has met in its aimless wanderings. Soon it is altogether broken up, and no more is heard of it.<sup>14</sup>

Given the various outcomes possible after death—absorption in the infinite (*samadhi*), reincarnation, a ghostly existence, and other possibilities not discussed here although some are hinted at in the last Collect of the Mass—Crowley says that one goal of every adept is to be properly prepared for this journey. As he writes in his epistle “De Nuptiis Summis,”

Death is the Dissolution in the Kiss of Our Lady Nuith. [...] It is the Summit of our Holy Art to present the whole Being of our Star to Our Lady in the Nuptial of our Bodily Death. We are then to make our whole Engine the true and real Appurtenance of our Force [...] Be a Bridegroom comely and well-favoured, a Man of might, and a Warrior worthy of the Bed of so divine a Dissolution.<sup>15</sup>

Writing less floridly in *Magick without Tears*, Crowley reiterates:

It is therefore of the very first importance to train the mind in every possible way, and to bind it to the Higher Principles by steady, by constant, by

<sup>13</sup> Crowley, *Liber Aleph*, 192.

<sup>14</sup> Crowley, *Magick Without Tears*, 166–7.

<sup>15</sup> Crowley, *Liber Aleph*, 194.

flaming Aspiration, fortified by the sternest discipline, and by continuously reformulated Oaths.

Such a man will be fully occupied after his death with the unremitting search for his new instrument; he will brush aside—as he has made a habit of doing during life—the innumerable lures of “Reward” and the like. (*I am not going to ask you to waste any time on the fantastic fairy tales of Devachan, Kama Loka and the rest; this must come up if you want to know about Paccheka-Buddhas, Skooshoks, the Brahma-lokas and so on—but not now, please!*) [...]

Enough of may, might, perhaps, and all that harpy brood! The plain fact is that I remember nothing at all of any Post Mortem experiences, and I have never known anyone else who does.<sup>16</sup>

This last sentence is particularly interesting, as—for all of Crowley’s musings on the subject of what happens after death—he has no actual memory or experience of what happens during this transition; which brings us back to where we began: We may suppose certain things to be true, but we don’t know for sure.

## Practical: What Magick Can I Do?

How does an adept go about this important work of preparation to die properly, to be comely and well-favored in our nuptial of bodily death? Fortunately, Crowley offers plenty of guidance in this area. As we shall see, the work outlined here is good magical practice in general, and can be as useful for the living who are coping with death as it is for the person about to go on that greatest journey.

Unsurprisingly, in order to die well, Crowley—in his commentary on *Liber AL II:74* (i.e., “Death! Death! thou shalt long for death.”)—tells us that, as the first step, “it is all-important to ascertain one’s true Will, and to work out every detail of the work of doing it, as early in life as one can.”<sup>17</sup>

Initiation in O.T.O. also helps the individual to understand their relationship to the universe and, thus, where death fits in. In his *Confessions*, Crowley explains the experience of a soul as it progresses through the O.T.O. Man of Earth degrees (which are open to everyone who is free, of full age, and of good report):

It chooses to enter into relations with the solar system. It incarnates. I explain the significance of birth and the conditions established by the process. I next show how it may best carry out its object in the eucharist of life. It partakes, so to speak, of its own godhead in every action, but especially through the typical sacrament of marriage, understood as the voluntary union of itself with each element of its environment. I then proceed to the climax of its career in death and show how this sacrament both con-

<sup>16</sup> Crowley, *Magick Without Tears*, 244–5. Italicized portion appears in the original letter, but is edited out of the cited edition.

<sup>17</sup> Crowley, *The Law is for All*, 148.

sebrates (or, rather, sets its seal upon) the previous procedure and gives a meaning thereto, just as the auditing of the account enables the merchant to see his year's transactions in perspective.

In the next ceremony I show how the individual, released by death from the obsession of personality, resumes relations with the truth of the universe. Reality bursts upon him in a blaze of adorable light; he is able to appreciate its splendour as he could not previously do, since his incarnation has enabled him to establish particular relations between the elements of eternity.<sup>18</sup>

O.T.O.'s initiation ceremonies are not the only official documents to address the subject and meaning of death for initiates. As "Liber CI" spells out, "The dying are entitled to return of all their dues, as a sort of life-insurance policy; yet we are also instructed to bequeath to the order a portion of our worldly goods to reflect what we have gained from membership."<sup>19</sup> While O.T.O. has never, to my knowledge, operated as such a life insurance company, this statement stems from the popularity of fraternal benefit orders (especially in North America) that offered life insurance as part of the mutual aid benefits of membership. This fact notwithstanding, those who have gained from their experiences in the Order and want to help ensure that those benefits remain available to others can make provisions for O.T.O. as part of their estate planning.

"Liber CI" further goes on to instruct us on how we should respond to the death of a fellow initiate:

34. The death of a Brother is not to be an occasion of melancholy, but of rejoicing; the Brethren of his Lodge shall gather together and make a banquet with music and dancing and all manner of gladness. It is of the greatest importance that this shall be done, for thereby the inherited fear of death which is deep-seated as instinct in us will gradually be rooted out. It is a legacy from the dead aeon of Osiris, and it is our duty to kill it in ourselves that our children and our children's children may be born free from the curse.<sup>20</sup>

Crowley reiterates this instruction about the Greater Feast in his commentary on *The Book of the Law*:

The feast for life is at a birth; and the feast for death at a death. It is of the utmost importance to make funerals merry, so as to train people to take the proper view of death. The fear of death is one of the great weapons of tyrants, as well as their scourge; and it distorts our whole outlook upon the Universe.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Crowley, *Confessions*, 701.

<sup>19</sup> Baphomet X° O.T.O. Ireland, Iona, and All the Britains [Aleister Crowley], "Liber CI: An Open Letter to Those Who May Wish to Join the Order; Enumerating the Duties and Privileges," *The Equinox* 1919, III(1): 207–24. See also the paragraphs 33, 63, and 64.

<sup>20</sup> Crowley, "Liber CI".

<sup>21</sup> Crowley, *The Law is for All*, 124.



0. Be seated in thine *Asana*, or recumbent in *Shavasana*, or in the position of the dying Buddha.

1. Think of thy death; imagine the various the various diseases that may attack thee, or accidents overtake thee. Picture the process of death, applying always to thyself. (A useful preliminary practice is to read text-books of Pathology, and to visit museums and dissecting-rooms.)

2. Continue this practice until death is complete; follow the corpse through the stages of embalming, wrapping and burial.<sup>24</sup>

The exercise goes on to visualizing a return to life, an egg of light, identification of this egg with the sun, and following the sun through its course including setting, darkness, and rising victorious again in the dawn. At the end of this section, Crowley notes, “this is a mighty meditation and holy, having power even upon Death; yea, having power even upon Death. (Note by Fra O.M. [...] There is also some danger of acute delirious melancholia at point 1.)”

Contemplating and identifying with the sun may sound familiar to anyone who has practiced the quadri-diurnal solar salutations of Crowley’s popular “Liber Resh.”<sup>25</sup> Indeed, Crowley recommends it in *Magick Without Tears*: “Particularly useful against the fear of death is the punctual and vigorous performance of *Liber Resh*. Meditate on the sun in each station: his continuous and even way: the endless circle.”<sup>26</sup>

In this same letter from *Magick Without Tears*, Crowley offers several other practices useful for working with death:

One moment, though, about the fear of death. The radical cure is the gaining of the magical memory. (See also *AL* 1:58) The more previous incarnations one can remember, the less important appears the moment when the curve of life dips below the horizon. [...] How to acquire that Memory? The development of the Magical Record is by far the most important of one’s weapons. How to use the Record is not easy to explain; but there is a sort of knack which comes to one suddenly. And there are certain types of *samadhi* during the exercise of which these memories appear spontaneously, without warning of any kind.<sup>27</sup>

In addition to keeping a magical record, Crowley also points to “Liber תישארב”<sup>28</sup> as a potent exercise in the magical memory. This liber consists of techniques for memory work to facilitate recovering the memory of past lives. Its consists of two main exercises: The first involves practicing reading, writing and thinking backwards. The second involves meditating on events or aspects

<sup>24</sup> [Aleister Crowley], “Liber HHH sub figurâ CCCXLI,” *The Equinox* 1911, I(5): 5–14.

<sup>25</sup> [Aleister Crowley], “Liber Resh vel Helios sub figurâ CC,” *The Equinox* 1911, I(6): 29–32.

<sup>26</sup> Crowley, *Magick Without Tears*, 382.

<sup>27</sup> Crowley, *Magick Without Tears*, 382.

<sup>28</sup> [Aleister Crowley], “Liber תישארב Viæ Memorîæ sub figurâ CMXIII,” *The Equinox* 1912, I(7): 105–16.

of oneself and tracing antecedent influences to their root causes to gain insight into oneself. Crowley humorously concedes that,

None of my writings, by the way, deal with the First Method; this is because I could never make any headway with it; none at all. F.: Iehi Aour, on the other hand, was a wizard at it; he thought that some people could use that way, and others not: born so. If it should happen that you have that faculty, and no gift at all for the other, it's just too bad; you'd better buzz off, and get another Holy Guru less one-legged.<sup>29</sup>

On a practical note regarding these exercises, Crowley advises “the shock of death makes it a matter of displaying the most formidable courage to go over in one's mind the incidents of previous deaths.”<sup>30</sup> Through whatever practice one acquires the magical memory—whether through keeping a magical record or one of the exercises “Liber **ה'ישאר**”—Crowley said that this experience provides the “certainty, not faith” promised in *The Book of the Law*.<sup>31</sup>

*Magick in Theory and Practice* discusses magical formulae and how they can be used as models for magical work and even ritual construction.<sup>32</sup> Two formulae are particularly useful for mastery of death. First is that of IAO, an early Greek transliteration of **יהוה** which, in the Golden Dawn, represented the stages of life, death and resurrection symbolized by Isis, Apophis and Osiris (although this formula takes on altered significance in the New Aeon). As Crowley writes, “What was until now called ‘Death,’ the means of resurrection in the Formula of Osiris IAO, is to be understood henceforth as ‘love under will.’”<sup>33</sup> Crowley's notes to the Twenty-Second Aethyr in *The Vision and the Voice* expand upon this idea:

In the New Aeon, Death is become Life Triumphant, not through Resurrection, but in its own Essence. [...] The Thelemite does not “suffer death.” He is eternal and perceives Himself the Universe, by virtue of the *categories* of Life and Death, which are not real but subjective conditions of his perception, like Time and Space. They are forms of his artistic presentation. Osiris, tricked into the belief in death, had to overcome it by Magick, the Formula I.A.O.<sup>34</sup>

Another fruitful avenue of practical work is with the 93 current itself. As Crowley writes in *Magick in Theory and Practice*,

<sup>29</sup> Crowley, *Magick Without Tears*, 382.

<sup>30</sup> Crowley, *Magick Without Tears*, 243.

<sup>31</sup> See *Liber AL*, I: 58: “I give unimaginable joys on earth: certainty, not faith, while in life, upon death; peace unutterable, rest, ecstasy; nor do I demand aught in sacrifice.”

<sup>32</sup> Master Therion [Aleister Crowley], *Magick in Theory and Practice* (Paris: Lecram, 1929–1930).

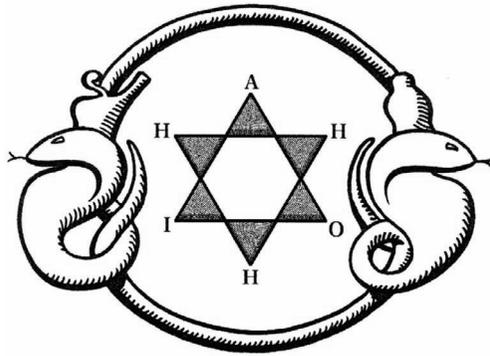
<sup>33</sup> “Liber LXV with Commentary” in Aleister Crowley, H. P. Blavatsky, J. F. C. Fuller and Charles Stansfeld Jones, *Commentaries on the Holy Books and Other Papers: The Equinox, Volume Four, Number One*, ed. A.:A.: (York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser, 1996), 145.

<sup>34</sup> Aleister Crowley, Victor B. Neuburg and Mary Desti, *The Vision and the Voice with Commentary and Other Papers* (York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser, 1998), 83fn.

93 is the number of the word of the Law—Thelema—Will, and of Agape—Love, which indicates the nature of Will. It is furthermore the number of the Word which overcomes death, as members of the degree of M.:M.: of the O.T.O. are well aware, and it is also that of the complete formula of existence as expressed in the True Word of the Neophyte, where existence is taken to import that phase of the whole which is the finite resolution of the Qabalistic Zero.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, not only does initiation through the entire Man of Earth triad provide instruction concerning death and what comes after, but it also provides initiates of the III<sup>o</sup> with a word which—through contemplation and application—conquers death.

In the above quote, Crowley also alludes to the word of the Neophyte, which refers to A.:A.: rather than O.T.O. That magical system also contains other lessons pertaining to death. After the Neophyte grade, the aspirant advances to Zelator by way of “Liber Cadaveris,” also known as “Ritual CXX, called of Passing through the Tuat.”<sup>36</sup> As suggested by its title (in English, “the Book of the Corpse”), this ritual also deals with death. As Gunther points out in *The Angel and the Abyss*, the section of “Liber HHH” discussed above corresponds to “Liber Cadaveris.”<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, Crowley’s sketch accompanying his manuscript of “Liber HHH” implies a connection between HHH and the I A O formula (see Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Frontispiece of “Liber HHH” from Aleister Crowley et al., *Magick: Liber ABA*, 598, after an image by Crowley in the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin [reproduced by permission of Ordo Templi Orientis].

<sup>35</sup> Crowley, *Magick in Theory and Practice*, 48–9.

<sup>36</sup> MS notebook, Yorke Collection OS26, Warburg Institute, University of London.

<sup>37</sup> J. Daniel Gunther, *The Angel and the Abyss: Comprising The Angel and the Abyss and the Hieroglyphic Triad, Being Books II and III of The Inward Journey* (Lake Worth, FL: Ibis, 2014), 60. Readers may find Gunther’s discussion on pages 53–64 to be insightful.

Finally, any aspirant in A.:A.: may also take the bodhisattva vow. It, too, pertains to the experience of death. As Crowley writes in *Magick Without Tears*,

There is one Oath more important than all the rest put together, from the point of view of the A.:A.: You swear to refuse all the “rewards,” to acquire your new vehicle without a moment’s delay, so that you may carry on your work of helping Mankind with the minimum of interruption. Like all true Magical Oaths, it is certain of success.<sup>38</sup>

In Buddhism, the bodhisattva vows to renounce absorption into the infinite in favor of reincarnation in order to help all of mankind attain to liberation from the cycle of rebirth. This vow, which persists across all incarnations, would clearly impact what happens in the afterlife.

## Conclusions

In summary, we find many exercises and practices to enlighten our understanding of death and help to confront it, whether with our own death or that of someone close to us. These techniques include:

- Discovering and doing your Will;
- Taking the O.T.O. Man of Earth initiations;
- Celebrating the Greater Feast to honor our loved ones and also to break out of the Old Aeon view of death;
- Contemplating the identity of love and death;
- Practicing “Liber HHH,” Part II;
- Regularly performing “Liber Resh”;
- Keeping a magical record to cultivate the magical memory;
- Doing the exercises of “Liber תישארב”;
- Working with the IAO formula and the 93 current;
- Experiencing the parallel mysteries of A.:A.:.

Armed with these techniques—and informed by this review of philosophical and technical approaches to death in Thelema—may you be able to look at Death and The End with head erect and eyes open.

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<sup>38</sup> Crowley, *Magick Without Tears*, 245.