

Microcosmographia Magica,

or

**A Microcosmography for Magic
(An Essay on Some Fundamentals)**

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A Note on the Title

The *Microcosmos*, or Little Cosmos, is the Human Being. The *Macrocosmos*, or Big Cosmos, is the whole of existence, the entire universe.

They are so called because every Human Being is thought — by some — to embody on a small scale the structure of the entire universe, to be that universe in miniature. Whether this is true or not does not matter for the purpose of the present essay.

Microcosmographia Magica, or *The Microcosmography of Magic*, therefore, is a (partial) description of the Microcosmos, the Human Being, framed for the use of Magicians and Mystics.

This essay was written about twenty years ago, then set aside to ferment. By now it has fermented sufficiently to be shared with others. I have revised the original text only lightly. Only the *Epilogue* is wholly new.

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Chapter 1

The Start of the Path

1.1. Learning Magic

Magic that works can never be wholly lost. What a person once found, another can find again. What a Power once gave, It can give again. Only the magic that doesn't work can be lost forever — and that's no loss!

Magic is the hidden ways of doing things. It is an art, a craft, a set of skills, rather than a science or a philosophy to be conveyed in words and sentences. It is like swimming or cooking, not like mathematics or metaphysics.

Yet there are differences even here. One body can teach another body to swim, or to cook, without much use of words, but it is one mind that teaches another mind how to work magic.

It is by words that one mind most easily reaches and teaches another mind. Thus words are needed to teach magic, especially at first, when mind and mind have not yet learned how to talk to one another without words and when the Teacher Within is still at rest.

Magic cannot be transplanted from one mind to another. A teacher's words do not sow the seeds of magic in a learner's mind. Rather, her words are like the sun and the rain that cause seeds to grow. Magic is already present in the learner's body (including her brain and nervous system), like seeds in fertile soil, and needs only slow nourishing to grow. Just as each patch of fertile soil has its own properties that determine what kind of seeds can grow in it, so from the time of its conception each learner's body has its own Gifts to foster and its own Challenges to meet, which prepare it for magic of one kind or another.

Like the sun's heat and the rain's moisture, the words and the deeds of the teacher sink into the dark recesses of the learner's memory, secretly acting upon the seeds of magic that lie hid in the learner's body. These seeds grow

ever so slowly, and reach full maturity long after the teacher and the learner have gone their separate ways. For the most part, they achieve full maturity only when some urgent need spurs their growth — when the learner has to deal with something for which her ordinary abilities and resources have proven insufficient.

Or these seeds may reach maturity when the learner is Called to teach magic, in her own turn, to another who needs to develop her own powers. She who has been taught must someday teach in turn, if she would know the full extent of her powers.

Yet be slow to teach. For the most part, teach only when you can see the seeds of magic already beginning to grow in the learner who wants your teaching. What these seeds will yield is beyond the power of reason to comprehend, beyond the power of words to define, describe and delimit.

Teach with humility, knowing how little the greatest teacher can say about such a mystery. Teach with respect, knowing how much the least pupil may have to offer out of her own resources. For the roles may be reversed without warning: your pupil will begin to teach you, or your teacher will begin to learn from you.

She who knows does not speak; she who speaks does not know.¹

Once your seeds of magic have begun to grow, you will also discover a **Teacher Within**, who can speak either without words or with them. It will happen that you urgently need to know something — what to do, or how to do it — and suddenly you find that you have the knowledge you need. It will seem to you that you always have had this knowledge, and had merely forgotten it until urgent need called it to mind. This is how you can recognize the teaching of the Teacher Within. If it feels like fresh knowledge, it does not come from the Teacher Within. If it feels like knowledge that you always had, but had forgotten for a while, or somehow mislaid, then it may come from the Teacher Within.

¹ Lao-Tzu, *The Wisdom of Laotse*, transl. Lin Yutang (New York, 1948), ch. 56.

No one knows precisely who or what this Teacher Within really is — whether she is a hidden part of you, or a being separate from you, or both at once.

Few other arts and crafts seem to have a Teacher Within.

Words can point to the gate that stands at the beginning of your path toward magic, once you are ready to follow it. The first turnings of that path can also be told in words. But words fail more and more to guide you as you advance along your path, which always ends at a deep well-spring of wordless silence. It ends in silence because words are merely seed-casings, and the full-grown plant cannot be crammed back into the shattered husk that once held its seed.

Thus no magical path has a true name. A path that can be named is not a magical path.

This is why it is good for every learner to outgrow each of her teachers in turn. Otherwise she might be tempted to name her own path by her teachers' names.

Words get in the way! They cripple even shallow knowledge, and they slay deep knowledge.

Any natural thing — even the smallest pebble — is far too complex to be exhaustively described in a lifetime of word-spinning. How much more inexhaustible are the greatest mysteries, such as magic!

Omnia exeunt in mysterium. “All things end in mystery.”²

These greatest mysteries are beyond all speech — they need no oath of secrecy to hide them from the unfit, or to protect the unready from them. If you sense their existence, if you have loved them from afar, then you are fit and ready to approach them.

² Arthur Machen, *Hieroglyphics* (1902), p. 126 (chapter 5). Machen cites it as “an old scholastic maxim,” but he took it from Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who ascribed it to “a schoolman,” that is, an unidentified Medieval scholastic.

1.2. The First Pitfall: Two Kinds of Power

An unfit or unready learner cannot learn enough to do too much harm to others. Although a teacher may misjudge a learner's readiness, the soil is not yet fertile, and the seeds of magic can hardly grow in it.

What danger there is, when the learner is unfit or unready, comes mostly from a frustrated desire for magical Power. When the seeds of magic do not grow in the learner, she cannot become aware of the cooperative ***Power-with-all-things-together*** that comes from Emptying and Uniting.

Then the desire to get some sort of Power from one's work easily leads both the teacher and the learner to develop the coercive ***Powers-over-many-things-apart***, by which they can obtain a modicum of control over one another and over their fellow creatures. Such Powers-over always corrupt their users — sooner in some cases, later in others, but in the end always. As Lord Acton wrote to Bishop Creighton 1887,

*Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely.
Great men are almost always bad men.³*

However, these Powers-over must be recognized and understood, if one is to develop a true mastery of the Power-with. This understanding is a form of self-knowledge, and comes from experience — often from bitter experience.

Also, the Powers-over can be used — with caution and delicacy — to show a ready learner how she can know and use her Power-with. Since the Powers-over are readily accessible and easily awakened even in unready learners, they can be used to convince a ready learner of the reality of Power in general and to demonstrate to her how one perceives Power and uses it. When these lessons have been learned, the much harder task of knowing and using one's Power-with becomes a little easier.

³ John E. E. Dalberg-Acton, First Baron Acton, *Historical Essays & Studies* (1907), p. 504.

Yet the Powers-over corrupt everyone who experiences them — slaves and masters alike. Even the cautious and delicate playing with Powers-over that can be used to learn about Power-with, inevitably sows some seeds of corruption, which teacher and learner alike must then labor hard to keep from ripening.

This is why it is good for a teacher to teach only a few students in her lifetime. Too many students, and you will not be able to keep these seeds of corruption from ripening.

This, too, is why it is good for a learner to outgrow each of her teachers in turn. By breaking the mold that defined the two of you as teacher and learner, you also break the hold that the Powers-over acquired on each of you as you were playing with them before you came to know and use Power-with.

Having broken this mold, you are free to establish a new relationship, namely, a relationship between equals who respect one another. This is the only kind of relationship that is *safe* between those who have learned to use the Powers-over. It is also the only kind of relationship that is *possible* between two people who know and use Power-with.

Like any new, unknown herb, the plant that grows from the seeds of magic in you yields up its secrets only slowly. Investigate these secrets carefully and cautiously, so as not to over-reach your natural protections and defenses. But also investigate them boldly, or you will never learn how to use your magic. Steer a middle course between caution and boldness, between safety and danger, for there is no profit without risk, and no growth without corruption. Ultimately, there is no life without death.

1.3. Gifts, Callings and Challenges

Every person has her own myriad special abilities — her own **Gifts**. She will never get to know them all, especially the lesser ones. They are too many. The greater Gifts are more easily recognized, once you learn how to look for them.

Your Gifts are the foundations of your magic. Different Gifts yield different kinds of magic. Two people rarely have the same Gifts. Thus two people can rarely practice the same kind of magic.

Every Gift is both bane and blessing; it works for weal and for woe. Although every Gift brings both joy and pain, the one usually looms larger than the other. You can recognize a greater Gift either by the joy or by the pain it brings you.

When you have recognized a Gift, you must understand it — how and why it has come to you. Then you can use that Gift for your own purposes, including the purpose of magic. Knowledge always gives Power — Power-with in the best case, Powers-over in the worst.

Among the many kinds of greater Gifts is the **Calling** — a Gift that overmasters you with the certainty that you must do some particular thing with your life, or with a part or period of your life. Callings appear to be beyond all argument, as certain as your own existence. They impel you, they compel you, they force your hand, and they feel irresistible. Like all Gifts, every Calling brings both joy and pain. As your joy or as your pain in it looms larger, a Calling will be pleasant or unpleasant. Yet even an unpleasant Calling can be turned to your own purposes in magic.

A Calling, like any Gift, may be very much out of step with what your Waking Self has decided it wants to do with your life. But there is far more to life than the mere whims of your Waking Self.

Another kind of greater Gift is the **Challenge** — a Gift of a great obstacle which you can overcome only with difficulty, by mastering skills that you otherwise would not have bothered to develop. Challenges are the points at which you are in real danger of failing, or even of perishing. The very strongest Challenges can destroy your Body or your Waking Self, or make of them a cripple who can no longer move away from the point of that Challenge, no longer leave it behind and go on. Challenges develop new abilities in you,

or bring you new knowledge. They are the advanced courses in the School of Hard Knocks.

Most Challenges can be met, at least in principle; but sometimes someone is Challenged wholly beyond her strength and ability. Although this is not fair, it does offer you this cold comfort — whenever you fail some Challenge, you *cannot ever* know whether it was your own fault or not. This helps keep you ready for the next Challenge.

Although some Challenges wholly destroy a person, they are rare. The strongest Challenges that you are likely to face will do no more than wound you — more or less deeply. Yet magic is also about healing. Whoever would heal others must have been wounded first, so she can learn from her own wounding. The wisest healer is a wounded healer.

Chapter 2

The Inner World

2.1. Your Body's Life and its Creation of Your Selves

Your life unfolds before you, from one day to the next, as a fan of branching paths. At each branching point there is a choice to be made. Even standing still, and refusing to choose one path over the others, is a kind of choice. You can never escape choice.

At the beginning of your life, upon conception, your **Body** (including, eventually, your brain and nervous system) is created and begins to live and grow. As your Body lives, it must pick its way through this fan of branching paths, choosing some paths and rejecting others. At first your Body chooses without any awareness. But with every choice it makes, your Body creates and slowly shapes a **Waking Self** which can facilitate the physical and physiological work of the Body — its search for nutrition, reproduction, pleasure, power, safety, meaning, and so forth.

Each of these choices that you made stands as a milestone along the route that has led to the creation of your Body's Waking Self. Without a Body to create it, your Waking Self would not exist.

Your Body's Waking Self is limited and delimited by the entire series of specific choices made at each point from conception to the present. It is these limitations that make purposeful activity possible for anyone: omnipotence would drive each and every one of us mad. *"It's our limitations that keep us sane,"* said Bertha Simos.⁴ The Waking Self is, so to speak, a "horse" which the Body has created to ride toward its goals — in general, to facilitate all its most necessary work.

However, there is much more to you than just your Body and your Waking Self. There are, first of all, very many **Sleeping Selves** (or **Sleepers**, for short)

⁴ Quoted by her daughter, Starhawk [Miriam Simos], *The Spiral Dance* (1979), p. 109.

in each and every one of us.⁵ They arise as a natural by-product of the process by which the Body creates its Waking Self.

Each of the paths *not* taken at each branching point in your life also has its consequences, for it is a milestone on some other route to other possible Selves that your Body did *not* take while was creating your Waking Self. The paths not taken are what determine the possible alternative Selves that your Body has rejected in the course of its life so far.

As no two Bodies will face exactly the same sequence of choices during the course of their lives, nor make exactly the same choice at every point in that sequence, so no two Bodies will have exactly the same collection of rejected alternative Selves.

Yet **Memory** is forever, and holds every choice in its grasp. Each and every one of these rejected alternative Selves is retained in your Memory, like a vast multitude of prisoners asleep in the cells of some great inner **Dungeon**. (We shall use this metaphor in what follows.) These are your Sleeping Selves, or Sleepers.

The very oldest of your Sleepers are poorly formed and hardly human. In your infancy even your Waking Self was inchoate, monstrous, and just beginning to be human. As your Body's life unfolded year by year, the new Sleeping Selves that it created became less and less monstrous, more and more well formed and human. (The same was also true of your Waking Self.) When you reach your full growth, your most recent Sleepers will be very like your full-grown Waking Self. They will be fully as human and fully as capable as your Waking Self is, though their capabilities will be more or less different from the capabilities of your Waking Self. A Sleeper that your Body created

⁵ The concept of many distinct selves that smoothly work together within every human body was (so far as I know) first articulated by Charles Godfrey Leland, *Gypsy Sorcery and Fortune-Telling* (1891), p. 14, and chapters XI–XII. Leland expanded on it in some of his later works, notably *Have You a Strong Will?* (1899) and *The Alternate Sex; or, the Female Intellect in Man, and the Masculine in Woman* (1904). One year later F. W. H. Myers first published a similar insight in his “The Subliminal Consciousness” [continued as “The Subliminal Self”], which was published in installments in the *Proceedings of the Society for Psychological Research*, VII–XI (1892–1895).

only a year or two ago will be almost indistinguishable from your current Waking Self.

After you are fully grown, your new Sleeping Selves will be sufficiently like your Waking Self that your Body may find it easier, at any given point in the network of your life, to exchange your Waking Self for one of your new Sleeping Selves (better suited to meet the needs of the moment), rather than doing further work on your Waking Self and creating further Sleepers in the process. When this becomes your Body's regular way of meeting new Challenges, your Dungeon stops expanding. At that point, your abilities to meet life's Challenges become more limited.

2.2. The Use of Your Sleeping Selves

Some of the Sleepers in your Dungeon sleep more soundly than others. Some of them, at least, can be awakened under certain conditions, or by certain techniques, which can also cause the Waking Self to sleep for a while. At times, some Sleepers even wake up by themselves, for example, in dreams while your Body sleeps.

Some of your Sleepers will prove useful — and can be deliberately used — once you have learned how to wake them up and put them back to sleep at will. Some of your Sleepers will necessarily have characteristics or capabilities that your Waking Self lacks. If your Waking Self is timid, for example, some of your Sleepers may be bold. If your Waking Self is empirical or rational, some of your Sleepers may be intuitive and subtle. If your Waking Self is stupid or tongue-tied, some of your Sleepers may be brilliant and eloquent.

In times of great stress or trauma (for example, when faced with a Challenge that may be beyond your powers), one or more of your Sleeping Selves may be awakened without your willing it, and may temporarily supplant your original Waking Self as your Body seeks to survive. On occasion a person may end up with more than one Waking Self as a result of this process. This

can be uncommonly awkward, as these Selves vie with one another to serve the Body's needs.

It is not possible — even *logically* — to integrate *all* of your Sleeping Selves with your Waking Self. Your Sleepers, for the most part, are *not* repressed or rejected aspects of your Waking Self, but entire, complete alternate Selves which have been created by the impossibility of your taking all paths simultaneously as you make your way through the network of choices in your life. Many of them are shadows of all the people — saints and sinners alike — you *might* have become if you had lived your life according to different values and principles. There are countless antinomies and contradictions among them.

One of the magician's tasks is to explore her Dungeon, to discover some of her Sleepers, to decide which ones may be useful. She must also learn how to wake them up when she needs them, and how to put them back to sleep when she is finished with them. She must learn how to enhance their capabilities while they are awake.

2.3. Selves in Your Dungeon That are Not *Your* Selves

There are other Selves in your Dungeon, too, which are not *your* own alternative Selves.

Your Memory also holds **Shades** of *all* the other people with whom you have had to deal closely during your life, living or dead: members of your immediate family, all the members of your extended family and community whom you have known, the men and women whom you have loved or hated, your friends and playmates, your teachers and mentors. Any one of these Shades can be vividly called to mind, or can even provide a **Pattern** on which your Waking Self (or any of your Sleeping Selves) can model its own activity.

These Shades can also serve as Patterns for the construction of **Masks**. Masks are, as it were, characters that you create or roles that you play in order to keep some part of your life running smoothly, even though your Waking Self

needs to disengage from it. Challenges which have wounded you may cause you to create Masks, and these Masks will often remain even after the wounds have healed. Usually Masks do not work very well, and it can take a lot of effort to maintain them.

These Shades can also serve as Patterns for the construction of ***Child Pattern Selves***. These are the Selves that a mother — occasionally a father — creates for each of her unborn children in turn, as soon as she knows that she is to be its mother.

A Child Pattern Self is a “shared” Self, neither wholly the mother’s own nor wholly her child’s own. They are almost the *only* Selves which are shared in such a way.⁶ Other Selves are clearly one’s own Selves, or clearly other people’s Selves.

A Child Pattern Self is also provisional and tentative. It should weaken and eventually vanish once the actual child has been born and begins to develop its own Waking Self. As the child does this, it makes use of the Child Pattern Selves which its parents created for it. They usually serve the child as Patterns for the construction of its Waking and Sleeping Selves, but in some cases may serve it as patterns for the construction of Masks.

2.4. Ancestors and Descendants in Your Genetic Material

These Shades and these Child Pattern Selves exist in your Body’s Memory. Yet your Memory is *not* the only place where your actual ***Ancestors*** and your actual and potential ***Descendants*** are carried within your Body. Every cell of your Body contains information about every one of your Ancestors and every one of your Descendants for many generations. This information is carried in your Body’s ***Genetic Material***, that is, in its DNA, etc.

⁶ There is a second, fairly rare sort of shared self which can slowly form between the two partners in a long and harmonious marriage, and which is their joint creation without diminishing each partner’s own waking self.

The Ancestors and Descendants whom you carry in your Body's Genetic Material are *fractional* beings. You carry roughly half of each parent and each child, roughly a quarter of each grandparent and each grandchild, roughly an eighth of each great-grandparent and each great-grandchild, and so forth. They are not fractional Selves, but fractional Bodies. Selves are carried in your Memory, but these fractional Bodies are carried in your Genetic Material.

Your Body's Genetic Material seems to have an effect, at least to some extent, on the range and variety of Selves which your Body is likely to create for its use during the course of its life. Identical twins who have been separated at birth and raised in distant families and different environments, without any knowledge of one another, are often found to have quite similar Waking Selves. The same appears to be true across the generations. Ancestors and descendants are often found to have quite similar Waking Selves. Thus there is a profoundly intimate relationship between each Body and the actual Waking and Sleeping Selves which that Body has created for its use.

To say the same thing in other terms, each Body's Genetic Material seems to determine — at least to some degree — how that Body will face and resolve the Choices and how it will overcome the Challenges that it encounters in the course of its life. What is carried in the Genetic Material may be nothing more than a *propensity* toward some kinds of choices and responses, or away from other kinds of choices and responses. That would be enough to account for the observed similarities.

Naturally enough, there will usually also be a great similarity between a person's Waking Self and the Shades of that person that are stored in the Memories of her nearest relatives.

Because of all these things, there will always be a delicate interplay — *within* your own Body (your Genetic Material and your Memory) — between the fractional Bodies of your Ancestors and the Shades of those same Ancestors, or between the fractional Bodies of your Descendants and the Child Pattern Selves for those same Descendants.

This interplay puts you at a great advantage when you are working with or for your own biological Ancestors and Descendants: they are flesh of your flesh and bone of your bone. Contrariwise, it puts you at a disadvantage when you are working with or for people who are not your biological relatives.

If you are a woman, there is one additional thing to consider, for you were carried as a fractional Body (that is, as an egg) in the womb of your own mother, and for a few months, also in the womb of her mother. This is because all the eggs that any woman will ever have were formed in her Body while she was still in her mother's womb. Likewise your children, if you have them, will have been carried as fractional Bodies (eggs) not only in your own womb, but for a few months in the womb of your mother. If you have daughters and they have children of their own, then you, in turn, will be their maternal grandmother and the same pattern will repeat again. This is the nature of descent in the umbilical line, that is, from a woman's most remote female ancestor down to her, traced through countless generations of mothers and daughters. It is "double-stitched" at every generation, so to speak, with the fractional Body (egg) of every woman being enclosed inside two wombs at once.

2.5. Other Things in Your Dungeon

There are other things in your Dungeon, too. They are more like what mainstream psychology calls the products of repression, denial, and so forth.

There is a ***Crypt of Buried Fears***, where you have buried everything that was too frightening to keep in your ordinary Memory. Every so often, strength and courage permitting, it is a good idea for a magician to explore her Crypt of Buried Fears, to dwell on everything that she finds there, and even to empty it and sweep it clean. The things that are in it can sometimes be used against you by someone who may wish to harm you.

There is also a ***Choir of Voices***, which constantly chants a litany of blame, shame and guilt at you, and in the worst cases can reduce you to utter abjection. This arises partly as a natural by-product of the more troubling

Choices you will have had to make as you were creating your Waking and Sleeping Selves. Partly, too, they are the critical and judgemental Voices of the Shades of people who are or have been particularly influential in your life — your closest family, friends and mentors. These Voices can be silenced, but it may take a great effort. It requires profound understanding of the person who has created each Voice (whether yourself or another), followed by the deliberate action of your own strong will.

Finally, there is a **Cesspool**. This is where all the waste products of your Challenges end up, all the refuse of dysfunction, denial, repression, stress, trauma, and so forth. It needs to be drained from time to time. Since it mostly contains just mental images, thoughts and words, it can be drained by the right kind of talking. Unfortunately, it keeps on filling up as long as the above-mentioned processes continue to operate and to produce their waste. To really sanitize your Cesspool, you have to overcome these processes. This needs knowledge (including profound self-knowledge), determination and effort.

All this inner topography, of course, is metaphorical.

2.6. The Importance of Your Body

The fundamental principle here and in the following chapters is so obvious that it may easily be overlooked:

The only essential magical tool is your own human body.

All other tools are mere props, which a skilled worker can do without; but no being can work magic unless she possesses a human Body and has learned how to use it with skill.

Chapter 3

The Veils That Naturally Hide Reality

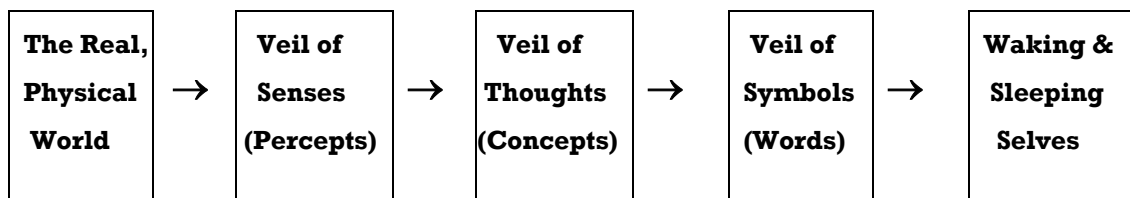
3.1. Three Veils

Your Body (including your brain and nervous system) is physically real. Your Waking and Sleeping Selves, like your Memory, were created by your Body, and depend on it for their maintenance, continuing existence and reality.

Beyond your Body is a much larger world, which is also physically real and must be dealt with on its own terms. This world was *not* created by your Body, much less by your Waking or Sleeping Selves. It is not greatly subject to your will, nor is it a kind of unformed clay to be shaped by you. It acts upon your Body directly and inexorably, despite the strength of your will or the depth of your understanding.

For the most part, your Waking and Sleeping Selves have *no direct access* to this real world outside of your Body. They know it only through your Body's physiological senses: touch, taste, smell, hearing, sight and several other less well known senses. Only part of the real, physical world makes any impression on the physiological senses. Even this part of the real world is naturally hidden from your Waking and Sleeping Selves behind several Veils. These Veils are the natural result of the ways in which your Body informs your Waking and Sleeping Selves about the real world.

There are at least three of these Veils — the ***Veil of Senses*** (or of Perception), the ***Veil of Thoughts*** (or of Conception) and the ***Veil of Symbols*** (including Language).



So far as all your physiological senses can serve you, you will never know the real world directly, and you can barely know Percepts. Concepts and especially Words make up all the world of which most people are ever aware. Yet Percepts, Concepts and Words are *not* the world in which you truly live — that world is physically real, and can help or harm you. It can even kill you (if, for example, you walk off an unperceived cliff). It is the principal source of your Challenges.⁷

3.1.1. *The Veil of Senses*

As the real world acts directly and inexorably upon your Body, some few aspects of it are perceived by your Body's senses. This process produces **Percepts**. Percepts are never wholly adequate, complete representations of the real world. As Emily Dickinson put it in one of her poems,

Perception of an object costs
Precise the object's loss.⁸

You can *observe* your Percepts, but *thinking* in Percepts is nearly impossible.

Your Percepts have been shaped by three factors: (1) by the real world itself, (2) by the built-in capabilities of your physiological senses, or “wet-ware,” which shape and limit the possibilities of perception, and (3) by your cultural conditioning, or additional “programming,” which in principle can be changed. Thus the structures which Percepts can exhibit are extremely variegated.

In many respects Percepts are the same for all people. In some respects, however, your Percepts depend upon the culture in which you have been raised.

⁷ The notion of the three veils has been shaped by the distinction made in semiotics between the **signifier**, the **signified**, and the part of the **real world** to which the **sign-function** (that is, the complex of signifier and signified) refers. See, for example, Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology* (English translation, 1967).

⁸ Emily Dickinson, *The Single Hound: Poems of a Lifetime* (1915), p. 16.

3.1.2. *The Veil of Thoughts*

Percepts have to be turned into something suitable for thinking, namely, into **Concepts**. You can think in Concepts directly, without Words or Symbols, though most people don't do so.

The real world does not shape your Concepts directly, but only *through* your Percepts. Your Concepts have been shaped by three factors: (1) by your Percepts, (2) by the built-in capabilities of your brain and nervous system — other parts of your “wet-ware,” and (3) by other parts of your cultural conditioning, or additional “programming.”

Your Concepts have much simpler structures than your Percepts. The structures that your Concepts exhibit are the traditional subject of logic and metaphysics. Some Concepts may derive from one and only one Percept. Other Concepts derive from more than one Percept. Yet other Concepts may be created by the brain and nervous system so that they correspond to no single Percept and stand for nothing in reality. Therefore Concepts are less adequate and less complete representations of the real world than Percepts are.

In some respects Concepts may be the same for all people. In very many respects, however, your Concepts depend upon the culture and language in which you have been raised.⁹

3.1.3. *The Veil of Symbols*

Concepts have to be turned into something suitable for communication, namely, into **Symbols**, including Words. Words are mostly what we communicate with, and silent Words are mostly what we think with. Very few

⁹ This was the great insight of Benjamin Lee Whorf — linguist, MIT-trained engineer, and long-term member of the Theosophical Society. See especially his articles “The Relation of Habitual Thought and Behavior to Language,” in *Language, Culture, and Personality: Essays in Memory of Edward Sapir* (1941); and “Language, Mind and Reality,” in *The Theosophist* (January and April, 1942). [Both articles were reprinted in *Language, Thought, and Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf* (1956), but the text of the second one was altered in several places by the editor without notice.]

of us ever think in Concepts instead of silent Words. (Thinking in Percepts is nearly impossible, though it can be done with great effort.)

Your language has been shaped by three factors: (1) by your Concepts, (2) by the built-in capabilities of your brain and nervous system — yet other parts of your “wet-ware,” and, most of all, (3) by your cultural conditioning, or additional “programming.”

Symbols, and especially Words, are even simpler in structure than Concepts. The structures that your Words and their combinations (Speech) exhibit are the traditional subject of grammar and rhetoric, or more recently of linguistics. The structure of Speech is basically linear, along time. Words and Speech are less adequate and less complete representations of the real world than Concepts are, and much less than Percepts are.

Words and speech depend almost completely upon the culture in which you have been raised, though some of the patterns and structures that they exhibit may be universal.

3.2. The Difference between Percepts, Concepts and Words

Consider the griffin. In the real world there are no griffins which a zoologist might examine. Nevertheless, one can truly say that one artist’s drawing of a griffin is zoologically accurate, or that another artist’s is not. This judgement does *not* depend only on “what one means by the word *griffin*.” There is more at stake here than just the definition of a word.

When I take a griffin as my example here, I am talking about a Concept. Some Concepts derive from a single Percept in a relatively straightforward way. Likewise, some Percepts derive from a single class of related things in the real world in a relatively straightforward way. The Concept and the Percept of a lion or of an eagle may serve as examples.

Other Percepts derive from the real world in various indirect ways, for example, the Percept of a tesseract or of benevolence. Similarly, but with

greater possibilities for confusion, some Concepts derive from Percepts in a variety of indirect ways, and these Percepts in their turn are related to nature with varying degrees of straightforwardness.

The Concept of a griffin is only indirectly related to the real world, and, like the Concept of H. P. Lovecraft's Great Old One, Cthulhu, is a fiction. However, the relations between each of these two Concepts and the real world are very different from one another.

One cannot criticize an artist's drawing of Cthulhu in the same way as one can criticize an artist's drawing of a griffin. The former is almost wholly arbitrary, whereas the latter can be criticized for accuracy. Any artist's drawing of a griffin must also be appropriate to our Percepts of those elements of the real world which are reflected in the Concept of a griffin as a beast that is half eagle, half lion. There is no such tight constraint on an artist who would draw Cthulhu.

In the real world there are many individual lions and eagles. Our Percepts of the generic lion and the generic eagle derive from these individual animals. Our Concept of the lion derives from our Percept of it alone, as does our Concept of the eagle. Our Concept of the griffin derives only from a combination of our Percept of the lion and our Percept of the eagle together; there was no Percept of a griffin from which it might have derived.

Finally, the Words for a lion, an eagle or a griffin will vary from one language to the next, and will vary much more sharply than do our Concepts themselves. There are languages that have no Word or Concept or Percept for a lion or for an eagle, simply because those animals do not live where those languages are spoken. Even more languages have no Word or Concept for a griffin, an animal that never lived anywhere in the real world.

3.3. The Work of the Veils

Part of a magician's work is to recognize the three Veils. Once she has learned to recognize them, she can learn the art of making them thinner, and

even of lifting them, in order to gain more accurate knowledge of the real world.

Sometimes, too, the Veils thin or even fall away by grace or good luck, without any effort on your part. If you are so fortunate as to have experienced this, you may find it easier to work with the Veils deliberately.

The outermost Veil is the Veil of Symbols, and especially Words. You can make this Veil much thinner, and maybe sometimes lift it altogether, by conscious mental activity and mental discipline. When, for example, you learn a foreign language, you learn an alternate Veil of Words. Once you have more than one Veil of Words, it becomes much easier for you to be aware of how Words hide Concepts.

Similarly, when you learn any abstract system of thought, for example in higher mathematics or modern physics, you will learn to think in Symbols that are not words, and thus you will also learn to think in Concepts. “Let no one ignorant of geometry enter here,” is what Plato is said to have carved over the entrance to his school of wisdom.¹⁰ This is why he did so.

The Veil of Symbols is the easiest of the three Veils to pull back, but even it is hard to shift at first.

The Veil of Thoughts is next, as you move away from mundane habits of thought. You can't even begin to wiggle this Veil unless you are already aware of how Concepts differ from Words or Symbols. Long, slow hours of careful contemplation or meditation help here. Verbal paradoxes may help. Some kinds of visualization use Concepts, not Words, so visualization exercises may help also. The disciplined practice of stillness — stillness of Body as well as of Thoughts — is always helpful.

Once the Veil of Thoughts has been touched and shifted, there remains the innermost Veil: the Veil of Senses. The same general practices can be used

¹⁰ Two Byzantine philosophers from the sixth century CE (Joannes Philoponus and Elias, both from Alexandria) cite this inscription; no earlier source for it has survived.

here that were useful for thinning the Veil of Thoughts, but it is even harder to get any results.

For the most part, all you will be able to do in the beginning is to make the outermost Veil, or the outermost two Veils, slightly thinner. It is very hard to work with the Veils — perhaps the hardest of all magical practices. It may take you decades to become really good at it.¹¹

¹¹ A remarkable short Byzantine Christian treatise, *The Three Methods of Prayer*, somewhat anticipates this Work of the Veils. According to its anonymous author, the first and second methods of prayer rely on sense-imagery (αἴσθησις) and on language and thought (νόησις), respectively, and thus can easily deceive the monk and lead him astray; only the third method, which avoids using either of these means, can bring the monk to what sounds very much like Direct Perception (see the next chapter of this book), in which he can truly commune with God. The Greek original was first published by Irénée Hausherr, *La méthode d'oraison Hésycaste* (Orientalia Christiana, IX/2, 1927). An English translation can be found in volume IV of *The Philokalia: The Complete Text*, translated by G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard and Kallistos Ware (1995).

Chapter 4

Direct Perception of High Reality

4.1. Direct Perception and Ineffable Experience

Normally, once you have pulled back the Veil of Sense, or of Percepts, there seems to be nothing behind it — nothing there at all. This is because all your previous mental and physical activity has been in terms of Percepts, Concepts and Symbols.

If your Mind and Body are not still, this is just the point at which the **Forces of Illusion** really come down hard on you. Hungering for any activity, your Body and your Mind will invent whole universes for you to live in. These invented universes are, however, made up entirely of Percepts, Concepts and Symbols, and they can be recognized from that fact alone. They come pouring in on you in a great crashing flood of sensation. You seem to be almost god-like, able to shape the real world by the force of your will alone, as you rebuild yourself and your world of Percepts, Concepts and Symbols. (Whether you *really* can bend the laws of nature, or reshape the physical world, in this state is quite another question . . .)

You can see this process at work, even without much self-discipline, through a simple experiment. Block your sight with a perfect blindfold, block your hearing equally well with earplugs, and sit absolutely motionless in a room with no air currents and no smells, where the air is at a temperature that feels neither warm nor cold. Remain thus for many hours, not moving a muscle. Your Mind and Body will hunger for sensation, just as they do when all three Veils have fallen away, and illusions will come in, though with much less power than when the Veils are really lifted. Even so, it can be a terrifying experience. Be cautious, and stop if you get really scared, or if it feels really “bad.” Have a safe and comforting environment you can retreat to afterwards. Don’t even try it if you are in poor health.

The “Nothing” that you perceive at first, when all the Veils are lifted and before your Mind and Body begin to invent whole new universes for you to

live in, is *also* an illusion, albeit a boring one. You must reject not only the new universes which the Forces of Illusion have made for you, but *also* the further illusion that there is nothing else there behind the three Veils. Only then can you take the next step.

Like a man newly deprived of all his senses, who can perceive nothing, you must develop another means of perception to function in this new world. Fortunately, you *can* do this, although it is not easy.

There exists a kind of ***Direct Perception*** of the real world, not mediated by any of your many physiological senses. You can recognize this kind of perception, when you have experienced it, by its sheer ***Ineffability***. What you perceive by Direct Perception cannot be put in Words in any natural way. There is no natural way even to put it into Concepts so that you can think or talk about it. Nor does it correspond in any natural way to any Percepts that you have ever perceived. This is what an ***Ineffable Experience*** is.

Some ordinary human experiences are *very hard* to put into any Words, to grasp by any Concepts. Ecstasies are frequently like this, as are other altered states of consciousness. Yet there are some people who have a great gift for Words, who can manage to convey something of the nature even of such ecstasies in Words, however inadequately. The poet John Donne is one good example, and there have been others, too. (Yet even they, when asked, sometimes admit that their own Words seem inadequate to them.) Ecstasies of this kind are most definitely not Ineffable. If a poet of John Donne's stature could manage to convey even a little something of what an experience is like, then that experience is not an Ineffable Experience.

Experiences that are truly Ineffable are nothing like such ecstasies or such altered states. They have not even the slightest, tiniest points of contact with anything that you have ever perceived before, or can perceive through your ordinary physiological senses; none of your Percepts have any relevance as you experience them. The same is true of your Concepts and your Words: they cannot be brought to bear in even the slightest way on your Ineffable Experiences, nor do they have any utility or relevance as you wrestle with what you have experienced.

There are profound thinkers who claim that Ineffable Experiences are simply not possible, that there can be no such things. They might be correct if all human experience resulted from the activity of the Body's physiological senses and its thoughts and emotions, as they suppose. Contrariwise, if there are true Ineffable Experiences, however rare, then those thinkers' claim about human experience cannot be true.

Moreover, Ineffable Experience is so utterly different from all other human experience, whether sensory, emotional or intellectual, that you cannot reason your way to it by any analogy with any common human experience.

The only way ever to be convinced that Ineffable Experiences do exist is to have had an Ineffable Experience yourself. If you have never had one yourself, you cannot know that they exist, or form any conception of what they are like. All you can do is provisionally trust the witness of those who have had one, but this can never satisfy any critical thinker.

When you have an Ineffable Experience, you wholly bypass all your physiological senses, with their faculties for creating Percepts, Concepts and Words. If you are still able to use Percepts, Concepts and (silent) Words to describe what you have experienced, however inadequately, then you are still in a fog of illusion, and you have not experienced Direct Perception.

Another experiment here, this time just to create an *analogue* of the process within one's ordinary sensorium. Have the same blindfold and earplugs as before, fold your arms behind your back with the firm resolve not to use them under any circumstances, and begin walking slowly around the room, trying to find obstacles before you actually bump into them. Most people can eventually learn to do this, after several learning experiences when you actually do bump into something. Then try to find a friend, who is standing silent and motionless somewhere in the room. Some people can learn to do this also. What you have achieved here is *not* Direct Perception, but merely the awakening or tuning up of some of the less-used physiological senses that we all have. Even so, it is an instructive experience.

Ask a blind person, if you are friendly enough with her, about these abilities: many blind people will confirm that they can do such things without using their senses of hearing and touch. (If you can't manage to do these things yourself, even after a large number of attempts, find a safe way to "turn up the heat" a bit, that is, to make the consequences of failure a bit more unpleasant. Sometimes it takes stress to break the stranglehold of your everyday habits of perception.)

What you encounter under Direct Perception, while you are having an Ineffable Experience, may be called **High Reality**. It is experienced apart from, or outside of, the parameters of space and time. There all things are equally close at hand and equally open to your inspection, however distant from you in space and time they may be in ordinary experience. It also stands apart from all emotions and all intellectual activity. There is an adamant clarity to Ineffable Experience that seems to leave no room for the ordinary, everyday ways of knowing. Even existence itself, as we conceive of the Concept with reference to our mundane world, seems inapplicable to what we are calling High Reality, the experience of which makes everything else seem wholly unreal.

While you are having an Ineffable Experience, all things lie open before you in all their complex simplicity and blinding fiery light. Your world of experience becomes vaster than you ever thought possible, and immensely richer in ways that wholly escape all your mundane senses, or that you can grasp in terms of your mundane experiences. It is as if you had suddenly acquired an infinity of new senses, each wholly unlike any of the many physiological senses that you use in everyday life, and what these new senses perceive is wholly apart from what you perceive in everyday life. To bring anything of an Ineffable Experience back to your everyday life is like trying to take a drink from a fire hose in full blast without getting your head torn off.

Here, if anywhere in human experience, is where you might actually hope to accomplish such outright physical impossibilities as telepathy, clairvoyance, etc., after you have become sufficiently familiar with Direct Perception and the High Reality to which it leads. You might even be able to test such abilities empirically. Certainly you should not accept the reality of any

apparent feats of this kind without testing your results with great care back in the physical world. The Forces of Illusion can also create in you an illusory power to accomplish such feats.

4.2. The Second Pitfall: The Emotion of Certainty

Even a little thinning of the outermost Veils — even the faintest glimpse of the Ineffable High Reality — will produce major emotional effects of a particular kind in you. Usually you feel awe, wonder, or glory; but sometimes you feel their dark counterparts, such as horror, terror, or desolation. Such emotions are *numinous*, that is, they naturally suggest to you that you are in the presence of something sacred or supernatural, something that is beyond the everyday world.¹² (Ideas can also be *numinous*, as can experiences and places.)

The thinning of the Veils also produces another strong emotion in you, which we may call *Certainty*. This term refers to at least two separate things. It can refer to a judgement of the mind, which may result from argument or experience. Also, it can refer to a strong emotion, a feeling of unshakable assurance. In this chapter, we always use it to refer to the strong emotion.

Like any other emotion, Certainty will cloud your understanding and seriously interfere with your efforts to evaluate an Ineffable Experience. The emotion of Certainty creates an illusion that is particularly seductive. This is the *illusion* that you have finally come to know some Absolute Truth.

Here is how it creates that illusion.

One can only be Certain *of something*. Certainty is an emotion that (so to speak) hungers for *something to be certain of* — ideas or beliefs. In a numinous context, such as when the Veils thin, it hungers for numinous ideas or beliefs, and it will take them where it finds them in you. When the Veils

¹² The term *numinous* is taken from Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (English translation, 1923).

thicken again and the emotion of Certainty fades away, you will find that you have been left *unshakably* Certain of whatever numinous ideas or beliefs it had seized upon — whatever they may have been!

In fact, when the Veils do start to thin, it is precisely the raw materials of knowledge and belief — Percepts, Concepts and Words — that vanish. Yet the emotion of Certainty, always “hungry” for its proper food, will snatch at the shreds of this vanishing knowledge or belief that may rise to the surface as the Veils thin. It will also exalt these shreds of knowledge or belief into Universal, Absolute Truths. This is how ecstatic experiences, particularly on the part of religious people, can yield what *seems to them* to be Absolute Truths. This is the illusion that Certainty has created.

Yet you are often the farthest from Absolute Truth just when you are most certain that you have finally grasped it.

Any such Absolute Truth is Ineffable — that is, it lies far beyond the power of anyone’s words to express in any adequate way. Thus you must always test and retest whatever truths you *think* you have learned through Direct Perception.

Direct Perception of the ineffable High Reality is best treasured up in your memory intact, without re-working it in terms of Percepts, Concepts and Words. Talking about Direct Perception really weakens your intact memory of it, for you cannot talk about it at all unless you first *re-Veil* it in Percepts, Concepts and Words.

The true magician, like the true mystic or meditator, loves silence, and appears secretive to those who do not understand what words cost her every time she speaks. Words are cruel to memories. Words can destroy all your memories of Direct Perception.

4.3. False Enlightenment and False Endarkenment

False Enlightenment and Endarkenment are the most powerful *illusion* created by the emotion of Certainty which one experiences as the Veils thin, or fall away completely. As noted, Certainty seizes hungrily on any shred of knowledge or belief that crosses your mind as you experience this emotion.

The other emotions that one experiences when the Veils begin to thin are the *numinous* emotions, such as awe, wonder and glory, or sometimes their dark counterparts, such as horror, terror and desolation.

The numinosity of these other emotions usually ensures that whatever shreds of knowledge and belief cross your mind will be shreds of *religious or philosophical* knowledge and belief. Usually they will be optimistic and tinged with hope, when the numinous emotions are also luminous emotions, as usually is the case. The resulting experience will seem to be a glorious revelation of Absolute Truth, which may be characterized as a kind of **False Enlightenment**.

If, however, the darkly numinous emotions arise, or if your religious and philosophical views are deeply pessimistic and despairing, then your experience will seem to be a dark revelation of Absolute Truth, which may be characterized as a kind of **False Endarkenment**. Fortunately, this experience is quite rare.

False Enlightenment and False Endarkenment can always be recognized as *false*, however they may overwhelm, however much they may compel belief and allegiance. If your experience is an experience of Percepts, Concepts and Words, or if the Absolute Truth that you take away from it can be put into Words somehow, then it is *false*. *True* Enlightenment and *true* Endarkenment are always Ineffable.

Though false, this kind of Enlightenment may still be a positive event in your life, simply because of the positive emotions that it produces: certainty, joy, contentment, and so forth. Even so, it remains a pitfall, which may keep you from advancing further along your path.

False Endarkenment, on the other hand, is utterly devastating. You are left with an absolutely unshakable conviction that the world is not merely meaningless, but unspeakably horrible, cruel, ugly, and terrifying beyond all endurance. The only way to shake off such an experience may be eventually to attain Enlightenment — even False Enlightenment may be enough to counteract it —, thereby broadening your unshakable Certainty to encompass both apparent absolutes.

(Note that False Endarkenment is not the “dark night of the soul” of Christian mystics, or what they call “dryness,” but something much more intense and lasting. False Endarkenment might be described in Christian terms as discovering, after heroic efforts to experience God directly, that instead you suddenly have directly experienced Satan, and experienced him in such a way as to totally convince not just your mind, but your whole being, that there is no God, but *only* Satan — no good anywhere in the world, but *only* evil.)

False Endarkenment differs from deep depression. The latter is much more common, and much less compelling. Also, one can treat deep depression medically. Deep depression affects your feelings and moods, your capacity to feel joy. Yet you still know that other people can experience joy, that it is possible to do so, and you may wish that you, too, could feel it. False Endarkenment, on the other hand, convinces you — as surely as you know that your head is on your shoulders, and quite against all the evidence of your five senses — that there is no joy, no hope, no salvation anywhere in the world, and that nobody else has ever truly experienced such things, either. It is an overwhelming Certainty about the makeup of the universe, which conquers all other perceptions and even reason itself. This is why it is so devastating.

Until you can counterbalance your experience of Endarkenment by an equal experience of Enlightenment, the only counsel seems to be one of courage (though you will feel trapped without an escape, and totally defeated) and strength (though you will feel totally powerless and weak). As a nameless bard sang more than a thousand years ago, in his verses on the doomed English warriors at *The Battle of Maldon*,

*Courage shall grow keener, clearer the will,
The heart fiercer, as our force faileth.*¹³

4.4. True Enlightenment and True Endarkenment

True Enlightenment and True Endarkenment do not feel at all like False Enlightenment and Endarkenment, for they are not produced by any emotional hunger. Here there are no compelling emotions, but a sense of freedom. There is none of the unshakable, passionate Certainty that colors both False Enlightenment and False Endarkenment.

True Enlightenment and ***True Endarkenment*** arise from your Direct Perception of Ineffable High Reality, once the Veils have thinned or fallen away, and once you have seen through the Forces of Illusion. High Reality cannot be expressed in terms of Percepts, Concepts and Words. It is known only through non-sensory, non-intellectual Direct Perception.

This kind of “knowing” is different from ordinary knowledge. It is not any kind of knowing that something is or is not so. It is not any kind of knowing how to do something. It is only a little like knowing a friend. The closest every-day analogue to it may be the way that life-long lovers “know” one another in sexual union. This is not just a coy Biblical euphemism for sex, but a fourth kind of knowing, a knowledge that transcends body and mind, and cannot be adequately expressed in either intellectual or emotional terms.

Unlike False Enlightenment and False Endarkenment, True Enlightenment and True Endarkenment are not opposite experiences. Instead, they are two aspects of one and the same experience, like the two sides of a single coin.

The experience of True Enlightenment and True Endarkenment can be more or less intense. Perhaps this depends on how thin the Veils have become, or

¹³ Translated by Michael Alexander, *The First Poems in English* (2008), p. 104.

maybe on how close you are to High Reality when the Veils become thin or fall away.

It is a glorious experience, and also a terrible, awesome one. Even in its least intense form it is truly Ineffable — at least, it is beyond any words that *I* know how to cobble together.

High Reality is always there around us. Arthur Machen expressed it very well:

No, when men say that there are strange things in the world, they little know the awe and the terror that dwell always with them and about them.¹⁴

Yet High Reality is almost always hidden from us by the three Veils and by the Forces of Illusion — whether by grace or by good luck. Most of us, I think, would perish under the steady impact of its unveiled glory and terror. I'm very sure I would. As T. S. Eliot wisely wrote:

Go, go, go, said the bird: human kind
Cannot bear very much reality.¹⁵

Words are so useless here!!!

The more I try to make it plain, the less my words seem even partly adequate... Words are as straw, but who can build a lasting sacred monument of straw? Stones might serve, yet no words are as eloquent as stones!

It is time to cease from speaking about what cannot even be imaged, let alone thought or uttered.¹⁶

¹⁴ Arthur Machen, "The Innmost Light," in his *The Great God Pan and The Innmost Light* (1894), p. 149.

¹⁵ T. S. Eliot, "Burnt Norton," in his *Four Quartets* (1943).

¹⁶ Similarly Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922), proposition #7 (the last proposition in the *Tractatus*): "Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen / Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent."

4.5. Beings Who Dwell in High Reality

Yet there is still more to be said, though I do not know how to say it very well.

My own faint and weak experience of High Reality left me aware of sentient Beings who dwell there, and who may in some cases even have had a hand in creating it. These ineffable **Presences** are probably some of the un-human persons that most religions are accustomed to call ghosts, spirits, fairies, demons (daimons), angels, Deities and even Gods and Goddesses.

I know intellectually that my awareness of these Presences may well have been a product of the Forces of Illusion, not a revelation of Absolute Truth. Yet I seem to be unshakably certain of their existence all the same . . . This may merely mean that I have fallen into the Second Pitfall here.

Others, who have had more experience of these things than I, say that there is a second, greater form of True Enlightenment and Endarkenment. This occurs when one of those ineffable Presences seizes hold of your awareness and suddenly takes all Veils completely away.

This may be what lies behind a common saying among modern Pagans:

*You do not always get to choose
your own Goddesses and Gods;
sometimes they choose you!*

4.6. The Question of Further Veils, beyond the Three

Whether any further Veils lie behind these three I do not know. One would have to be very experienced in Direct Perception to even begin to find out, and I am not.

Perhaps the ineffable, splendid High Reality that Direct Perception reveals, may itself be something like a fourth Veil.

If it is, then there may well be an infinity of further Veils, each of which conceals a further, even Higher Reality, still more Real than the High Reality of which we have spoken so far.

In this event, the adventure need never end, and an infinity of lifetimes would not suffice to do it all.

Chapter 5

The Doors That Lead to Other Places

5.1. The Doors and the Other Places to Which They Lead

In addition to Veils and the High Reality which they conceal, some say that there are also **Doors**, which lead to **Other Places**. Doors can be opened even when the three Veils remain firmly in place. The Other Places into which these Doors open appear to be non-physical sectors of our world. Although it is convenient to think that they exist elsewhere, at least some of them interpenetrate our own material world, and are imperceptibly present all around us.

Despite their strangeness, the Other Places are *not* ineffable. You can still observe and understand them in terms of Percepts, Concepts and Words.

These Other Places are not parts of your inner Dungeon, and the Doors which open onto them are not the same as the inner “doors” that you open as you explore your Dungeon or work with your Sleeping Selves.

Open Doors do not substitute for Direct Perception. If, perhaps, some Door does open onto High Reality, then if you were to open it, you would not find High Reality in all its Ineffability, but only a pale reflection thereof, mediated by your mundane Percepts, Concepts and Words.

Doors sometimes open by themselves, but more often they seem to open under pressure or in response to stress. They also sometimes open when you are ill, or while you are sleeping. The first of the two experiments given above (in Section 6.1, on Direct Perception) will sometimes open a Door, if one can keep the Forces of Illusion at bay for a while.

Doors open more easily when you go into an appropriate Altered State of Consciousness by any of the well-known methods, such as rhythmic motion and noise; limitation of your senses (including movement); circumstances which produce in you great terror or horror, or joy and wonder; exhaustion;

stress and danger; and external induction by someone who knows how to get there (or self-induction, if you can manage it).

Whether psychotropic drugs *occasionally* open Doors is uncertain. It is clear that they commonly just strengthen the Forces of Illusion.

5.2. Beings Who Dwell in the Other Places

If you think that you have encountered some Being from behind a Door, the odds are that it is merely an awakened Sleeper from your Dungeon. This is a very common experience for some people. Even if you live constantly in the company of such Beings, they may still be Sleepers from your Dungeon.

However, some say that there really are Beings behind at least some of the Doors. If they are right, then you might occasionally encounter such Beings when you don't expect to, especially if a Door has opened for you by itself.

If you encounter these Beings frequently, or if you frequently enter the Other Places, then one of your Doors may even be stuck open.

Tarot Cards, Ouija Boards, Automatic Writing, Table Rapping, Crystal Balls and Black Mirrors usually *do not* open the Doors. What they commonly do is awaken one of the Sleepers in your Dungeon and give her a voice. Or they may just provide symbolic ways to express your mundane intuitions. Such methods are normally safe to use, if you will not be disturbed by what you might discover *within yourself*, down in your Dungeon.

Some of the Beings who are said to dwell in some of the Other Places, are also said to be hostile or dangerous. If this is so, then it might be quite risky to open Doors which have such Beings behind them — we are *not* talking now about the inner “doors” in your Dungeon —, and you might want to protect yourself in some way when you open such a Door.

Yet I suspect that even though you may be unprotected, you can usually manage to close any Door in time, should you actually meet a hostile or

dangerous Being in some one of these Other Places. (I have not met any of these Beings for certain myself, but then I am not one to open Doors just to see what may be behind them.)

The real dangers in connection with all such Beings seem to lie elsewhere. You may mistake a Sleeper for a Being from the Other Places, or for a Presence that dwells in High Reality. You may trust a Being or Presence who is not worthy of your trust. You may even be so fascinated with (or by) the Beings or Presences whom you encounter that you lose all sense of self-preservation as you deal with them.

5.3. The Third Pitfall: Fascination and Misplaced Trust

Any of the Sleepers in your Dungeon, once awakened, may try to remain awake. To this end it may masquerade as a Being or a Presence. Likewise, a Being from an Other Place (assuming that such a Being truly exists) may wish to remain in touch with you for its own purposes, and may also, perhaps, be able to masquerade as a Sleeper or as a Presence who dwells in High Reality.

You should, therefore, be very cautious when you think that you have encountered any Being or Presence. You will be better able to assess such an encounter if you already have strong control over your Sleepers, so that you can put any of them back to sleep at will, once they have awakened.

Most of the apparent Beings and Presences whom you will encounter in your magical, meditative or mystical practice will really be your own Sleeping Selves, or at least will have been created by you, or sometimes by the group of practitioners with whom you are working. Only rarely, if ever, are you likely to encounter a Being from the Other Places (if such Beings truly exist). Even more rarely will you attain Direct Perception of High Reality and the Presences that seem to dwell therein.

Many of these Beings are inherently fascinating, and some of them may even deliberately attempt to fascinate you for their own purposes, so that your own

curiosity or delight will impel you to prolong your contact with them, whatever it may cost you.

Any of these Beings *may* be untrustworthy, ignorant, foolish, weak, deceiving, or even predatory. Probably some of them *are*. Therefore treat them as you should treat the ordinary people whom you meet in your mundane life. Treat all these Beings with respect, but also with caution until you have learned the true character of each of them. Confirm their individual trustworthiness by their actions, *not* by their words alone.

If one of these Beings proves to be untrustworthy, find the will and the strength to break off contact: close the Door, put the Sleeper back to sleep, or overcome the Forces of Illusion. If you cannot do it by yourself, you will always be able to do it with the aid of others who truly have your well-being at heart. These others may be other people, other Selves in you, or other Beings and Presences. When you have found them, cherish them.

5.4. Are the Other Places Really There?

Neither the Other Places nor the Beings that seem to dwell in them are truly ineffable. Thus they *may* all have been created by the Forces of Illusion. No one knows for sure.

People who have explored the Other Places independently of one another sometimes describe the same Other Place in specific detail, or even the same Beings that they have met there. However, even these independent descriptions do *not* suffice to prove that the Other Places exist independently of our Bodies (including our sense organs, nervous systems and brains), for all of our Bodies are made of the same flesh, the same biological materials, and all have the same physiology.

The ***Forces of Illusion*** are themselves natural activities of our common physiology. The raw materials — Percepts, Concepts and Words — out of which these Forces create their illusory worlds are also the natural products of our common physiology, in this case our sense organs, nervous systems and

brains. Thus the illusory worlds which these Forces create for us are also a natural product of our common physiology. Since similar causes bring about similar effects, the worlds created by the Forces of Illusion can be similar or even virtually identical for two people who have no other point of contact with one another. Therefore the Other Places *can* be worlds that have been created by the Forces of Illusion, and the Beings that you may meet there *can* have been created by the Forces of Illusion also. What they actually *are* is unknown.

Chapter 6

The End of the Path

6.1. The Web of Sentient Living Fire

Once you have encountered High Reality, you are likely to be left with an awareness of how the whole world, even the whole universe, is one vast entity, and how everything that exists is part of this entity and thus is connected to every other thing that exists.

This awareness is Ineffable. This means that you cannot easily work with it, think about it, or describe it until you have *diminished* it to the measure of the Percepts, Concepts and Words which you use to deal with your mundane world.

I have *diminished* it, for my own part, into a vision that everything in the unfathomably vast universe is, as it were, a shaped tongue of flame, which flares forth from a single mass of living and sentient fire that permeates all time and space, and which also extends beyond the limits of time and space as we understand them.

I have also *diminished* it into a vision of a vast woven **Net** or **Web of Living and Sentient Fire**, in which every thing that exists is joined to every other thing, however distant or dissimilar, by a living fiery strand. These strands appear to vary in their thickness and in their brightness, and they seem always to be changing. They become brighter or darker, thicker or thinner, they even break and are restored.

I have also *greatly diminished* it into a vision of a vast flowing river, with currents and backwaters, with whirlpools, eddies, rapids and even waterfalls, and full of shoals, rocks and snags. Along its course there are safe harbors, rough landings, beaches and also cliffs where no landing is possible. If you wish to use this river, you must (so to speak) travel on it in a rowboat with whatever skill you have. Some folk let their boats drift with the currents. Others spend their all strength rowing their boats along the most direct

course between their starting points and their destinations. The old river-hand, however, knows all the features of the river; now she drifts, now she spends all her strength, but mostly she merely puts an oar into the water for a minute or two to slightly alter the course of her boat.

Some 1500 years ago a mystical theologian similarly *diminished* his own experience of High Reality in an attempt to convey its presence, writing that it

*exceedeth light and more than exceedeth
knowledge;*

that its mysteries

*lie hidden in the dazzling obscurity of the secret
Silence, outshining all brilliance with the intensity of
their darkness;*

and that it overwhelms

*our blinded intellects with the utterly impalpable and
invisible fairness of glories which exceed all beauty!¹⁷*

Only by such diminished visions can you conceive the inconceivable, or think about that which surpasses all power of thought.

Some such diminished vision seems to be necessary, at least at first, if you would learn how to use the great cooperative Power-with-all-things-together that is the magician's surest and safest way of working. This Power-with underlies all of the most hidden ways of doing things, which are what we mean by true magic.

Using one of these diminished visions, I shall speak of the Web of Living and Sentient Fire here. Yet it is not a web, nor is it alive, nor sentient, nor is it

¹⁷ This author used the pseudonym "Dionysius the Areopagite" and wrote in Greek. The quotations are from C. E. Rolt's translation of his *Mystical Theology*, chapter I (1920, p. 191).

made of fire, as these words are normally used in speaking of our every-day world. When I speak of this Web, I am not speaking of any combination of Percepts, but of the Ineffable interconnectedness and interpenetration of all natural and artificial things.

To be aware of the true Ineffable Web of Living and Sentient Fire, you must have experienced Direct Perception of High Reality, at least for a moment. Until you have had such a moment, you must make do with an intellectual conviction that there is such a Web. Use whatever works to create that intellectual conviction in yourself, whether logical argument, poetic inspiration, the authority or judgement of people whom you trust, or any other means.

To work with the Web, when you are not Directly Perceiving it, you need to have some visionary model of it held firmly in your mind's eye. You probably cannot do as much with such a diminished model of the Web as you can do with the Web itself when you are aware of it by Direct Perception. But even so you can do something, through the process of *Emptying and Uniting*.

You can Empty and Unite more or less skillfully. The more skillfully you do it, the easier it is to thin the Veils. Perfect Emptying and Uniting produces Direct Perception of High Reality.

However, the process of Emptying and Uniting borders on the Ineffable itself. I can talk at length around its edges; I can circumscribe it by saying what it is not, or describe it by what it somewhat resembles. I can point to a path that eventually will lead you there. But I cannot simply teach you how to do it. That ability seems to develop as your seeds of magic grow in you, as was said in Chapter 1.

6.2. Emptying

To *Empty* yourself completely, you must put your Waking Self wholly to sleep, while keeping any of your Sleeping Selves from waking up.

In addition, you put all your Masks away. You keep all your Doors to the Other Places firmly shut. You silence your Voices, you lock and bar your Crypt of Buried Fears, and you fasten down the lid on your Cesspool. You silence your Memory, so that everything in it becomes forgotten. You cease to speak. You cease to think. You cease to perceive with your physiological senses.

While you do all this, something in you must remain dispassionately aware of the whole process, and of what remains after the process is finished. This “something” is the last sentient entity within yourself, but it is *not* any of your Selves. It has no form, no body, no physiology, no senses, no emotions, no name — it has nothing but keen awareness. It is the **Nameless One** that is in you.

You do *not* need to worry about the Veils. Let them do what they will — remain in place, become thinner, or wholly fall away. They will not get in the way of your Emptying.

When you have perfectly Emptied yourself, the Nameless One in you will exist wholly apart from your Body and wholly apart from everything that your Body has created in the course of its life so far, that is, all your Selves and Masks, your Memory, and so forth.

Were your Body to be threatened, damaged or even destroyed while you were perfectly Emptied, the Nameless One in you would be unconcerned. It would be utterly indifferent to such an event, just as your Waking Self would be indifferent to the fate of an old tattered garment you had long since outgrown and thrown away.

When you have reduced your whole being just to the Nameless One in you, you have come as close to death as you can without actual trauma to your Body.

If there is anything that long survives your Body’s real death, it is this Nameless One in you. Certainly it cannot be any of your Body’s ephemeral creations, such as your Waking and Sleeping Selves.

6.3. Uniting

The Nameless One in you is always aware of High Reality, and of the true ineffable Web of Living and Sentient Fire. The three Veils hide nothing from It.

The Nameless One in you is your nexus or node in the Web of Living and Sentient Fire. It is what holds your ends of all the countless strands of the Web that join you to everything else in the universe. It is the one and only thing in you that is directly a *part* of that Web.

When all that remains of you is this Nameless One, then you experience *yourself* as a part of the Web, *yourself* as — to use another of my diminished models — a shaped tongue of flame that flares up into time and space for a moment from the great Living and Sentient Fire beyond all time and space, from the fiery raw material out of which absolutely everything is formed. To *experience* this is to **Unite**.

6.4. The Well-Spring at the End of the Path

Once you have Emptied yourself to the point where *only* the Nameless One remains in you, and also have United yourself (as that Nameless One) with everything that exists, then the great cooperative Power-with-all-things-together is yours to use. You will also know *how* to use it — as naturally and instinctively as you know how to open and close your hand.

The Nameless One in you is not a Self in any sense of the word. Moreover, your Waking and Sleeping Selves must be *wholly* asleep for you to have perfectly United. In this state you *cannot* use Power-with in a selfish fashion, but only in harmony with the great dance of All-things-together. This Power-with is what gives the semblance of life to the fiery material of the Web. It is what shapes each and every tongue of living and sentient flame into its proper form (whether enduring or evanescent). It is what sustains the vast roaring blaze of living and sentient fire from which each tongue of flame arises.

Here there is neither fear nor trust, neither hate nor love, neither ignorance nor knowledge, neither folly nor wisdom, but an indescribable way of living and knowing that surpasses each of these extremes as much as the centuries which have rolled over the Earth since its creation surpass our briefest moments of joy or sorrow.

Here the illusion that there are countless separate things vanishes, and one knows how all things work together in High Reality. Here the coercive Powers-over-many-things-apart, which cause so much pleasure and pain in this world, are helpless before the cooperative Power-with-all-things-together that is the magician's final goal.

Here, at last, is the deep well-spring of wordless silence at the end of every magical path.

When you find it, you will know that it has been within you from the start. As the wise alchemist Alipili wrote some three centuries ago:

*If that which thou seekest thou findest not within thee, thou wilt never find it without thee.*¹⁸



¹⁸ Alipili, *Centrum Naturæ Concentratum, or the Salt of Nature Regenerated* (1696), p. 79.

Chapter 7: Appendix

Further Considerations from the Sidelines

7.1. Magic, Mysticism and Meditation

Depending on your background, you may have felt that the preceding chapters of this essay had more to do with mystical or meditative practices than with magical ones. I do not see any fundamental difference between the practices of magic, of mysticism and of meditation. All three are sophisticated varieties of something far older, which W. B. Yeats once termed

*the doctrine and practice of the desolate places, of shepherds and of midwives.*¹⁹

Clearly, in single cases there *can* be fundamental differences between them. *Some* kinds of magic differ fundamentally from *some* kinds of mysticism. *Some* kinds of mysticism differ fundamentally from *some* kinds of meditation. *Some* kinds of meditation differ fundamentally from *some* kinds of magic.

Yet you can also find individual schools *within* any one of the three main varieties of practice that differ fundamentally from one another. One kind of magic may differ from another as fundamentally — and in much the same ways — as it differs from some kinds of meditation or some kinds of mysticism; and the same is also true within meditation and within mysticism. Thus there is no *fundamental* difference between magic, mysticism and meditation, when each is examined in its entirety.

This brings to mind the old tale of the Seven Blind Men and the Elephant. Each blind man tried to find out by touch alone what an elephant was really like. One felt its trunk and said it was like a snake. Another felt its tail and

¹⁹ W. B. Yeats, “Swedenborg, Mediums and the Desolate Places” (1914), published as an Appendix in *Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland, Collected and Arranged by Lady Gregory, Second Series* (1920), 295-339.

said it was like a rope. Another felt its leg and said it was like a tree. Another felt its ear and said it was like a flapping sheet. And so on. In fact, a whole elephant is like none of these things, though parts of it somewhat resemble one or another of these things. And a living elephant is also like many other things that no blind person can ever see. The same is true of magic, or of mysticism, or of meditation. Where they are concerned, we are all blind, and can perceive each of them only in part.

Nor do the three differ fundamentally in their purposes or functions. You can be a mystic or a meditator and still not believe in any Deities, even after you have experienced High Reality by Direct Perception. You can practice meditation or mysticism only in order to acquire the hidden Powers-over for any purpose, however base or cruel. Contrariwise, you can be a magician who pursues a path of personal transformation without harming others, or who labors wholly in order to serve others.

Thus each of the three can be used to good effect as you grow spiritually or religiously. Each of the three can also be used to bad effect, as a means of deception, exploitation or coercion.

Your character necessarily limits the work that you can do, whether as a mystic, a meditator or a magician. Some works require a deeply rooted, constant habit of altruism, selflessness and love. But the opposite is also true: other works require you to be wholly selfish, hate-filled and malevolent. Either kind of person can be a magician, a mystic or a meditator. But no one can be both these kinds of person at the same time.

None of the three is wholly safe. Nor is any of the them more safe than the other two. All paths have the same pitfalls, which may trap the careless and the unwary (see Sections 1.2, 4.2 and 5.3 above). Even the mildest of meditative, mystical or magical practices can also produce, on rare occasions, the utterly devastating experience of False Endarkenment (see Section 4.3 above). Magicians, I think, are more aware of this last danger in mysticism and meditation than are the mystics and meditators themselves.

7.2. Magic and Science

Many of the old practices of magic actually either work or appear to work, at least some of the time. If this were not so, magic itself would not have continued to be practiced for so many centuries.

The real or apparent effectiveness of most — not all! — of these old practices can now be explained by the sciences as they are presently constituted, without any appeal to such things as parapsychology. (I do not expect that parapsychology will ever be established as a genuine science, yielding its own reproducible and empirically testable results.)

Only a few effective magical practices seem to me still to lie beyond the frontiers of science. These will be discussed later in this chapter, after we have outlined the ways in which most effective magic can now be explained in scientific terms.

First of all, many natural materials have useful physical or chemical properties which are not at all obvious, but had to be discovered by careful observation. Thus a certain kind of rock (lodestone) attracts iron. Willow bark contains a chemical (salicylic acid) which can relieve some kinds of pain or fever, and Foxglove contains another chemical (digitalis) which can be used to treat dropsy and some kinds of heart disease. And so forth. Magic used to include much of what is now part of established science, medicine or technology.

Properties such as these may have been obscure, but once they were discovered, they were accepted without much difficulty. In a few cases, however, the natural properties of certain things run counter to our deepest intuitions about the world and how it works. Here even the most rigorous proof may fail to convince, at least on a gut level.

You intuitively know that it must be possible to throw a ball along a curved path, even in a vacuum. In fact this is not possible, for it would violate the First Law of Motion in physics.

You intuitively know that it would be unbearably painful to be stuck with a pin. In fact the pain that you actually feel depends partly on the density of nerves in your body at the point where you are stuck and partly on the diameter of the pin that has stuck you. It partly depends on your own fear and expectation of pain, as well.

You intuitively know that anyone who touches any very hot object will be severely burned. In fact, the temperature of the hot object is not as important here as the material from which the object is made (which determines the *rate* at which heat can flow from that object into human flesh). Nor is it as important as the area of your flesh that is actually in direct contact with the hot object, and as the duration of that contact (which together determine *how much* heat actually flows from that object into your flesh at that particular rate).

Randomness and chance are particularly counter-intuitive, for our human brains are predisposed — even “hard-wired” — to find patterns and meaning in everything that happens, and to relate events to one another as causes and their effects. It goes strongly against all our instincts to be told that some stroke of great good fortune or of great ill luck is neither a punishment nor a reward, or that there was no particular reason why it befell us rather than others. Thus many of our actions *seem* to us to produce the effects we have desired, at least on occasion, when in truth these effects actually had other causes, or no cause at all.

7.3. Magic and the Link between Mind and Body

Some of the above examples also demonstrate how unsound are some of your every-day intuitions about your own body and the things you can use it to do.

You are used to thinking that you have only five senses, although modern physiology has established that you have others as well, of which for the most part you are not aware (for example, proprioception). You are used to thinking that all of the information which is exchanged between your mind and the world outside of you passes through these five senses, and that you consciously receive most of this information. In fact, much of the information

that you receive and act upon is never consciously examined, and some of it (e.g. what is transmitted by pheromones) *cannot* be consciously examined by your unaided consciousness.

Also, you are used to thinking that your consciousness, or your mind, is somehow housed within your body, much as a bird may be housed within a cage. This is a fundamental misconception, which every magician must correct in herself at the outset if she is to succeed in her work. A bird and a cage are indeed two separate things: you can have either of them without the other. But your consciousness (or mind) and your living body are not two separate things: each depends on the other for its existence.

This follows from what has been said above. The every-day term *mind* (which was not used as a technical term there) covers most of what your Body has ***constructed*** in order to do its physiological work: your Waking and Sleeping Selves, your Masks, your Crypt of Buried Fears, your Cesspool and all the other things that you can find within your Dungeon. Likewise, the every-day term *consciousness* covers just a part of your mind, in most cases just your Waking Self. All these things were created by your Body. They also depend on it for their continuing existence, and do not long outlive it.

But this dependence runs in the other direction, too. Your Body, once it has been born, cannot usually survive for any length of time without creating a Waking Self. As it does this, it also creates the Sleeping Selves, together with all the other things in your Dungeon. Therefore your living Body, in turn, depends for its continuing existence on your mind and your consciousness.

Thus your consciousness (or mind) and your living body are not two separate things: each depends on the other for its continuing existence. Here is neither bird nor cage, but two sides of a single coin. This counter-intuitive fact has an important consequence:

Whatever affects your mind also affects your body.

Whatever affects your body also affects your mind.

Nothing can touch the one without touching the other.

From this principle follow several phenomena which science recognizes, but cannot yet completely explain. In medicine they include the placebo and nocebo effects, suggestion and autosuggestion, and biofeedback.

Apart from any medical context, this mutual dependence of body on mind and mind on body lies at the very heart of any effective practice of magic. (It is equally important in meditation and in mysticism.)

Every magician must be aware of this principal, and should be able to use it for her own purposes.

This is why — as was said in Section 2.6 — the only truly essential magical tool is your own human body (which includes your brain and your nervous system). All magical tools other than your body are mere props, which you can do without once you are sufficiently skilled. But you cannot work magic unless you have a human body, and unless you have learned how it works and how to use it skillfully.

7.4. Magic and the Social Construction of Perceived Reality

Up to now we have taken Reality as a constant, which is the same for all humanity, which is the source of the Challenges we face, but which is also *hidden* from our Waking and Sleeping Selves behind three Veils (see Section 3.1). This view needs to be modified, though only slightly.

The Reality of your Body, and also of the larger world beyond your Body, remains a hard truth. Stepping off the edge of a cliff can kill you, whether you have perceived the cliff or not. Likewise, the Body's physiological senses are more or less the same for all people, so that the Veil of Senses now hides, now reveals more or less the same aspects of Reality for all of us.

When, however, we examine the outermost two Veils — the Veil of Thoughts and the Veil of Symbols — we find that they differ from one person to the next in surprising and even counter-intuitive ways. We also find that these differences depend mostly on the culture in which each person was raised,

the individuals who nurtured her, and the language which she first learned to speak as she grew up. These things differ largely from one society and culture to the next, and they also differ, though much less so, from one person to the next within any one society and culture.

Thus the Concepts and Symbols which we use in order to understand Reality — that is, to remember it, to order our lives within it, to think and talk about it — are not wholly natural. Nor are they the same for all people. Rather, they are constructed by each person as she grows up, at the same time as her Body is constructing its Waking Self (together with its Sleeping Selves and all the other things in its Dungeon). Reality itself is indeed hard and unyielding, but our Concepts and Symbols of Reality are not. They are largely *constructs* of our society, our culture and our individual psychology. And it is your Concepts and Symbols of Reality — not Reality itself, which remains hidden behind the three Veils — that your Waking and Sleeping Selves rely on as they serve your Body throughout its life.

Since they are constructs, your Concepts and Symbols of Reality can be changed by you or by others, either deliberately or accidentally. And since you act upon the basis of your own Concepts and Symbols of Reality, your courses of action can also be changed as a result. Whoever controls a Body's Concepts and Symbols, controls that Body's actions. She who controls her own Body's Concepts and Symbols, controls the limits within which she can act.

Every magician must be aware of this principle, too, and should be able to use it for her own purposes.

7.5. Magic and Charlatanry

In addition to the sciences, there are also the manifold *Arts of Deception*, by which a skillful charlatan can hide the true causes of all the effects which she produces, and can also direct or misdirect the attention of her audience, or affect its judgement. Thereby she can create an endless variety of illusions in which she appears to overcome even the laws of nature.

A true mistress of the Arts of Deception must have learned many of the same principles and some of the same skills that an expert magician, meditator or mystic would also have possessed traditionally. She, too, has know many of the obscure and counter-intuitive properties of natural materials. It is the counter-intuitive properties of the natural world that are particularly useful whenever she wishes to produce the illusion that she can overcome the laws of nature. They are also valuable to her if she wishes to avoid being deceived herself.

As already noted (in Chapters 4 and 5), the Forces of Illusion constantly work to hinder your progress along any magical path. They also have the same effect on those who follow mystical or meditative paths. One of the very best defenses that you can have against the Forces of Illusion is your own highly developed expertise in producing illusions yourself.

Above all, a true mistress of the Arts of Deception, like an expert magician, meditator or mystic, must understand perfectly how the mind and the body are as closely joined as the two sides of a single coin. This enables her to *read* a mind by *reading* the body to which it is joined.

Moreover, this link between mind and body is what she must use whenever she directs or misdirects the attention of her audience.

This link between mind and body is also what makes it possible for her, if she has chosen to cultivate the coercive Powers-over, to control other minds by controlling their bodies, or to control other bodies by controlling their minds.

Additionally, this link between mind and body is her best tool for changing a person's Concepts and Symbols of Reality.

On any magical path you will commonly encounter people who have chosen to cultivate the Powers-over, and who will try to use them to control your mind or your body. Here, too, one of your very best means of defense is an expert knowledge of these same methods of control. The difficulty is to acquire this knowledge without being corrupted by the power that it will give you.

7.6. Magic as a Low-Tech Psycho-Technology

Beneath all the traditional Arts of Deception lies hidden an ancient, “low-tech” psycho-technology. Despite its rough-and-ready character, this old psycho-technology goes way beyond what academic psychology — which has trouble even with so mainstream a thinker as C. G. Jung — is prepared seriously to consider.

One of the aims of this booklet is to give clues to this traditional psycho-technology. It underlies many of the most subtle parts of magic.

In the West, this old psycho-technology was preserved chiefly by charlatans, con-artists, faith-healers and wandering showmen. The *methods* of these skilled operators deserve the very respectful attention of every magician, even though their lives have often been corrupt and their aims reprehensible.

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries parts of this same psycho-technology were also explored, with less insight but more probity, by Mesmerism, Spiritualism and New Thought on the one hand, and by the new profession of stage-conjuring on the other. Early psychical researchers spent a good deal of effort, too, attempting to shed light on how this ancient psycho-technology worked.

The older varieties of ritual magic, up to the days of Francis Barrett and Eliphas Levi, also enshrined much of this old psycho-technology, but they are now largely extinct and must be reconstructed from surviving rituals and other texts. The more recent varieties of ritual magic, I think, are built on somewhat different foundations and have somewhat less to offer us here.

In Asia, this same traditional psycho-technology is preserved not only among charlatans, but also within several major living traditions of spiritual or religious practice. These spiritual traditions seem to have been more widespread formerly than they are now. The few that have survived are just the remnants of a vast range of practice and doctrine.

7.7. Magic Beyond Science

There is one part of magic that seems to me to lie beyond the current frontiers of science, and also beyond the current limits of the Arts of Deception. This is the part that delivers the strongest challenge to our commonplace theories of the world in which we all live.

This part of magic relies on ***Direct Perception***. As already noted (in Chapters 4 and 6), Direct Perception occurs without any activity by the known organs of perception, and apparently also without any significant expenditure of energy (in the physicists' sense of the term *energy*). When you have a moment of Direct Perception, all times and all places are equally present to your observing Self.

We might try to frame this process using the basic notions of information theory. If so, then Direct Perception would require the transmission of enormous quantities of information to a receiver over an extremely short period of time, and much of it from sources that are very distant. This transmission, in turn, would require the expenditure of a great amount of energy. The necessary energy, however, cannot be found within the known physical systems whereby information can be transmitted to the given receiver.

In Direct Perception, the flow of information (and of energy, if any energy is expended) is *to* the subject. Logically, the information and energy might flow in the other direction, that is, *from* the subject, who could then act upon the universe by means of the information and energy that he transmits. We can term this process ***Direct Action***. If its scope is the same as that of Direct Perception, it too ought to require the expenditure of more energy than the available systems actually possess.

Genuine Direct Perception and Direct Action should be empirically verifiable, if they truly occur and can be achieved at will by a skillful operator. Their occurrence has *not yet* been verified beyond all controversy, despite countless attempts to do so. This may be because they do not truly occur. It

may also be simply because no one knows how to produce them at will in a laboratory setting.

Four things have become clear, however, from all these failed attempts to verify the existence of the genuine phenomena of Direct Perception and Direct Action.

First, a skilled charlatan can *fake* these phenomena in ways that are almost impossible even for another skilled charlatan to detect, let alone for a scientist who is ignorant of the skills of charlatans.

Second, the Forces of Illusion can and do produce *illusions* of these phenomena, including hallucinations.

Third, if the genuine phenomena really exist, then they are *very rare*, and very few people ever experience them even once in their lifetime.

Fourth, there seems to be *no known means of producing the genuine phenomena at will*, even in theory.

We might hope to find a few clues pointing the way to techniques for producing genuine Direct Perception and Direct Action at will, assuming that they truly occur. Such clues might be found in the esoteric varieties of the old traditional religions, which have often claimed that Direct Perception and Direct Action really occur, if only rarely. We might follow up these clues even if we do not otherwise practice the religions in which they are found. Although some of these traditional religions reject magic on principle, they still offer the best discussions we yet have of Direct Perception and of the High Reality to which it gives access.

7.8. Magic and Madness

Magicians, mystics and meditators are on familiar terms with a wide range of uncommon phenomena. A few of these phenomena seem to contravene the

established principles of science, while others are inconsistent with the commonly accepted postulates of Western philosophy and religion. Mainstream psychology regards many of these phenomena as evidence of mental illness. It also regards most of them as too hazardous to be safely and legitimately cultivated by anyone for any purpose whatever.

When faced with evidence for the Sleeping Selves, a mainstream psychologist usually suspects incipient Multiple Personality Disorder, and attempts either to put each awakened Sleeper back to sleep or to integrate it into the every-day personality (that is, the Waking Self). This is thought to be a kind of healing, when it can be done, since our public world — our established philosophies, religions, laws, customs and even forms of discourse — all presuppose that everybody has one and only one active personality, one Waking Self.

Indeed, it is nearly impossible to get along in every-day life when you have more than one Waking Self *and* there is any conflict or competition between them. Yet there *need not* be any conflict or competition between them, if your Waking Selves are all are wise enough and strong enough to avoid it (or if one of them is, and is able to control the others).

Similarly, when faced with a glimpse of High Reality or of the Other Places, or the Beings that seem to dwell therein, a mainstream psychologist usually thinks of hallucinations, of psychoses and of altered states of consciousness, and often suspects the illegal use of psychedelic drugs. She usually does not even pause to ask whether there might truly be other forms of existence outside of the physicist's world of time and space, of mass and charge. Nor does it occur to her that one might try to determine by empirical tests whether any of these immaterial Beings truly exist.

Magical practices, in contrast to mainstream psychology, offer you techniques for using and for controlling all these phenomena. They permit you to work with your Sleepers — to wake them up and to lull them back to sleep, and also to make them work together when several are awake at the same time. They give you keys to open and to close the Doors that seem to lead to the Other

Places. On occasion they can even produce Direct Perception of High Reality. (Nor do you need to break any laws in order to do use these techniques.)

This is the principal reason why outsiders fear that magic or occultism leads to madness — they doubt that anyone could either control these phenomena or use them to her advantage.

Yet the experienced magician can reply that she has *mastered* these techniques and can use them effectively for her own constructive purposes. She differs from the madwoman in her ability to shut these phenomena down *at will* and to return to her normal way of life. To the extent that she appears to be mad, she has only put on the *appearance* of madness for her own purposes, and she can always take it off at will.

Real madness, in contrast, leads you captive. It is a danger at the edge of things if your mastery of magical techniques is flawed.

But if your body and mind are healthy, and work as they were meant to, then you are pretty safe from this danger. When you have used your magical techniques for a while, you just want to take a walk, or to lie in the grass and smell the flowers, or to enjoy the delightful company of your fellow human beings, few of whom have ever thought very much about their own deep places and the strange powers that lie hidden inside them. Most people, most of the time, have more than enough health of mind and body for that!

If, for a while, you don't have even that much health, then you might well be cautious and leave off your magical practices until you have your health back again. Yet illness, too, can sometimes open the Doors to the Other Places. If such an illness is temporary, you may even benefit from its having forced these Doors open for you.

7.9. Many Magics

At the start of this chapter, we noted that one kind of magic may differ fundamentally from another kind of magic, just as one kind of magic may differ fundamentally from some kind of mysticism or meditation.

What this means in practice is that different systems of magic are *not all* equivalent to one another. They are *not all* just different ways of presenting the same truths, different ways of analyzing the same real thing. There is *no such thing* as magic in general, which might be the object of all historic systems of theory and practice. Rather, there are many specific and different magics, each of which is a unique outgrowth of the old “doctrine and practice of the desolate places, of shepherds and midwives” — and of hunters, hermits, sailors, and other such marginal folk.

If you came to this book already familiar with some other system of magic, you can test this claim for yourself. As you master the kind of magic that I present here, you are likely to find that it is not equivalent to your other kind of magic, whatever it may be. You will probably not be able to *translate* either kind of magic into the terminology of the other without losing something in the process.

The ultimate test of any kind of magic is whether *you* can make it work for *you*. This is a *personal* test. Every kind of magic would probably fail the corresponding *impersonal* test, that is, whether it works for everyone, under all circumstances, always. Few if any kinds of magic work well in everyone’s hands. This comes from the diversity of Gifts: everyone has her own Gifts, including her own Challenges and Callings, and different Gifts yield different magics (see Section 1.3 above).

No one can master all kinds of magic. It is not only that everyone has her own Gifts. Nor is it only that there are so many kinds of magic, and life is so short. It is also that, as you master any kind of magic, you become a different person than you were before you began. Eventually you become the kind of person best suited to practice the kind of magic that you are mastering. As you change, your Gifts change, too, and you may lose your former aptitude for

other kinds of magic. Each kind of magic creates its own kind of magician, that is, its own kind of person best suited to practice it. In magic, any extended run of experiments always changes the experimenter.

This is why magic is not, and cannot ever be, a science. You can explain scientifically why this or that magical practice is effective, but that is not enough to make magic itself into a science. Rather, magic is an art or a craft. Sciences can pass the impersonal test: they can be mastered by anyone, at least in principle.

Arts and crafts cannot pass this test, but only the personal one. Does this craft work *for you*? Does that art yield masterpieces *in your hands*? If not, which other art will work *for you*? So it is with all the many magics. You have to find the magic that works best for you, and once you have mastered it, you may not be able to practice some other kinds of magic any more.

It is very hard to be two kinds of person at once, and it is just as hard to practice two kinds of magic at one and the same time in your life. You might be able to manage it — with a lot of effort — if the two kinds of magic were very similar, and so were best suited to similar kinds of people. If, however, there is some fundamental difference between the two, then it is not possible for you to be both kinds of people or to master both kinds of magic at the same time.

The upshot of all this is that there can be no general treatment of the theory and practice of magic, no system that underlies all the historically attested magics, let alone all the possible magics. No book can do more than present the theory and the practices of some one kind of magic, or of some family of closely related magics.

That, too, is all that you will find in *this* book.

7.10. The Deepest Secret of Magic

Yet the art and craft of magic differs from other arts and crafts in one crucial way, which was brilliantly expressed — more than five centuries ago — by a Renaissance philosopher, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, in the aphorism,

Magicam operari non est aliud quam maritare mundum.

To work magic is nothing other than to marry the world.²⁰

The painter does not marry his paints and brushes, nor the musician his instruments, nor the sculptor his tools and stone. Though these things have their own subtle properties and propensities, they are not sentient; but a marriage is a union of two living, sentient beings.

Pico's aphorism implies that magic is not an impersonal natural force, like magnetism, which anyone can put to work who understands its nature and properties. Rather, magic is some sort of sentient living impersonal being which must be courted by the magician, and which can choose either to accept or to reject the magician's courtship — with hard consequences for the magician's ability to work magic effectively.

This is the deepest secret of the art and craft of working magic. Would you be a true magician? Then court your desired magic as sensitively as you would court a cherished human lover.

Mayhap magic will consent to marry you.

²⁰ S. A. Farmer, *Syncretism in the West: Pico's 900 Theses (1486)*, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, vol. 167 (1998), pp. 498-499.

Epilogue

As already noted (on page 2), this essay was first written about twenty years ago, then lightly revised from time to time. When I wrote it, I had been teaching university courses on magic — its history, but also its nature — for about fifteen years, which several hundred undergraduate students had taken.

Some of this essay is the product of deep conversations with several dozen of these students about their own experiences of the sort of things treated here: the Sleeping Selves and other parts of their inner worlds, the Veils and their thinning, the Doors and the Other Places to which they lead, and their intimations of High Reality. So many times I have heard, “I’ve never told anyone about this before” or “I wondered whether I was going crazy”!

Many other parts of this essay are the product of my own experiences, and also those of my family and friends.

Yet other parts of it were worked out in the course of discussions on the old listservs alt.pagan and alt.magick in the very early 1990s.

Finally, some parts of this essay have been influenced by various published works on such academic topics as folklore, anthropology and anthropological linguistics, semiotics, and medieval philology. (Footnotes point to the most significant of these publications.)

Of my own experiences, there is just one which I must not to pass over in silence here. That experience caught me wholly by surprise when I was about 13 years old, around 1955 or 1956. At the time we were living in Berkeley, California, in the house on Monterey Avenue that had been my great-grandmother’s. By that age I had become a mathematics and science geek, and also a loud-mouthed, know-it-all, militantly atheist kid. (And I had gotten pounded for my outspoken atheism by my classmates, too). So I was totally unprepared for what happened to me one day.

On that day in the morning, as I was walking along The Alameda to school, without any warning the whole world was suddenly all transformed. Every separate thing — the concrete of sidewalk and the asphalt of the street, the soil beneath them, the trees and grass, the birds in the trees, the houses on the street, the dog-doo and the gum wrapper in the gutter, my clothes and my very body — suddenly seemed to be made of some strange kind of “living sentient fire,” instead of their usual substances. (Yet those words, *living sentient fire*, are only a poor, weak attempt to describe what it was I perceived that day. I have no words that are really adequate to describe it.)

Moreover, my perception of all this was independent of my everyday senses (sight, hearing, touch, etc.), all of which reach only so far in space and time. What I perceived was a vast, astonishing, awesome and awful panorama that stretched in all “directions” — including other directions than the four familiar dimensions of space and time, directions for which I still have no names. This panorama extended as far as my greatly heightened perception could reach, seemingly to the farthest reaches of space, and also from the beginning to the end of time. It seemed to manifest in many more dimensions than the usual three dimensions of space and one of time.

All this heightened perception poured in on me with the power of water from a fire-hose in full blast, and with the gentleness of sunlight.

There was no emotion whatever (not even love) in this experience — all was crystal clear, as hard and as irreducible and as dispassionate as a diamond.

I knew then — and still know — just as firmly as I know that my head is now really on my neck, that what I perceived was *real*: it was *far more real* than the material world of everyday life, which is always firmly located in space and time.

In addition to what I perceived, I was also given to know three things that were far beyond my newly enhanced perception of the entire universe.

I was given to know that all this vast panorama, more real than everyday reality itself, was just a very small and insignificant part of something far vaster and far stranger, shaped from (or, shaped by) other, far greater sentiences than the living fiery one I perceived, sentiences which lay far beyond even my heightened perceptions on that day.

I was also given to know that all the splendor which poured in on me was just a pale reflection of something else, much more glorious and very far away. In comparison with its source, the splendor that was overwhelming me was like a reflection of a candle flame seen in a dusty mirror several rooms away: the candle itself would be much, much brighter than its distant, dim reflection.

And I was given to know that this dimming was done for my safety and survival. Had I seen the “candle” itself, and not only its dim reflection, the intensity of its “light” would have annihilated me utterly; not even a grease spot on the pavement would have been left to mark where I stood, and my family would never have known what had become of me.

This experience of mine lasted for a number of hours. I went through the motions of my classes that day with a tiny, detached part of my awareness. I did so without any impairment, as a person walks somewhere while absorbed deeply in something other than walking.

Eventually my experience began to fade away, and it was wholly gone by the time I returned home.

Of course, I retained none of the resultant knowledge afterwards. I can tell you nothing at all about the far reaches of the universe, or how it began, or how it ends, or the other dimensions of being beyond our familiar four of space and time.

Human languages are so limited, human senses are just adequate enough for the survival of our species, and our human intellects can understand so little of the reality in which we exist.

What I did retain was my observations of my own self and my own strong reaction to the experience.

As my perceptions began to fade away, there arose up within me a very strong emotion — the transitive emotion of *certainty*. (Certainty is a transitive emotion because it requires an object, a something of which the experiencing person is certain, or becomes certain. Not to put too fine a point on it, the emotion of certainty *hungers* for something of which it can become certain.) This particular emotional impulse toward certainty was focused on what I had just experienced.

By a stroke of great good luck, I had had no particular religious or spiritual upbringing. My father was an agnostic. My mother's spirituality was quite practical: it was all about getting results by using the power of one's mind, without any underlying philosophy or theology. (She had been raised a Christian Scientist, but had no interest in fine details of that religion.)

If I had been raised as, say, a Christian or a Buddhist, on that day I would have become absolutely, unshakably certain of the truth of whatever form of Christianity or Buddhism I was most familiar.

But I had not been so raised. My impulse toward certainty found nothing whatever within my thoughts and memories of which I could become unshakably certain.

As the experience faded out wholly, that emotion of certainty crystallized and hardened without having satisfied its hunger. Ever since that day, I have been absolutely, unshakably certain of ... yet there are no words, no concepts, in any language that I know which could complete this sentence. Nor do there seem to be any such words in any human language. I am indeed in the grip of absolute certainty, but — paradoxically — there is nothing to which that absolute certainty of mine can apply. This is an odd position, and its logic is uncomfortable. But I have gotten used to it over the years.

For a good number of years afterwards I remained an atheist, although in a much quieter mode. When I was old enough for such things, my mother told

me a little about her own pantheism and her mind-over-matter practices. As the years rolled by, I became an agnostic, then a mystic, and finally also something of a “mage” (but one who did not call what he did “magic.”). My interests slowly shifted, too, from mathematics and science to linguistics, philology, anthropology and medieval studies.

I still do not know what my experience meant, cognitively. Yet it was the most real and most valuable thing that has ever happened to me in all the 80-odd years of my life. Like nothing else in my life, it has made me who I am and prepared me for the relatively few things that I am fairly sure I was put on earth to do for the benefit of a few dozen other people.

I said nothing to anyone about that experience of mine, not that day. Then, a few days later, it happened again, in a weaker form. (It never happened a third time.)

When it happened for the second time, I mentioned it to my mother. I will never forget what she said when I did. In a very odd voice, which did not invite any rejoinder, she said: “I feel really sorry for you. You saw things as they really are, and now you’ll just have to live with that horrible knowledge for the rest of your life, you poor kid.”

So there are degrees of the inadequacy of language. An experience like mine is so far beyond the power of words to name or describe, that the common ways in which language is always inadequate to experience are left far behind in the dust. This seems generally to be true of Direct Perception, which is independent of the bodily senses, and probably of the constraints of matter and energy, time and space.

This experience of mine was *ineffable*. That word does not refer to something that *should* not be put into words. Rather it refers to something that *cannot* be put into words in human language or comprehended by human thought.

So this is why I study magic and mysticism, and cultivate the very small abilities I have along these lines. This, too, is why I have written this small book.

FINIS

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