



A Desert of Roses

Alan Chapman
Duncan Barford

A Desert of Roses

Alan Chapman
Duncan Barford

HEPTARCHIA
www.heptarchia.co.uk

Published by Heptarchia

London and Brighton, United Kingdom.

Information: www.heptarchia.co.uk

Copyright © Alan Chapman & Duncan Barford 2010

First edition July 2010

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information retrieval system without the prior written permission of the copyright owner, except for brief quotations in a review.

ISBN: 978-0-9563321-2-7

Printed and bound in Great Britain.

There is nothing whatever in the Stone but a White Rose. And a voice comes: there shall be no more red roses, for she hath crushed all the blood of all things into her cup.

Aleister Crowley
The Vision and the Voice (2nd Aethyr)

Contents

Introduction.....	7
DUNCAN'S MAGICAL RECORD	
Embracing the Shadow.....	11
Salvia Divinorum: So Now I Know How Reality Works.....	14
What LAM Did For Us.....	19
Enlightenment.....	21
Confessions of a Hermit.....	27
The Twittergatha.....	32
ALAN'S MAGICAL RECORD	
The Encounter with Choronzon.....	39
The Scrying of Aethyr 20 (KHR).....	44
The Great Work Accomplished.....	47
DISCOURSES	
When Magic Turns Paranormal (<i>Duncan</i>).....	67
<i>Magick Works: A Response (Duncan)</i>	76
The Cross Correspondences (<i>Duncan</i>).....	80
Magick and Enlightenment: A Recap (<i>Duncan</i>).....	89
Thank You, Dr. Gotama (<i>Duncan</i>).....	91
Letter to a Dharma Teacher (<i>Duncan</i>).....	92
You Can't Be Serious! (<i>Duncan</i>).....	95
Buddhism on the Tree of Life (<i>Duncan</i>).....	97
The Tempe Working Explained.....	104
Understanding Actual Freedom (<i>Alan</i>).....	117
Politics and the Occult (<i>Duncan</i>).....	122
The Words of the Magi.....	127

EPILOGUE

What is *The Baptist's Head*?.....143

NOTES.....147

REFERENCES.....149

INDEX.....151

Introduction

Done is what has to be done... Here it is, the third and final volume in a trilogy that began with *The Blood of the Saints* (2009a) and *The Urn* (2009b), comprising the writings of two contemporary magicians as they rediscover the true meaning of the western magical tradition and hurl themselves towards completion of The Great Work, also known as 'enlightenment'.

As before, the material in this volume first appeared on our website *The Baptist's Head*, but has been re-edited, annotated and referenced for this edition. In my opinion, a printed book is less prone to destruction than a website, so I can sleep sounder in the knowledge that the entirety of this material is now available as a material object, accessible to future generations of magicians and seekers (should they find any use in it).

In comparison with previous volumes this one is conspicuously slimmer, but in large part simply because it covers a smaller time-frame. When we published *The Urn* both Alan and I were far closer to completing The Great Work than either of us probably seriously believed, even though we'd been given clear enough indications from our communications with the spirit Tempe, astral representative of The Great White Brotherhood.

One of the key articles in this collection is, indeed, our retrospective examination of Tempe's prophecies. In the light of recent events these make far more sense, although even now some of his more cryptic references are still unresolved. But also on offer, and likely to be the main focus of interest for readers of the previous volumes, are the first-hand accounts of our final enlightenment.

Our respective claims to enlightenment continue to attract fury and derision from certain quarters—more recently, not only from inside the magical community, but also from practitioners of eastern traditions that supposedly regard enlightenment as a realisable aim. There is evidently still enormous resistance on the magical, spiritual and counter-cultural scenes to the idea that enlightenment is something actual, practical and attainable by ordinary human beings. This is certainly due

A Desert of Roses

to the wide prevalence of bad models and a poor general understanding of what enlightenment is. Once again, we extend a sincere invitation to everyone interested, to read our accounts and replicate our findings by making the experiment of actually *trying out* the practices described.

In recent months we've been delighted to become involved in sustained communication with people from a wide range of spiritual traditions who are doing precisely that, and have also been overjoyed to observe them undergoing similar experiences and enjoying the same results. This stuff works. This stuff is genuine. It's quite obvious to us that we're doing nothing more than spreading ideas and methods that have been used reliably for millennia and are part of our birthright as human beings.

Since our completion of *The Great Work*, the flow of articles onto *The Baptist's Head* has slowed, and our intention is to wind up the project completely in due course. The final essay in this book is Alan's summation of what *The Baptist's Head* was actually always about. Although both of us will always retain a special bond with the western magical tradition, we've since embarked on a new project, *Open Enlightenment*, which aims to speak to the reality and attainability of enlightenment across all spiritual traditions.

I doubt that either of us will ever renounce our continued practise of magick. In many quarters of the western magical tradition, magick itself is viewed as standing in opposition to or as an antidote against spirituality and religion. The one thing that *The Baptist's Head* demonstrated, however, was this: magick is a radical means by which we can bring the core truths of religion and spirituality to life.

Duncan Barford

July, 2010

The Baptist's Head (www.thebaptistshead.co.uk)

Open Enlightenment (www.openenlightenment.org)

DUNCAN'S MAGICAL RECORD

Embracing the Shadow

28th December, 2008. 2:37am.

The university is poorly organised. The administrators have not realised they should have thrown me out last year when I failed to submit an American Literature assignment. I hate this course, yet I won't let go of the hope that some day they'll award me a Masters degree.

Sitting in my room, I wonder if I should visit my tutor. He doesn't even know my name. Perhaps he could suggest a way I can complete my degree. But I don't have the motivation to make up my mind. And then I hear a menacing sound behind me, and turn to find a spectre creeping up: black, shaggy, deformed.

I'm terrified, but turn my mind into the experience. I know I'm dreaming and surrender to the fear, realising that the apparition is harmless. Sure enough, the contraction of fear releases. I allow the monster to grab me and I embrace him. I kiss his face and the knot completely unties.

It's like that moment in Poe's *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, when the narrator falls from a cliff into the waiting arms of Dirk Peters, his atavistic dark-skinned companion.¹ I'm not sure if this is part of the dream or my waking commentary upon it. American Literature was part of my studies in the dream, which makes it doubly uncertain whether I am awake or dreaming.

But now that I've embraced my monster, the issues behind the confusion can surface.

Angels, the *bene elohim*, gave us human language. Because we did not invent it, this means human language is predicated upon non-human assumptions. Ancient scholars of the great traditions have formalised these assumptions and the types of problem to which they give rise at the human level.

I realise that I'm no student; I'm a *teacher*. I'm leading a seminar on methods of resolving problems in language. I'm describing lines of thought which, although obscure and difficult, have been explored and proved true by generations of scholars.

A Desert of Roses

The particular formalisation I'm teaching addresses four or five problematic assumptions. The standard resolution of one of these gives rise to an ugly verb-form: *foy* or *feu* or *feo*.² I propose to the seminar that a better solution would be *elufeio* (or perhaps *elofeio*).³ It feels like I am replacing words from the modern Latin languages with terms from ancient Greek.

This is not more 'correct', but it is more elegant. This is not original thought on my part, but it is a successful attempt to reach for a more aesthetic solution. I do not delude myself that I am 'right', but neither can I deny my ability to hold my own in these matters and teach others this difficult material, formulated long ago by great classical minds.

ελεφαιρο

After some searching I decided that *elufeio* or *elofeio* was *elephairo*, which, with my non-existent Greek, I'd render as *ελεφαιρο*. This is an obscure term, used rarely, whose meaning is not entirely certain. *Elephas* means 'ivory' and is the root of our word 'elephant'. *Elephairo* means 'to deceive' and appears most notably in *The Odyssey*:

Stranger, dreams verily are baffling and unclear of meaning, and in no wise do they find fulfilment in all things for men. For two are the gates of shadowy dreams, and one is fashioned of horn and one of ivory. Those dreams that pass through the gate of sawn ivory deceive men, bringing words that find no fulfilment. But those that come forth through the gate of polished horn bring true issues to pass, when any mortal sees them. But in my case it was not from thence, methinks, that my strange dream came. (*The Odyssey* XIX: 560-569)

Virgil repeats this idea of twin gates of horn and ivory through which, respectively, true and false dreams pass (*Aeneid* VI: 893-898), but Homer was using the image in a punning sense that neither English nor Latin can capture: the Greek for

'fulfil' is similar to 'horn', and the Greek for 'deceive' (*elephairo*) is similar to 'ivory' (*elephas*).

What can this be taken to mean in relation to my dream?

First off, the confrontation with the shadow seems to be the price of entry for what is revealed in the second part. The dream does all it can to pass itself off as waking reality rather than a dream—as if alerting us to the fact that something out of the ordinary is happening.

The way that Greek (*elephairo*) is being used to replace and elucidate Latin words chimes eerily with the way that Homer's untranslatable pun in Greek (*elephairo* / *elephas*, 'horn' / 'fulfil') is what underlies Virgil's more literal image of the gates in Latin. But, at the bottom of it all—the dream says—is the fact that language was given to us by non-human agencies, so we can't expect answers to human questions to be answered at the human level by language. What we do have, however, are the great traditions, whose scholars successfully formalised the problems, recognising that although they cannot be resolved at the human level we can nevertheless arrive at the wisdom that the nature and origins of language are divine.

The passage from Homer is spoken by Penelope. She is telling a stranger that she dreamt her husband Odysseus came home from his wanderings, but she reasons that this dream came through the gate of ivory and is deceptive. Little does she know the stranger she is speaking to *is* Odysseus in disguise and the dream is true. Therefore, it is not the dream that is deceptive but her perception of the waking world.

The passage from Virgil describes Aeneas's return from the underworld, where he has had various visionary encounters. Virgil states that Aeneas returns to the world of waking reality through the gate of ivory—the gate of deception. There has been much debate on what Virgil was getting at, but Jorge Luis Borges offered an interesting possibility:

What then occurs is quite curious and has never been well explained, except by one anonymous commentator who I believe offered the truth. Aeneas returns through the gate of ivory and not through the

A Desert of Roses

gate of horn. Why? The anonymous commentator tells us: because we are not in reality. For Virgil, the real world was possibly the Platonic world, the world of the archetypes. Aeneas passes through the gates of ivory because he enters the world of dreams—that is to say, what we call waking. (Borges, 1985)

In other words, to return to the waking world requires passage through the gate of ivory (= 'deception', *elephairo*) because the waking world is falsity itself, the deception of human perception.

There's no solution to this deception at the level of the deception itself. However, language—our understanding—is given to us as a divine faculty and by arriving at an understanding of deception, profoundly grasped in its root sense (i.e. as the Greek term, *elephairo*) we can become aware that we apprehend everything through 'the gate of ivory'.

The dream therefore offers a model for all sorts of interesting relationships between language, dreams, perception and truth. The price of admission is embracing the shadow and thereby collapsing the boundary between waking and dreaming.

Salvia Divinorum: So Now I Know How Reality Works

The intention was to use the powerful entheogen *salvia divinorum* to gain a vision of the activities in the afterlife of Henry Sidgwick, Frederick Myers and Edmund Gurney. There is more about them elsewhere in this book⁴, but for now I'll concentrate on the manifest details of what resulted.

Salvia is legal in this country; I went and bought some tinctured leaf for £10.50 from a newsagent. Later, we found the same product £2 cheaper on an indoor market stall. Alan, already a salvia veteran, suggested that a 5x tincture (i.e. five times the strength of untreated salvia) was plenty strong enough, although tinctures were available in gradations all the way up to 50x.

The temple was opened and banished, and various other

workings performed before I took up position on a cushion and loaded my pipe with the tinctured leaves.

'Are you sure you want to do this?' Alan said. 'You realise that it will seem as real as walking through the door into the next room?'

'Yes,' I said, cluelessly.

On Alan's advice I took as big a hit from the pipe as I could manage. Small hits bring on a mild, hallucinogenic effect; a big hit is required to flood the brain with salvinorin (the active ingredient) and propel the user across the threshold into an altered reality.

I took a puff, waited, and was about to take another but changed my mind. Something was rushing up at me. It was very familiar. Ludicrously so. An uncontrollable paralysis took hold of me and I let myself fall backwards onto the cushions placed behind in preparation. I was laughing like a lunatic, harder and harder, as the situation became more and more ludicrously familiar.

I think I was unconscious for a short time, during which I was immersed in childhood impressions: memories of atmospheres, textures, and intimately ordinary objects: such as sections of pavement, parts of lampposts and roadways, ornaments from my parents' or my grandparents' houses. Then I became aware of the context of these impressions. We were all of us in my granddad's vegetable garden and each of us, it seemed, had a zipper that ran the length of our bodies and fastened us to reality. It was not through choice that our zippers were fastened, but by the action of other figures who walked between and came to us in turn as we lay helpless and paralysed. They were pulling shut the zips that bonded the two sides of reality—my body on one side, and everything else on the other—into a seamless whole. When this was done, I was again immersed in the atmosphere of childhood and aware of nothing else, because it was so full and satisfying.

Yet after a time I became aware of the figures and the zippers again, and that my zipper—which had seemed closed—was gaping open. So the figures would come by once more and zip me up, and the process would repeat, over and over.

A Desert of Roses

The figures were few: only two or three of them, definitely male. I could not see their faces clearly, but they were of a piece with my childhood recollections. They looked like posh, upper middle-class men of the early 1970s; the sort of *pater familias* who regularly appeared on a contemporary TV quiz show called *Ask The Family*.

The zipping-up was for our entertainment: that was self-evident. It was like a fairground ride, exhilarating, and partly the reason I was laughing so hard. Especially enjoyable was the zipper closing along the length of my body. Reality, the substance I was zippered into, was a kind of vinyl with a plastic sheen. Its surface consisted of synaesthetic formations of childhood impressions, difficult to put into words, but one of them was that special feeling of standing in my parents' yard at night, with the outdoor light switched on; another was the space at the top of some concrete steps along the route to my grandparents' house; the polished tiles in the corner of my grandparents' sitting-room where they kept a potted rubber plant; a warm orange light that was familiar, but which I couldn't place—perhaps from a forgotten lampshade; and a smudged confluence of colours that was instantly intimate, but which I recognised only afterwards as a tiny section of the print of a painting of some boats my parents had hung in the living-room when I was a child.

Some of these impressions, however, were false—although they might easily have been true, because they all had the same intimate feeling. For instance: the recollection of a rocking-horse on the polished tiles in my grandparents' house. This looked and felt like a memory, but afterwards I knew there had never been any such thing.

I did not quite understand how I became repeatedly unzipped from reality; nor how I could know afterwards which memories had been false, when at the time they all felt true. Yet each time, after being zippered and lost in childhood, I would become aware that what I experienced was neither true nor real. Each time I realised, it felt as jaw-droppingly incredible as the last: a Philip K. Dickian moment of terror, waking up to experience as a total fabrication. Each time, I saw that what I per-

ceived *were not* real memories of childhood, but a synthetic fabric pieced together from them, and I would realise it was the drug, salvia, that was putting me through this ordeal over and over. It was like a betrayal or violation: hidden forces, the faceless men with their control over the zippers, were using my childhood stuff to trick me into believing in the reality of the fabric.

This was probably the point at which I started to shout 'Stop it! Stop it!' and kicked against the floor, much to Alan's alarm, and probably my neighbours' also. I stretched out my arms and legs towards the men, to make it easier for them to zipper me, reasoning that this way the experience would be over more quickly.

It felt pleasant and unpleasant at the same time, very like when someone tickles you, but refuses to stop. It was clear by this point that the process was inescapable and I would have to endure it until its end.

Throughout, the vision had a strong sense that I was being shown 'something behind the scenes'. The zipper-men were an impersonal force, binding people to reality for our own safety and enjoyment. Even after I'd realised reality was a trick, it was nevertheless still clear that all of this was largely for the purposes of our entertainment. The most unsettling realisation was still to come, however, and it was this: *there is no resting anywhere*. The memories weren't real, but neither—I realised—was the realisation of this. Each time through, the cycle exposed that the last time had not been the awakening it had seemed to be; and so, presumably, this time was no different. Each time the cycle was merely manufacturing yet more synthetic material for the zipper-men to fasten me into next time. There was no way out, and no reference point anywhere on the inside that it made sense to regard as 'real'.

Gradually, the childhood impressions faded and I was more aware of the room, and of Alan, and of Alan talking to me. But the effects weren't over. The cycle of buying into reality and then awakening from it was now being applied to my sensory perception. I talked to Alan, but would be struck by how I'd yet again bought into the stupid idea that this was truly what was

A Desert of Roses

happening. Even as normality began to return, it would feel shockingly unreal again, and the cycle would repeat, but more slowly and more shallowly each time.

I was shaking uncontrollably—not just because I was cold. ‘You’ve had a shock,’ Alan said. It was not until the effect had worn off almost entirely that I was capable of standing. In the background was a panicky feeling that I had damaged my brain, or I would shortly go insane, but I acknowledged that this was merely a reaction to the drug and it would soon pass off.

A background sense of unreality lingered into the next day. Cooking, eating and listening to the news on Radio Four helped ground me. What I didn’t expect was the impact of the experience on my meditation, which seems to have moved up a level. When I sat, I found I could easily find the sensations from the vision of being ‘zippered up’ and of being ‘open’. The fastener was done up each time I lost myself in thoughts, or identified with sensations. The ‘open’ feeling, I realised, is the attitude adopted when we practice vipassana, centred prayer, or whenever we turn the mind to emptiness.

The vision has enabled me to see clearly that the feeling of ‘familiarity’ or ‘intimacy’ associated in the mind with any arising sensation is indeed in a sense a con-trick, or an act on our part to buy into an illusion. I’m still investigating whether ‘reality’ is formed exclusively of the feeling of familiarity. I’m not sure yet, but what I am sure of is that both the familiarity or intimacy (i.e. the feeling of experience being ‘mine’) and reality are themselves sensations arising in the mind, and are definitely not—as we usually take them to be—independently arising signs of an accurate perception of the external world.

My experience of salvia led to unexpected benefits, but I’m not suggesting its use leads to enlightenment. A search on YouTube for salvia turns up a sub-genre in which people give the drug to their friends and film the ‘hilarious’ results. One woman was gripped with terror and on the verge of panic because, although she could see and was talking to her friends, as she put it: ‘You’re not there’. This might well happen, if you

don't have a context in which to integrate an experience of emptiness. Her friends, however, thought it was really funny.

What LAM Did For Us

Looking back through my magical diary, I was surprised to discover the important role played by the extraterrestrial entity LAM in the foundation of *The Baptist's Head* and my embarkation upon The Great Work.

Remember LAM? The egg-headed alien, assumed by many to be the prototype of our modern-day 'alien grey', inadvertently summoned into our dimension by an ill-considered magical working of Aleister Crowley? The very same whom Alan argued (convincingly, I think) is only an inept invention of Kenneth Grant, spawned from his misinterpretation of an equally inept 'portrait' by Crowley of the Chinese sage Lao-Tzu.⁵

A nest of synchronicities, with LAM at its centre, brought Alan and I into each other's orbit. I was new to magic at the time, but had joined a group of which Alan was also a member. I had been reading *Promethea* (2003) by Alan Moore and remember being struck by how Moore had rendered the tarot card 'The Judgment' with the image of Harpocrates, 'the silent god', giving him the face of Harpo Marx.

On the way to a meeting of our group I listened to a podcast by The Viking Youth, which contained the first references I'd heard to the supposed connection between space aliens, LAM and Crowley's Amalantrah Working.

At the meeting, one of the rituals involved making contact with a 'machine intelligence' from the future. During this I received a vision of a alien 'grey', with its lips sealed—hardly surprising, perhaps, considering what I'd been reading and listening to. I mentioned my vision to Alan, whom I hardly knew at the time. 'Have you done any work with LAM?' he asked. 'Funny,' I answered, 'I was listening to a podcast about him on the way here...'

Later that same meeting, Alan presented a ritual that involved a petition to the Egyptian god Heru-pa-khered. As the name suggests, this god was the forerunner of the Greek Har-

A Desert of Roses

pocrates and shares the same iconography: a finger against his lips in a gesture of silence. Both gods are also strongly identified with Horus.

It seemed that LAM was calling me, so on March 5th, 2006, I made contact with him for the first time, following the specific instructions provided by Grant. Immediately I obtained some odd results: such as opening my eyes (as directed by the instructions), only to discover that temporarily I could not see; and reaching up to touch my face, only to discover I appeared to have no head! At the end of the working, I requested LAM to make a sign in the sky that contact had been established. A couple of days later, I found myself staring in wonder out of the office window with my colleagues, at a strange rainbow-coloured light in the daytime sky.⁶

With results like these, no wonder I went back for more! The second working, March 8th, was less intense. I began to realise how LAM is not a 'personality' but more 'the idea of an operation; that one must do certain things to obtain a result'. Among other stuff, I was advised of the importance of the heart chakra and given a vision of 'black wine' that I must drink in order to change myself forever.

This last theme reappeared in the third working, March 12th, as a 'black sea' that I tried to enter, but caused a stir among the gods because 'I was not advanced enough'. I was advised to acquire an ankh, to meditate upon it and to wear it—which, later, I did. A boat came towards me in the vision, and this I took to mean that by working with the ankh I might cross the black sea.

The fourth working on the 15th included a prophecy: the arrival of a person. 'Look out for them and listen to what they say,' LAM was telling me. I was then told explicitly: 'Ask Fes-ton'. At the time, this was Alan's magical name. (Hey, I mustn't laugh—in those days I was going by the monicker of 'Frater Vacuum'.) The vision then presented an image of Alan looking through a microscope.

It was this explicit instruction from LAM that led to Alan and I discussing the possibility of working together, making

podcasts and setting up a website—long before either of us harboured any explicit notion of ‘The Great Work’.

Perhaps LAM’s work was done at this point, because the fifth working (March 19th) was vaguer and inconclusive, and I began to wonder if he was actually having a positive effect.

The sixth (March 26th) was vaguer still. I had a sense that messages were being passed to me, yet I was—again—‘not advanced enough’ to decipher them.

The seventh, and the last, on April 9th, was also unclear: ‘a strong sense of silence about to be broken. Of a voice about to be heard... He expresses that which is on the borderline of communication’. And: ‘there is information in the air and in the sky. It is in a material that we have not managed to decode yet... The communication is all around us, but appears in a form so mundane or indistinguishable that we do not perceive it as a signal’.

That was the last I ever heard from LAM—and the last he ever heard from me. Looking back, however, it seems there are clear precedents in these workings of what would follow: the crucial alliance with Alan; the ‘black sea’, as an abyss that I would cross (into ‘stream entry’), but at the time was not sufficiently advanced to comprehend; the silence and the overlooked communications, which now could perhaps be read as a naive inklings of the notion of emptiness.

Thanks, LAM, you helped me a lot. Not bad, considering your origins in the insane ravings of Kenneth Grant. It would seem that even the most contrived and ridiculous imaginings have something to offer if approached in the right way. Or perhaps it was simply in his true identity as Lao-Tzu that LAM was guiding me.

Enlightenment

On March 6th, 2009, a Twitter message from Alan in India lit up my screen at work: *It is finished*.

This could mean only one thing: he’d attained arahatship, that degree of understanding traditionally described as ‘enlightenment’.

A Desert of Roses

Wonderful news. But now what? One of us getting enlightened meant *The Baptist's Head* had fulfilled its aim. So what would follow? And strongest of all were the feelings about how this impacted upon me: envy, frustration, fear that I might never achieve the same level of understanding.

Bodhi svaha! I tweeted back to Alan⁷, at the same time resolving to bring myself to the same level as soon as possible.

The Powers That Be

The last couple of fruitions in my meditation practice had been biggies. I'd sensed I was close, and had even wondered whether I might get there before Alan. (That would have been *sweet!* I'm pretty sure I beat him to stream-entry, by the way, but I've been trailing ever since.) It was time to obtain some heavy-duty guidance so, that same afternoon, I lit some incense of Abramelin, banished the temple, and invoked my Holy Guardian Angel.

The presence of the angel came through very strong. In answer to my question 'How can I make the grade of arahat as quickly as possible?' it gave me three runes: TYR (reversed), BEORC and WUNJO.

WUNJO was easy enough to decipher. It symbolises joy. In all its communications my angel has used it to represent fruition or enlightenment. The outcome seemed assured, then, but how to make it happen *quickly*?

TYR reversed, according to the book I consulted, symbolised impatience and effort incorrectly applied. I had stepped up my practice recently in a bid to precipitate a final breakthrough. This was worrying; it was evidently the wrong approach. BEORC, however, was more positive: it represented a birth or coming into being. 'Any schemes in the works should be implemented right away', the commentary advised me.

I asked for a sign from my angel. The sky outside the window, which had been empty, instantly filled with birds.

Arahat Weekend

For the weekend of March 14-15th I'd reserved a place on two workshops with dharma teacher Christopher Titmuss who, I

imagine, is no stranger to enlightenment. I'd also booked a two-week residential retreat at the beginning of April at a Buddhist centre. These would form the elements of a new plan: I would ease up on my meditation practice and try to relax into enlightenment, rather than forcing it through; and I would try to use the retreat and the contact with Titmuss as catalysts.

Yet even before deciding this—in fact, right from the moment I'd received Alan's message, a softening in my practice had already begun to set in. It had already begun to seem absurd to attempt to 'pressure' Emptiness into a conclusion. But after only a couple of sittings, this softening itself also became problematic.

I was confident that I was well-established at the level of realisation immediately before enlightenment, known as 'third path' or *anagami*. This stage is characterised by the appearance of Emptiness to the meditator over extended periods, or 'in real time'. The apprehension of Emptiness, however, was limited to a particular point in my field of awareness, specifically associated with with my brow (*ajna*) chakra. Emptiness always gave a strong impression of being on one side, with me on the other side, set against it, although there was a paradoxical awareness that both were actually on the same continuum, as if situated at different points along a mobius strip. There had also been experiences—usually at or approaching fruition—when me and Emptiness would flip places, sometimes with Emptiness seeming 'over here' and me on the 'other side'. From my reading and my contact with highly-realised practitioners, I'd been led to believe that enlightenment comes when 'me' is completely identified with Emptiness, or—in other words—the process of identifying the self with sensations comes to an end through its having been seen for what it is.

So how was I to make that final jump from identifying with sensations to identifying with Emptiness? The softening tendency had already led to my abandonment of formal vipassana practice. It simply seemed more natural just to sit with Emptiness. But what was I supposed to *do* with it? If I focused my awareness on Emptiness, it solidified into an object of concentration, and I would find myself moving up and down through

A Desert of Roses

the various concentration states, or *jhanas*, which was pleasant enough but wasn't leading to any new insights. Yet if I left Emptiness alone and just sat, this seemed to go nowhere either, except into increasingly more contentless states that at times seemed to slip into that almost utter cessation known as *nerodhi samapatti*.

When in doubt, ask someone who's been there and done it! The workshops with Christopher Titmuss synchronistically rolled around. Titmuss doesn't teach meditation on these day-schools; instead he talks, and encourages people to talk to each other. Probably he's learnt the hard way that people don't like to learn the hard way. Talking about psychological stuff is the only inroad to the dharma that many modern westerners are willing to follow. His themes for the weekend were: 'Does Anything Really Matter?' and 'The Powerlessness of Now'. Titmuss is a compassionate and lovely man who oozes realisation from every pore. By the end of the weekend I was so calm and focused on the dharma that in itself this seemed to have an effect. At the end of the first workshop, I asked if he would listen to a question about my practice. I briefly described where I'd got to. Instead of the struggle I'd had explaining myself to teachers in the past, he seemed to know exactly what I was talking about and what I needed.

'You don't need to practise anything,' he said. 'Just attend to that which is not Emptiness.'

That was it. I was confident this advice would prove correct. It was Saturday evening, and I sat two further sittings in which I put Titmuss's advice into practice. I noticed no particularly unusual states during these, except the feeling that my practice was moving forwards again. It felt 'right'.

The Eye in the Pyramid

A few days earlier, at the beginning of the week, I'd had a vision during my morning sitting. First, I'd seen an eye: unblinking, persistent and staring. Then I'd felt myself picked up and moved. My 'soul' was being transported. It was taken to a pyramid and ushered directly through the walls into the innermost

chamber. Radiant white light filled my being as I entered. Inside, also bathed in white light, Alan's soul was waiting.

It was so cheesy it made me laugh, but there was no denying the unusual power of the vision. Success seemed assured, but there's no oracle I've ever come across that seems able to put accurate timescales on its predictions. It might be *years* before I joined Alan in our gay Egyptian hideaway.

The timescale that Destiny was working to turned out to be far different from anything I'd expected.

Completely Unexpected

On Monday 16th March I woke at 2.50am wondering if someone in the building had put their washing machine on maximum spin. There was a sensation of heat and a strong, fast vibration in my solar plexus. It was a moment before I grasped the cause of the feeling was internal. And then, a moment afterwards, I noticed consciousness had changed in some strange way. There was a feeling of collapse and relaxation. A peculiar absence of striving.

I waited for a few minutes. If this were a dream or trance, then it would pass. But although the vibrations faded, the alteration in consciousness remained; in fact, it grew, and a sense of utter certainty established itself.

I knew it was done.

I got out of bed to meditate. Looking inward, I saw the configuration of the mind had changed to a degree I'd only experienced before after gaining a new path. When I tried to resume the practice that Titmuss had given me—'attend to that which is not Emptiness'—I couldn't, because the practice had become redundant. Emptiness was apparent, but it was no longer set against or beside anything. The structure of my mind had shifted so that now, wherever I looked, *everything* was Emptiness.

My personality being the thing it is, I was gripped with doubt, anxiety, fear. Was this what it seemed? Would it last? But the doubts, anxieties and fears were arising against the background of this new configuration, where there was no sense of a separate me set against anything. So although my

A Desert of Roses

personality was doing the kind of thing it usually does, its products were seen through effortlessly as soon as they arose, or with the merest reflection.

Often, indeed, there are still things I experience that include a sense of 'me'. But under the new configuration these have become just that—i.e. they are experienced not as 'me', but as sensations giving rise to that. The whole, entire field of awareness is shot-through with Emptiness, which seems the most salient aspect of the new understanding. It is this that prevents 'me' from setting itself up in opposition to anything, as it used to. The old solid and separate 'me' has been stifled at its very root, and seems unlikely to return. This domination of the field of awareness by Emptiness is what is meant—I assume—by the saying 'Emptiness is Form', which is the realisation upon which arahatship depends. There is, then, a sense that all phenomena (including the sense of a perceiver) arise against a background of Emptiness. It might be described as seeming as if phenomena were 'blocking the view' of Emptiness; as if true seeing would occur if it weren't for all these impressions of objects in the way. From this perspective I understand the saying 'in the seeing, just the seen; in the hearing, just the heard', etc., which supposedly describes the moment-to-moment consciousness of the arahat.

A few minutes after 4am I returned to bed and slept. I dreamt that someone brought me a selection of nice PVC trousers to try on. I chose my favourites, then stood and performed the song 'Bombers' by Tubeway Army. I was aware that probably I looked absurd, but I enjoyed the song and the singing anyway. *Why hadn't I done this sooner?* I wondered.

I woke again at 6am and everything was in the same new state. I got up, meditated, and my observations were again the same.

The teaching and the workshops with Titmuss had created the space for the most unexpected thing to occur. I'd never expected it to come so soon, nor for it to be like this—which is a good indication that it really *has* occurred, because I still remember how third path (*anagami*) was completely beyond my wildest expectations. As this is too, with its bizarre mix of the

ordinary and the strange. Of all the paths this one bears the strongest resemblance to no path at all.

Nothing has ceased of its own accord. Rather, an understanding has been arrived at that enables a view through and beyond everything that continues to arise same as it ever was.

I can't pretend the last week has been a blissful joy-fest. There is a lot of integration to be done. My obsession with enlightenment is unfortunately still in place: I catch myself obsessively scanning my inner processes for traces of unenlightened behaviour, checking I still 'have it', even though this makes no sense. The habits and obsessions are seen through as they arise, yet the tendencies that give rise to them are still fully active. My mind gives the impression of a fly-wheel mechanism that's no longer needed to carry the strain it used to, and now it's spinning super-fast, out of control, because there's nothing else for it to do.

On the two nights following awakening I was again disturbed by vibrations and heat in the solar plexus. Each night was weaker than the last, and there has been no recurrence since. I've also been bothered by headaches and migraine-like symptoms for a few days. These, too, seem to be passing. What remains at the moment are anxiety-dreams, which, I'm hoping, are a means for all the obsessive tendencies and unhelpful impulses that have grown up around my dogged pursuit of enlightenment over the years to blow off some steam and perhaps one day cease.

In the meantime, I intend to get on with things, just as I've always tried. I'd be untruthful if I said there's absolutely no change to everyday awareness. This path seems to have a very subtle background sensation, like the mental equivalent of constantly falling backwards. It reminds me of looking up into a colourless sky and watching snowflakes come tumbling down.

Confessions of a Hermit

Two weeks in silence at Gaia House in Devon, working five hours a day, meditating like crazy for six, and still this 'fourth path' thing, this so-called 'enlightenment', seems to be holding up.

Learning to Leap

Before the retreat I was tormented by doubt, yet I'd been able to see that my doubt was a *reaction* to the shift in relationship to emptiness, not an insight arising from it. In 'The Tempe Working Part Three' (Chapman & Barford 2009b: 203f), the spirit Tempe, an astral representative of the A.:A.:, revealed to Alan and I information about our karmic habits. That whole cycle of workings now appears to have been a set of prophecies dealing in part with the circumstances under which Alan and I attained fourth path. In the third working, Tempe shows us that our karma is the issue immediately confronting us. And indeed—my doubt was completely in keeping with my character; in other words, it was karmic. In my case, at least, Tempe was warning that my karma had the potential to disrupt my attainment and should be properly examined.

After a few days on the retreat of general sitting and building up tranquillity and concentration, I picked up an audio tape from the Gaia House library and discovered an interesting talk by Zen teacher Reb Anderson.

Watch your *intentions*, says Anderson, which are present in everything you do at virtually every waking moment. Intention reveals your relationship to the universe. It reveals your karma. Like all things, however, intention is empty. On searching for its essence it becomes unfindable, because it is neither in you, nor not in you. To experience your intention in this way—Anderson says—is to know the buddha mind, which abides neither in fixed intentions, nor in karma, but is described as always 'leaping'.

I tried this 'leaping', but intentions continued to arise as usual, so I backed off and simply watched them for a couple of days. I allowed my attention to get sucked into their unpleasant, fizzy energy. A lot of my intentions were centred around having arguments with people, proving them wrong, dramatizing confrontational scenes I'd never have the guts to stage in reality. There was also an obsessive intention to get 'it' sorted out now (whatever 'it' was), and to solve for once and all this whole problem of intentions and karma. The longer I noticed

all this the more unpleasant it became, until suddenly—out of the blue—I noticed something: that although intentions can and do lead to other things, such as thoughts, actions, feelings and fantasies, *the intentions in themselves do not.*

Doh!

For me, this was a big revelation.

An intention arises. Later, it arises again. And again. Remarkable, each time, it's unaltered. Other stuff might happen *after* the attention has arisen, but that other stuff is no longer the intention. Intentions in themselves do nothing, and furthermore—guess what?—they're no different from other mental contents: they manifest as sensations, just like everything else.

Idiotic as it seemed, I was still harbouring an idea that karma is something special, the urging of some kind of fate or destiny. In an interview with my teacher, she advised me to distinguish between karma and the results of karma. My insight enabled me to do this: the results of karma are the stuff that happens after the intention, but the karma itself has already manifested in the intention, which is the driving force of the result, yet is simply a sensation and as easy to see through as any other sensation.

Karma, therefore, is no big monster. If your karma inclines you to doubt, the intention to doubt is not the doubt itself. The habit of regarding intention as 'what hasn't manifested yet' is very strong, but an intention has in fact always already manifested—as an intention! It can therefore be exposed as empty, just like everything else. Yet—also like everything else—simply realising this didn't prevent my karma and intentions from continuing to arise just as they always had.

Now, I know what you're thinking: how could a self-proclaimed enlightened being be as dim as this? Well, just because I might have penetrated the veil of perception and realised my relationship with the Deathless beyond space and time (which I have) doesn't mean I've cleared up all my inadequacies closer to home.

In fact, it was my continuing inadequacy that came to the fore as the karmic stuff slowly quietened down over the next couple of days. Emptiness itself even dropped from view en-

A Desert of Roses

tirely. The more I meditated, the more it seemed to retreat away from me. But surprisingly, I didn't give a shit, because this enabled me to realise another truth from another random teaching I'd stumbled across in the library (from Dzogchen): 'There is Emptiness and the knowing of Emptiness'.

In other words, it's easy to get hung up on Emptiness to the degree that we reify it as the be-all and end-all of practice. But the truth is that there is no knowledge of the Absolute except through a relative, limited human consciousness. Like it or lump it, we view the Absolute through the spectacles of being human. So I sat and abided without Emptiness, absorbed in my own humanity, acknowledging its limitation, its relativity, its ignorance, and managing not to hate myself for it in the slightest. Sometimes Emptiness was apparent, sometimes not. What was constantly apparent, however, was the relative nature of my cognition—and why should I expect it to be otherwise?

This, I think, is what some people call *compassion*.

From the Heart

I'd considered my heart chakra opened, after performing a forty-day kundalini yoga kriya to achieve just that and having consequently felt some stirrings in that region. But—*fuck!* Around the half-way mark of the retreat it began to feel as if there were a six-inch gash in the centre of my chest. Sometimes there was a hard stone inside it. Sometimes the flesh was ripped and bruised. It was unbearable.

On the teacher's advice, I gave myself permission to step back from examining it when it felt too much, but to explore it deeply when I was able. 'Look at the feelings and ideas associated with it,' she suggested, 'and see if there's a sense of what kinds of experiences would help with unblocking or pushing through the sensations you find.'

Inside the chest-hole I discovered guilt, remorse, plus that nasty sticky feeling you get when you express yourself to someone and it comes out all wrong or they misunderstand your intentions, and also a curiously specific feeling of being driven by intense love to do something to the beloved person

that was too rough, or too motivated by selfish needs. Most surprising of all, however, was how obvious what was required to 'push through' these emotions—simply: *more of the same*. Yet *more* guilt, *more* remorse, *more* risking of the stickiness of miscommunication, *more* situations calling for the management of dangerous love that might damage the beloved if unskilfully exercised.

Near the donations box at Gaia House was a quotation from the Buddha: 'If you knew as I know,' it said, 'the pleasure in the act of giving, then you would share every meal.' This didn't sound like the Buddha to me; that word *pleasure* seemed wrong. But whilst meditating my mind would often wander back to the quotation. The hole in my chest felt horribly vulnerable, as if anyone could thrust inside and do me immense damage. I realised that the fear of damage was connected with my lifelong habit of holding back from others.

Oh dear. It was looking as if the meditation was dragging me toward a realisation of my lack of generosity. This might break the habits of a lifetime. But on the other hand, I was up for it! Why the fuck not? If it meant I could break a life-time habit it would be great to feel those icky sensations in my heart centre pushing through the existing crap. As long as it was yoked to something worthwhile, why the fuck hold back from shitty situations? Shitty situations are just as impermanent and empty and any other!

As if to test my resolve, external circumstances intervened. I'd exchanged smiles and glances with one of the female retreatants and a situation had begun to develop—at least, it seemed so to my mind. To me, it looked as if it was an issue for her too.

In a normal environment, an exchange of words would've made our intentions (or the lack of them) clear. But silence is the rule at Gaia, and breaking another person's silence is a big deal. I felt self-conscious when she was around. Her body language indicated she felt the same. In retrospect it's ridiculous, but in a retreat environment where there's nothing else to think about, stuff like this can become a major mindfuck.

A Desert of Roses

There were two days left. Fine, I thought. I don't want to make her uncomfortable, so I'll spend the rest of the time meditating in my room. But then I realised I was simply avoiding the awkwardness, whereas this situation could be grasped as an opportunity to confront some of those sticky feelings I'd discovered blocking my heart. So I sat with my stupid self-consciousness, watching my absurd fantasies about this unfortunate woman arise and pass, examining in minute detail the sensations that well up from miscommunication. It felt like I'd swallowed the entire writings of Marcel Proust. I watched the baseless fantasies arise, saw their emptiness, and wondered at their karmic origin. Yet it would be false to pretend that I wasn't at the same caught up and carried away by them.

I considered whether it would have been kinder to the person concerned to have hidden in my room after all, rather than using her as an occasion for cold, dry vipassana. Wasn't this in itself a defensive tactic?

Yes, of course it was. Welcome to the world of the relative!

As I'd begun to realise, the Absolute alone is perfect; only Emptiness is free from limitation. I'm not the Absolute, yet I can know it. Through this knowledge, the extent to which I align my relative self to the Absolute is the extent to which I realise its nature. And the way we realise the Absolute is to negate self, by which I mean not a conscious effort to reverse or modify our usual actions (which would only be a separate manifestation of self) but by seeing-through intentions, and unbinding the self from any fixed course of action.

It's not easy, this stuff. It troubled me not a little, that on the retreat I'd concerned myself with the contents of experience almost as much as with its nature. But it didn't feel like I was getting sidetracked, because everywhere I turned I could find Emptiness, even when Emptiness had completely gone away.

This stuff is impossible to master. That's entirely the point.

The Twittergatha

Alan has laid claim to being the first person to announce his enlightenment using the social-networking service Twitter—in

which case, perhaps I was the second.

What follows is a selection of tweets—short messages with a maximum length of 140 characters—that I sent during the days immediately leading up to and after my attainment of fourth path.

REALITY IS SHRIEKING AT ME! (Mar 6th)

@travellingsadhu [Congratulating Alan on the announcement of his enlightenment] Way-heyyyyyyyy! Bodhi svaha! (Mar 6th)

White light. An eye, staring. My soul penetrates the inner chamber of a pyramid. Yikes! Not a typical sit. (Mar 9th)

More exhilarating than the feeling of flying in a dream is the moment of realisation beforehand that it's possible. (Mar 10th)

Very quiet. Just me and my mate Emptiness. (Mar 10th)

I just tried pointing out no-self to the Jehovah's Witnesses. That was stupid. (Mar 10th)

After Christ there will be no more prophets, say the J[ehovah's] W[itnesses]. So - like - if comedy were banned, nothing would be funny any more? (Mar 11th)

Must keep investigating the uninvestigable. Settling for just sitting with it is attachment. (Mar 12th)

A Desert of Roses

The Witness shocks the internal commentator into embarrassed silence. (Mar 13th)

Attending workshops by Christopher Titmuss this weekend. 'Happy Titmuss,' as somebody wished me. (Mar 13th)

Woke at 2.51am. Went to meditate and saw it had stopped. Big Love to everybody! (Mar 16th)

Dreamt I put on PVC trousers and sang 'Bombers' by Tubeway Army. So much fun, I realized I should have done it years ago. (Mar 16th)

Looking at it, it's **still** a field of sensations soaked with Emptiness. Doesn't look as if old 'me' is going to spring back any time soon. (Mar 16th)

I could touch the ground and ask Earth to be my witness. But what the hey - I've got Twitter! (Mar 16th)

Intense chakra action woke me again last night. I never believed in chakras, until they started going bananas on me. (Mar 17th)

Fears and doubts arising constantly. But the slightest reflection exposes they're empty. (Mar 17th)

Habits and tendencies. Empty, but oh so **very** active. (Mar 18th)

Remember the 'Handbook for the Recently Deceased' in the film **Beetlejuice**? Well,

Duncan's Magical Record

how about a 'Handbook for the Recently Enlightened'? (Mar 19th)

Fourth path (arahat) is the path that's most like no path at all. (Mar 25th)

Meditation has nothing to do with enlightenment. But that's not very helpful, is it? (Mar 25th)

Being enlightened is like being gay, in that it's terribly bad manners for one enlightened being to 'out' another. (Mar 26th)

Anyone need wood chopping, or any water carrying...? (Mar 27th)

The problem with keeping silence about experience is that it denies others the benefit of our mistakes. (Mar 30th)

Doubt is not evidence of a self-centre, but is arising as a reaction to the centrelessness - i.e. it's *karma*. Hah! I see you, Mara. :-) (Mar 31st)

'If we see God externally, it is merely magic.' (Nishida Kitaro) (Mar 31st)

Asking 'Who Am I?' I can't believe how I was satisfied with answers that lay in ideas or sensations. (Apr 1st)

Looking at the Absolute close up... Whoa... there seems to be some kind of *detail* in there... freaky! (Apr 3rd)

A Desert of Roses

Enlightenment is so much like not being enlightened that if I weren't enlightened I'd be fucking disappointed. ;-) (Apr 20th)

Somebody, please tell me, what's the relationship between Emptiness and Morality? (Apr 30th)

Have switched entirely to samatha practice. Wow. Watching myself concentrate is a superb object for insight. (May 6th)

Buddhism is the **opposite** of solipsism. Everything exists **except** the self. (Jun 4th)

'God doesn't exist'? Too right! If It did, It'd be just another part of the universe. Non-existence is the most freaking amazing thing... (Jun 15th)

Reception of impressions. Nothing else, but the reception of an impression there is something other. (Jul 7th)

Consciousness is full of stuff pretending to be its background or source. But all we have to do is look to see that none of it is. (Aug 27th)

ALAN'S MAGICAL RECORD

The Encounter with Choronzon

*The following article, because of its chronology, more properly belongs in *The Blood of the Saints* (Chapman & Barford, 2009a). Its text resurfaced quite recently, however, and so it has been included here for completion's sake.*

On the 25th November, 2006, I scryed the 30th aethyr within the Enochian magical system, and within the vision that I received the symbolism seemed to imply that I had crossed the abyss. A lot of the symbolism was Thelemic. It included visiting the City of Pyramids and being received within the Cup of Babylon, which all relates to the third sphere on the Tree of Life, or *Binah*, which is where the adept is received as a Master of the Temple once he or she has crossed the veil of the abyss.

Three days later I decided to confirm this with my Holy Guardian Angel. I communicate with my Holy Guardian Angel using an African divination system known as the Obi. It consists of four cowrie shells fed with blood, which are then cast within a consecrated space, usually delineated using a chain. There are five possible answers from throwing the Obi, some of them requiring a second throw. So although not as rich as—say—the Tarot or Yi King, you can get quite complicated answers to specific questions beyond simply 'yes' and 'no'.

I asked my angel if I had been accepted into the City of Pyramids and my angel confirmed that indeed I had, but that I wasn't yet a Master of the Temple. In order to complete the crossing and obtain the grade fully, I would need to perform a specific ritual that I came to call the Da'ath Operation. The description in my diary reads:

At the appointed time, retire to temple before sunrise with the curtains open to allow sunlight in. Burn storax. Invoke Holy Guardian Angel. Perform sex magick using a sigil to invoke Choronzon, the denizen of the abyss, into Da'ath. Then travel to Da'ath in my astral body to confront Choronzon. Perform the Star Ruby, a Thelemic version of the Lesser Ritual of the Pentagram. I would then

A Desert of Roses

obtain the grade of the Master of the Temple by declaring my name as a Magister Templi, and ending the ritual without banishing. I was told I would receive the name in due course, as well as the correct time to perform the operation, as a specific date was not given.

The thought of confronting Choronzon astrally, didn't fill me with too much confidence, considering the fact that I don't consider myself an expert at astral work. So I devised a practice routine, in which I would visit all the different spheres on the Tree of Life in order to exercise and thereby strengthen my astral body, a bit like a boxer training before a prize fight. It must be pointed out that at the time my knowledge of Qaballah and the Tree of Life was not that great, and so I first began by learning all of the correspondences necessary to visit those spheres in the astral body, such as the appropriate incense to burn, colours to visualise, names of God, and so on.

At just over a week into this new practice regime, on the 8th of December, I was sitting in my study writing at about three or four o'clock in the afternoon, when I suddenly had a vision of myself performing the Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram using a wand that I purchased when I first began my magical career, but had never actually used.

I went upstairs to my temple room, dug out the wand from the back of a cupboard, and performed the banishing ritual to see what might happen. It was after I finished the ritual that I realised that if the vision had not included the wand, I would not have performed the ritual in the temple room. Feeling a little confused, I assumed that perhaps there was something that I needed to do specifically in the temple. I noticed that I had left my diary on the altar, which is something that I never usually do, so I thought perhaps I was supposed to write something. So I went to my diary and had a go at automatic writing. After about ten minutes, it was obvious that I was writing absolute gibberish—it was just absolute nonsense. So I ripped out the page and threw it away, feeling a bit miffed that I had ruined my diary. But then it dawned on me that perhaps I wasn't supposed to write something; maybe my angel just

wanted to speak with me. So I took out my Obi to chat with him.

Basically, he intimated that something bad was going to happen that evening. To hear my angel say this filled me with absolute dread, and at this point a lot of questions began to fill my head, such as would I be receiving some bad news regarding a family member, or was there going to be a gas explosion downstairs, hence the command to go upstairs? My angel assured me it was none of those things, and the bad news was that Choronzon had decided to attack me that evening.

I found this very surprising, the idea that Choronzon had pre-empted the plan of me going to him, and had decided that he was coming to get to me first. I asked for a time at which to expect the attack. The reply was 6.30pm. At this point I took my old watch and placed it on the altar, so I could monitor the time. I asked what I could do to defend myself, and was told that I should perform the Da'ath Operation. I was quite concerned by this as I still wasn't as good astrally as I would have liked to have been, having only been practising for a week, and I still hadn't learned all of the Greek necessary to perform the Star Ruby Banishing. So I asked for confirmation that Choronzon's ETA was indeed 6.30pm, but this time received the reply that he would be arriving sometime that evening before 10pm. I then went through a lengthy process of corroborating every detail of the Operation previously given. This went on for some time, during which I went to the toilet a couple of times. Upon returning the second time, I was told I needed to make a fresh batch of Abramelin Incense, as well as receiving conflicting information on what exactly I was supposed to do next. It slowly dawned on me that perhaps I wasn't actually speaking to my angel any more, so I asked, 'Is this my Holy Guardian Angel?', to which the reply was, 'No'. This begged the question: 'Is this Choronzon?', to which I received an emphatic 'Yes'.

I looked at my watch on the altar and saw that it was exactly 6.30pm. I was dumbfounded for a couple of seconds and sat there shaking like a leaf, before pulling myself together and deciding I should just perform the Lesser Ritual of the Pentagram,

A Desert of Roses

considering all of the instructions I had been given previously were now out of the window. I performed the rite and then sat in my meditation posture, eyes closed, to see what might be going on. And lo and behold, I was in Da'ath on the astral plane, and the vision was so strong it was as if Da'ath had come to me rather than the other way round; there was no effort at all on my behalf.

I was stood on a rocky outcrop with a storm raging all around, at the end of which was Choronzon. He looked like a naked human, except that parts of his body were swelling and fluctuating, making him appear as if he were a giant, gibbering human boil. Amazingly, it popped into my head that I had read somewhere how Choronzon cannot abide concentration and silence, so I put my finger to my lips in the Sign of Harpocrates, and remained silent for awhile, as Choronzon continued swelling and gibbering and pulsating. I then thought it would be best for me to banish Da'ath, so I performed the Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram in my astral body, and needless to say the angels appeared without me needing to visualise them, and as the ritual progressed the storm began to subside until nothing of the vision remained.

Opening my eyes I performed another banishing, just for good measure, waved my wand menacingly at the Obi for a while, and—still shaking with adrenalin—thought it would be best if I retired downstairs to eat and watch some television.

At this point, I need to explain the layout of the house. I was living in an old Victorian townhouse, with two rooms upstairs and two rooms downstairs that I used as a study and a living room. The kitchen was built on as an extension to the living room, with a bathroom added at a later date. So you had to go through the living room to get to the kitchen, and you had to go through the kitchen to get to the bathroom.

When I came downstairs, the light in the living room was on, but the lights in the kitchen and bathroom were off. As I walked into the kitchen to get something to eat, I flipped the light switch—and the light bulb blew. Strangely, the living room lights remained on, even though normally in the house a light bulb blowing would cause a fuse to trip. Just to be sure, I

went to check. Locating the fuse box, thankfully under the stairs, I discovered that indeed none of the fuses had tripped. So I went back to the doorway of the kitchen feeling confused. Despite my experience in working with spirits and demons, and confident I could look after myself magically, I still couldn't help feeling that in the far-off darkness of the bathroom something unpleasant was lurking.

After a couple of seconds, I pulled myself together and confidently walked into the darkness, through the kitchen, to pull the cord and turn on the light in the bathroom.

The light didn't come on.

I ran back into the living room as fast as my little legs could carry me, only to notice for the first time that the clock on the microwave read 6pm. How could this be, when the ritual I performed had began at 6.30pm?! Now I was both scared and even more confused.

There was nothing to do at this juncture but sit down and watch some reality TV.

Later, when I could put it off no more, I dug out a torch and ventured into the bathroom, to find nothing hiding in there but my own confusion and paranoia. Thankfully, 6.30pm in real time came and went without incident.

The next day was spent hunting for an additional fuse box that might explain the strange behaviour of the lights. Finding none, I eventually called in an electrician who couldn't find a cause for the malfunction either, other than a spurious 'melted wire' in the ceiling of the living room that would require tearing up the floor boards upstairs to run a new wire into the kitchen and bathroom.

A couple of days later I got a second opinion from another electrician, who, after listening to my suggestion of another possible fuse box, glanced in the corner of the kitchen to spy a solitary fuse for the kitchen and bathroom lights, which up until that point no one had ever noticed.

Two weeks and new fuse later, Choronzon's reign of confusion was finally over. It was the day after my confrontation with him that I gained the insight to see the confusion or futility

A Desert of Roses

in all thoughts or—as Crowley described it—to experience the world ‘above the abyss’.

I think this whole episode is a wonderful illustration of the way in which spirits operate. Spirits are not simply beings that pop up during a ritual; their manifestation occurs on all levels of human experience, from the subjective to the objective, through mental, physical and social phenomena. As the embodiment of confusion, we can see that Choronzon not only manifested as an astral vision, but also in my subjective mental state, in that I couldn’t work out what time things were happening or the exact details of the ritual; in my emotional experience of fear and panic; and also physically, in the whole lighting fiasco. Immediately after the ritual, I had a lot of questions, such as how did Choronzon displace my angel to communicate through the Obi? And did Choronzon really pre-empt my decision to go to him by pulling a fast one and surprising me?

Looking back on it now, it seems naive to think there were two invisible spiritual beings wrestling for control of the cowrie shells. The encounter with Choronzon was a necessary part of my development, which is embodied within the HGA. So if we look at what actually happened, my HGA led me through an experience that is part of my magical development, and that experience was an encounter with confusion as embodied by Choronzon. If we look at what occurred in light of the above, it’s obvious that performing the Da’ath Operation was confusing, and that what happened with the Obi in terms of Choronzon gaining control of it was confusing too. In other words, these are manifestations of Choronzon, and the only correct way then to proceed in terms of finding an explanation for what happened is to utilise the only antidote to Choronzon, and that is Silence.

The Scrying of Aethyr 20 (KHR)

The following is a record of the scrying of the twentieth Enochian Aethyr (KHR), augmented by the ingestion of ketamine.

There is someone sat in a large room with wooden panelling and lots of red velvet. I think he may be a king. He is a chubby,

pale man, and he is dressed like a Bishop, holding a crooked staff. He is a saint.

I begin to trance out heavily. 'I'm trancing out—a lot, Dunc. Christ!

The saint is also a shepherd. I see sheep.

'Fuck me, this trance is mental,' I exclaim, as the trance goes even deeper. I explain to Duncan how it's somewhat similar to the 'big ball' I've encountered before, where space and time seem to bend into a sphere.⁸ 'It goes beyond the "big ball." I am the "big ball". Crikey!'

I can see space, but it is bent in a strange shape.

'Christ! I can't even describe what this...—fuck me! Oh, now I can see... space has bent into a funny shape... the universe has—WHOA!'

The totality of the known universe has become a minute drop falling into an infinite sea.

This is truly the most awesome thing I have ever experienced. Long deep breaths follow.

'I can't describe how immense this is, Duncan, and how minute I am. Oh—this must be Nuit and Hadit. This is easily the most mental trance I've ever been in. Christ!'

I see the shepherd. He seems very matter-of-fact. Perhaps sanctimonious.

The 'big ball' phenomenon still arises, but it has changed: it no longer seems so immense.

A green pasture with sheep. What looks like a Mexican farmer with a pitchfork is throwing bails of hay from a red truck.

This vision is replaced by a strange abstract figure: a cone on its base with an eclipse or crescent moon on its point. A seven- or nine-pointed star floats through space, with a stylised graphic representation of a tail.

I can see what looks like a triangular metal machine with three lights, one in each corner. Each corner also has a three-pronged arm. It probes me, before pulling a piece of flesh from my chest and eating it. It leaves, taking the form of a metallic crab.

I'm on the side of a giant robot. It takes its gun and shoots. I look down to see a burning hole in my torso, which is of gigantic proportions, floating in space.

A Desert of Roses

There is an hourglass. Bliss arises.

I see the drop again: I am the drop. I am a drop of nothing, falling from nothing, into a vast sea of nothing.

'Wow! This is mental! I don't think you appreciate the scale of this, Dunc.' [Laughter.]

My physical shape and the temple itself is inside the drop. It is blissful. I am the universe as a drop. The infinite vastness of the universe has been revealed to be the size of a minute drop in an incomprehensible sea. The scale is terrifying, but just like the drop and the ocean, the fear is nothing too.

'This fear must be related to the self-contraction.'

The vision becomes an expansive, comfortable trance.

I realise that the comfort is an illusion. Then: 'Whoaaa! Fuck me! I can't even begin to tell you what I can see now, Dunc! I'm surprised I can even talk at all. Christ! What was that?! That doesn't make sense. The universe is insane! Christ! I'll try and explain what just happened, when I'm not so off my face. In fact I'm sort of struggling to remember already what just happened... I can't describe what happened... Hmm...'

The vision becomes harsh and ultraviolet. I've been here before. It looks like a film negative: the colours seem inverted. The trance is black and white at the same time, but ultraviolet too.

'There was some mad shit there too, Dunc. I don't even know if I can describe it. It's such hard work.'

The vision is of an ultraviolet landscape with clouds as both the ground and sky, with lightning jumping between them. In the space in the middle are a number of what look like black torpedoes, resting on their fins and aimed towards the sky. One is much closer than the others, and out of its top is a pair of bony hands and a skull peering out. It looks like death.

After trying to verbalise everything above, I open my eyes, but have to close them again due to feeling so dizzy. It takes a good half-hour before I'm back to some semblance of normality.

Reflecting on the events above, I'm convinced that the vision of the torpedo followed a fruition that occurred during the vis-

ion. All in all, this is the most mystical vision I've ever had, and no doubt the ketamine facilitated this.

The Great Work Accomplished

I arrived in India with great expectations. The Tempe Working⁹ had predicted—amongst other things—that I would meet a member of the Great White Brotherhood somewhere around the Bay of Bengal, who would somehow take my magical development in a new direction. In addition, the same man had appeared within an Enochian vision as a gnome, carrying a pineapple, who directed me down the throat of a dragon or beast.

English Qaballah had revealed that the pineapple was a symbol for the Supreme Ritual, which led me to expect the Brother to teach me a new method of insight that might eventually lead me to attain the grade of Ipsissimus (or arahat, as it is known to the Buddhists).

Shiva

18th January

My wife and I landed in Mumbai, which is without doubt the worst place I've ever been in my life. Starving millions, abused and emaciated animals, rubbish everywhere, defecation in the streets, pollution equivalent to smoking two and a half packets of cigarettes a day, con men and women on every corner, countless beeping cars clogging the roads, and no mattresses or running water in our hostel.

I'm not going to mention the toilets.

21st January

Decided to visit Elephanta Island just off the coast of Mumbai. The boat ride is only an hour or so, but looking back you can't see Mumbai due to the pollution. This part of the Arabian Sea is so polluted it can no longer support marine life.

The first thing I noticed when I arrived at the island was a moored boat with 'AA' painted on the side, the name of my

A Desert of Roses

particular tradition. The island is home to a number of 1500 year old cave-temples, all dedicated to Shiva, with a huge and glorious three-headed statue of Shiva as its centrepiece. Would Shiva be playing a role in my magical development? I certainly found the main temple to be a very sacred place, especially around the central lingam.

A few weeks before I set off travelling, I asked Tempe to clarify a portion of the prophecy he had made about my travels. Tempe had said there was 'something nasty at the end of the tunnel', and this troubled me. Exactly what was this 'nasty' thing? I received the image of an oriental dragon, and a man in black robes whose face was hidden in shadow. Was this the Adversary, and a Black Brother, respectively?

After returning from Elephanta Island we caught a sleeper coach to Goa (we were ripped off for the tickets and we didn't get a wink of sleep during the fourteen hours due to the driver's insane driving). It occurred to me during this journey that perhaps the man in black robes was me. My recent visionary work with Enochian magick had presented my magical development in terms of the dragon-slayer myth. Doesn't every hero become the monster he slays by virtue of acquiring its skin or pelt, such as Heracles and the lion? Is the monster not the source of the hero's power?

Was I to meet and slay the Adversary?

22nd January

Arrived in Anjuna, Goa. A car drove past with 'AA' painted on the side. Took a shower and got electrocuted.

That night I had a very vivid and terrifying dream of small cobras trying to burrow under my skin, which I frantically tried to pull out.

23rd January

Pondering the night's dream, I passed a statue of a cobra on a stall near the beach. What was the significance of the cobra?

That evening we watched the film *Kill Bill* at a bar. Two permanently brain-damaged ravers who had taken one too many pills sat behind us, occasionally shouting nonsense at the

screen. At one point, one of these losers began to repeat 'a five pointed star' (the symbol of my tradition), like some kind of delirious human oracular machine.

24th January

Saw 'AA' on both a menu at a cafe, and on the grills above my apartment window.

25th January

A little investigation on the internet revealed that Shiva is one of three manifestations of Buddhi, the other two being Vishnu and Brahma. In other words, Shiva is the embodiment of the Supreme Truth, or enlightenment.

As I passed a sculptor's stall, I noticed a three-headed statue similar to the one at Elephanta Island. The reverse of the statue was a cobra. The sculptor confirmed that indeed, Shiva sometimes appeared as the King Cobra, the largest snake in India.

Had my dream about resisting the cobras entering my body revealed a fear of enlightenment?

Was the Adversary what my separate self perceived as death? Or better yet, was the Adversary the embodiment of fear based on ignorance? (Isn't all fear based on ignorance?)

27th January

On this day I met Shiva on the beach, where he tried to sell me stickers of Ganesha and the rest of the family. Okay, not the *actual* god, but an Indian bum who just happened to be named Shiva. After buying the stickers (I do love Ganesha), Shiva told us we should travel to Gujarat. Not being people who ignore the advice of a god, we spent the next few hours revising our route. Now we would take in the south coast all the way up to Chennai, where we would catch a flight to the Andaman Islands, before heading back to Kalcotta, then west to Bodhgaya, Varanasi, and eventually Gujurat.

30th January

We left Goa and arrived in Panaji. I had been slack on the magick front, so I decided to do a tarot reading. It told me I had

A Desert of Roses

been slack on the magick front. Here I began a daily routine of core HGA practice and tarot, which I recorded in my magical diary.

5th February

By now we were in Mysore. It dawned on me that perhaps I should have planned our route to include as many opportunities to meet enlightened people as possible, instead of leaving it up to chance. So I looked up Ramana Maharshi's ashram in the *Lonely Planet India* guide. It just so happened that his ashram was already on our route. In addition, the guide explained how Maharshi's favourite mountain, Arunachala, was apparently where Shiva first appeared as a flaming lingam.

Who needs planning when you've got prophecy?

6th February

Arrived in the small mountain town of Ooty.

At night I dreamt of a guru, venerated by Hindus and Buddhists alike, who was actually a demon. His teachings were empty proverbs. Despite his incredibly violent and unpredictable nature, I felt no fear and greeted him politely. Surprisingly, he responded in kind.

15th February

A fortnight had passed with many an adventure, but none of them magical. When we arrived in Verkala, I was beginning to despair at India. Nothing was safe to eat, everyone was a liar and my wife and I were exhausted.

In our room I found a copy of Vivekananda's *The Law of Success*, which can be summarised as: 'Don't think you can change the world, but always serve others'.

It seemed as if the ignorant view that life was something that happens to me, almost as if I were a victim, had crept back into my life. Was I losing faith? Should I ask the A.:A.: for a sign?

The Gnome?

16th February

We visited a restaurant overlooking a cliff near the beach, and sat at a table next to a man on his own. Within seconds he was talking to us: He was Lance, a rich Canadian construction entrepreneur. He had been in Verkala for five weeks, but was planning to visit the Andaman islands in the near future. This set off alarm-bells: was Lance the prophesied gnome?

My interpretation of the Tempe Working had led me to expect the gnome to own a boat, but Lance didn't like boats (he was flying to the Andaman Islands) let alone own one. Tempe had also mentioned a tattoo, and although Lance had none, the first thing I heard him say was a comment concerning tattoos to a passer-by. Lance was also interested in Buddhism.

However, what caused me and my wife to look at each other wide-eyed was when Lance said: 'You know the video to Pink Floyd's *Another Brick in the Wall*, where every now and then a gnome falls off the conveyor belt? Well, I asked my brother who they were, and he said they must be those people that end up in jail. I said "No, they're the entrepreneurs!"'

If ever there was an indication that Lance was the gnome, surely this was it? He had actually identified himself as such! It looked like the A.:A.: had given me my sign after the doubts of the night before.

Lance then suggested that when we visit the States we should drive up into Canada from Boulder. It appeared as if we were being given new travel plans again, this time to ensure I would visit Vincent Horn.¹⁰

We would bump into Lance a few more times over the coming week, but eventually we parted due to our different travel plans. I was left puzzled as to what the apparently missing details (such as 'the boat' and 'the tattoo') could mean in terms of Tempe's prediction.

A Desert of Roses

Aurobindo

24th February

We arrived in Puducherry to discover (to my surprise) that it was home to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's ashram. We inquired about staying at an ashram hostel, but the receptionist (I think she was French) was conceited, arrogant and unhelpful.

25th February

I visited the Aurobindo information centre to see if I could learn more about the guru. Had he left any enlightened students behind and, if so, could I meet them? The nice man behind the desk informed me that Aurobindo left no lineage and that in order to get enlightened one need simply read his writings. I found this very lame, so I asked if there was anyone around who was actually enlightened. The man told me that 'things' happen at the ashram, and he knew people that these 'things' had happened to. It sounded like an injunction to me!

26th February

Over the weeks I had been progressively ill with food poisoning and acute diarrhoea, and on this particular morning I was feeling very pissed off with the beeping of car horns, the mosquito bites and the constant smell of sewage. Whilst scowling and swearing to myself as I walked down the street ('India is a dirty shit hole full of ignorant superstitious people intent on ripping me off'), I looked at an old Indian lady going about her business and suddenly saw that even here, in this god-forsaken country, the Absolute was here.

It was very quiet and serene at the Aurobindo ashram. There were many devotees shuffling through the grounds, taking it in turns to pay their respects at the samadhi (the mausoleum). When it was my turn I copied the devotees and rested my head, with eyes closed, on the stone samadhi. At first, the samadhi felt as if it were physically moving under me. Then I saw a light, and the vision of an old Indian man with flowing white hair (can't say it really looked like Aurobindo though). I retired to a wall around the courtyard and meditated, feeling full and

at peace. Just as I had experienced it with Andrew Cohen, and then with Nuit during the Gnostic Mass, the Divine was definitely coming from and located at a point in space-time, in this case the samadhi. How the hell did it do that?

Two yellow flowers fell out of the sky and hit me as I sat there. Did these represent Aurobindo and the Mother? Looking around bemused, I saw that they had actually fallen from the central tree of the ashram.

I was struck by how so many from so far had travelled here in order to worship the ideal of enlightenment. It is often cited how in the West we have no lineages and our learning is book based, and yet here we had an Indian sage who actively promoted this approach.

I returned to the samadhi. I saw light again, experienced REM, and then a vision of a triangle, followed by the alien egg from the film *Species*.

28th February

I awoke at 3.30am in order to watch a bonfire being held at Auroville in honour of its inauguration. Returned after breakfast feeling very inspired, so I booked an appointment to meditate in the spectacular Matrimandir.

I had been reading Guenon's *Man and His Becoming* around this time, particularly about the Hiranyagarbha or 'World Egg' that represents the possibility of all life, also known as 'the subtle manifestation'. As I booked the appointment for the Matrimandir, I discovered that it too represents the World Egg.

Would I be 're-born' after entering it?

1st March

I visited the ashram again at 6.16pm, after a beer or two. I still felt the peace and fullness.

Arriving back at the hotel, I turned on the TV to find the film *Species* just starting. Was the vision of the egg at the ashram linked to the Matrimandir?

2nd March

A certain sadness had begun to take hold; I was craving the peace of Truth. What was I doing chasing after it? But why was

A Desert of Roses

I still not enlightened? I wondered if this was how disappointed Duncan felt during the loss of the transmission from Cohen.¹¹ I consulted the tarot as to what to do, and received *The Magus*. So I put together a little practice for an ashram visit.

Meditation in the ashram took the form of surrender to the samadhi/Aurobindo/Mother, and then I explored how the emptiness actually manifests. The Divine was simply not there, and yet still it radiated from the samadhi. Was it a result of my subjective viewpoint of the samadhi? After all, at this stage in the process of enlightenment I could experience emptiness in any phenomena simply by reflecting upon it. And yet the phenomenon occurred in the ashram before I'd even sat down to perform the injunction. Could it simply be that ignorance still dominates the Magus's perception of an object without a willed investigation, and so those phenomenon that are 'closer' to, or less ignorant of, the Truth appear to 'give off' emptiness or the Divine? Hence the appearance that emptiness is located in space-time, when it is actually above and beyond all phenomena, and so located everywhere and nowhere.

I had been having doubts about just how willing I was to authentically surrender myself to the lying fantasist that was the Mother. That night I dreamed of my stepmother standing in a field and holding a child's hand. The child was Ramana Maharshi. She told me: 'Do not go looking for the Supreme Lord in the fields'.

I concluded that my stepmother was the Mother (a mother who is not my mother), Maharshi was the supreme realisation, and that I had a false belief that my final realisation rested upon a sincere approach to the Mother; or, in other words, the Mother cannot stop me becoming enlightened. Exactly what was I concerned about?

3rd March

The Matrimandir appointment was at 9am. It's a fantastic building, and the central chamber reminded me of an Enochian vision, with the world's largest man-made crystal set up in a very Enochian fashion (resting on four-sided Aurobindo star, on a marble sign of the mother).

And the instructions for the 'concentration' within the Matrimandir? No talking, coughing, resting heads against walls, or chanting. I pressed the guide for an actual instruction. He talked about two kinds of 'concentration' that we could do: static (on a fixed idea, such as love) and dynamic (such as listening to a piece of music or exploring a theory). In other words, we were to have a good long *think!* I asked that if the crystal is the focus, are we supposed to think about what it represents? The answer: *It was up to us!*

The guide told us that the Mother had seen Auroville in a number of visions, and that it was only a matter of time before the vision descended the various levels of manifestation and reached the material world. It occurred to me that this is the very meaning of the World Egg.

Apparently the Mother saw no money, no police, and a united human race. (Perhaps she'd just had a vision of *Burning Man.*)

I am always surprised by the amount of people who are unable to sit still and silent for two minutes. Many were resting their heads against the walls. One man looked as if he had been there for days: legs spread out, head back against a pillar, arms outstretched and facing upwards, as if begging for relief. The fat bastard was actually part of my group and had only been sat down for five minutes.

Disappointingly, there were no immediate effects from the World Egg. Was the result still to come?

Arunachala Ramana

We left the same day for the small, hardcore Hindu town of Tiruvannamalai, once home of Ramana Maharshi, and arrived at 7pm. I was excited to be there. Surely there would be an enlightened devotee of Ramana who might be able to 'finish me off', as it were, and end the process of enlightenment that had begun three years previously? After all, Maharshi's technique goes straight for the centre point, the last barrier between the self and the Absolute.

Next door to the hostel was the Manna café, and on the noticeboard were a number notices for instruction in self enquiry,

A Desert of Roses

reiki, bamboo flute tuition, dance and other assorted New Age guff. Amongst the adverts for spiritual instruction, one stood out with its claim that the teacher was spiritually awakened. His name: Arunachala Ramana. This just happened to be the same name as the hostel in which we were staying. He is an American who claims to have become enlightened in 1973 by seeing a picture of Ramana Maharshi in a bookshop. His sat-sang was invite only, so I took his number to give him a call.

In bed at about 10 pm, a subtle 'transmission' effect, very similar to the Cohen event, began to occur. Bliss, a feeling of coming home, and the realisation that I've been enlightened before, were all in attendance. Was this because I was near the mountain Arunachala, which Ramana claimed was his guru? Was it a result of the Matrimandir? Or was there an enlightened devotee in the building?

4th March

During the morning my wife and I saw a corpse in the street. Later, I found out that the Maharshi ashram was actually a few hundred meters from where we were staying. 'This may explain the vibes!', I thought.

Visiting the Maharshi ashram, we discovered something very different from the tranquility of Aurobindo's ashram. Maharshi is venerated as a traditional Hindu saint, with the burning of copious amounts of incense, the singing of the Vedas, and the 'feeding' of the samadhis (Ramana's, his mother's, his dog's, his cow's, etc.) with milk; self enquiry, along with any enlightened devotees or lineage, were completely absent. This was very disappointing, especially as I experienced no vibes whatsoever.

What happened next was frankly bonkers and quite embarrassing. To cut a long story short, we were talked into walking a part of the way up the mountain with no shoes (we had to take them off to visit the ashram) by a man who, it later transpired, was pretending to be an official guide at the ashram. He took us to a secluded spot, joked that we should have sex, and disappeared. We thought he was clearly insane, rested our sore feet for a minute, then began to leave. As we did, the guide

came running out of the bushes, red faced and sweaty (he had obviously been masturbating) as (it later transpired) two of his young friends turned up to 'join in'. He then did his best to convince us to get drunk with him, as we hobbled back to the ashram. I reported the man, and the manager of the ashram found it hilarious.

You couldn't make this shit up, but that's India for you.

We returned to the hall to meditate, but I was overwhelmed with disappointment. This was certainly not the experience I was expecting at Ramana Maharshi's ashram.

Later I called the Arunachala Ramana ashram to book myself in for the satsang. We were required to visit the day before the satsang to undergo an orientation and registration.

5th March

I was determined that today was not going to be like yesterday. We decided to get some bananas to hand out to the poor and the stoner sadhus, and we planned to give away our cigarettes and our modest amount of cannabis too.

We bought some flowers for a puja to Ganesha at the main Hindu temple. If anyone can help, Ganesha can. As we were buying some bananas, a sadhu approached me with a golden spear. I suddenly remembered the weed in my pocket and gave it to him. Without unwrapping the packet, he looked at me as if he already knew what it was and thanked me sincerely. The sadhu then handed me a lemon, saying it was 'very good'. He had obviously just lifted it from the bowl of lemons next to him on the fruit stand.

The temple was magnificent and sprawling. We visited the lingam that Maharshi visited as a child, and burned some incense to Shiva. A guide approached us outside in the courtyard. We told him we had no money, but he could have some cigarettes if he took us to Ganesha. The guide led us to a large orange statue of the elephant-headed god, and led a very minimalist puja. We placed the flowers on the ground with two bananas and burned an incense stick. I didn't feel as if I had connected with Ganesha properly, so as we parted company with the guide, I remembered the lemon, and went back to

A Desert of Roses

Ganesha to make the offering. Standing there in silence, I suddenly felt Ganesha's presence manifest in the statue and a great love welled up inside me. Om Ganapati!

We returned to the Maharshi ashram to meditate in the grand hall, where we bumped into the manager of the ashram who asked, rather sincerely, if we were okay today. Om Ganapati!

After the meditation, my wife told me how she felt inspired, like she was ready to begin something new, perhaps a vocation, which she later investigated on the net. Om Ganapati!

Later that day it was time for 'orientation' at Arunachala Ramana's AHAM ashram. Lovely big grounds, very peaceful. We went to the rooftop where we met Vivian, a long-serving member of the organisation. She told us a little bit about AHAM, before our one-to-one questions would begin. What followed was a good hour of conversation and debate.

She told me I was already awakened, just like everyone else. So I asked her why AHAM existed. She replied 'Why not?'. I asked her if she could give me any pointers on teaching enlightenment as I wished to set up a similar organisation in the future, to which she replied: 'The future doesn't exist, only the present, so why does it matter?'. I asked her if she planned to wear clothes tomorrow or eat any food. I put it to her that if I wanted to build a roof like the one above us, could she not tell me how they had done it and what problems I might encounter? Why was it not the same with an organisation? On a different tac, I asked her if it was possible for two fully awakened people to talk about how best to make a roof. She replied I'd have to ask them. She then told me there have been no problems, there is nothing to relate. Why couldn't she have just said that in the first place?

She asked me what questions I'd like to put to Arunachala. I started with 'In your opinion', but she cut me off with, 'He doesn't have opinions. He doesn't have a mind, or thoughts'. I could hardly hide my incredulity. I suggested that maybe he has thoughts, but he is not attached to them. She concedes that yes, he probably does have thoughts. Phew!

When I related my interest in maps, stages and recognisable features leading up to enlightenment—stating very clearly that I had experienced some of these stages prior to my knowledge of any maps or models, and that some people seem to get enlightened in very different ways—she dismissed the very idea and stated that they have nothing to do with ‘that’ at AHAM.

Vivian then talked about their eight-day graduate program, where the student gets a buddy who has already graduated, in order to help them through. I asked her if a graduate is actually enlightened. Bizarrely, this completely threw her, and she eventually blurted out: ‘Well I don’t know!’.

I was convinced that Vivian was clearly not enlightened, even after thirty years of working in an organisation that supposedly facilitates such a thing, nor was she even aware if the program had actually enlightened anyone. And yet she had the audacity to spout pseudo-advaita at me as if she actually knew what she was talking about.

It was made clear that any questions about teaching enlightenment from a practical point of view, running an organisation or the process of enlightenment that Arunachala may have gone through prior to his enlightenment, would be answered with: ‘But who is this “I” that wants to know?’.

We finished off with a little pointing out exercise. Before coming, I had done a tarot reading on how best to proceed with AHAM, and I had been told ‘to be open’. I think I was quite courteous and tolerant during the conversation, and I did bite my tongue a number of times. So I mustered up some interest and did my best to try out the exercise. I was told to think of a problem. I picked enlightenment. I was then instructed to write the various emotions and thoughts surrounding this problem as a web diagram, with ‘I am’ in the middle. Surprisingly, fear came up as part of the problem. When I had finished, Vivian asked me to consider what all of these elements had in common. The answer, of course, was ‘I am’. Whenever I have a problem, I was told, I could perform this exercise to realise that I am none of these emotions and thoughts, only pure being, and that the negative emotions would then ‘dissolve’ in awareness.

A Desert of Roses

Back in the town, my wife and I were stopped by a German woman because we were holding hands. Apparently this causes rape to occur in the town, as it frequently does on the mountain, especially to foreigners. I said a lot of things to this woman, and a lot of those things were swear words.

We booked our flight to the Andaman islands that night.

6th March

It was time for my satsang with Arunachala Ramana. On the way to the ashram, I actually felt ready to give the whole enlightenment thing up. I was sick of it!

'The Sanctuary', where the satsang would take place, was a nice room with two large pictures of Jesus and Ramana Maharshi, comfy seats, and a large throne for Arunachala. There were about nine people already sat in silence, most of them meditating with their eyes closed, in a classical pose or holding a mudra.

I had brought questions to ask Arunachala. Vivian announced there would be no note taking; we were beyond academic or intellectual learning now.

I had a sense of excitement, anticipation. This was the first time I would be interacting with an enlightened person. How should I act? And what about the Supreme Realisation itself? I felt some fear at what the experience of that realisation might be like, and my heart raced. Going with the flow, I employed the 'I am' technique from the day before, in order to calm down.

Arunachala Ramana entered: a tall, bulky fat man with cropped white beard and hair. His shorts were humongous in order to cover his overhanging gut. He had two very bad tattoos, one on each forearm: an outline of the state of Texas, and a scroll saying 'Mother'. It seemed like an effort for him to walk, but he looked nothing like his eighty years. His bulk explained the size of the chair. He sat and pulled up a foot rest, sighed a bit, and looked round the room.

Suddenly my conceit around what it meant to be enlightened was apparent. I closed my eyes. I had held an unacknowledged conceit around process and practice too; they had

no bearing on enlightenment whatsoever. How could they?! I was in a strong absorption state; but this too was obviously unrelated. And finally: a stupendous fruition, with white light and a feeling of expansion. And with this I acquired knowledge of the Supreme Truth. Even emptiness or the non-dual had nothing whatsoever to do with enlightenment! A vision appeared of Arunachala holding a scroll, that when unfurled had only two words written on it: 'I AM'. Vajras formed the ends of the scroll, and I heard the phrase: 'The Path and Purpose are One'.

I opened my eyes. What had just happened? I wasn't completely sure, but the meditations, poses and mudras of the sangha were patently absurd. Just exactly what did they think this behaviour would achieve? Why were they here looking to Arunachala for something he could not possibly give them?

By the end of the preliminary hour of silence (9-10am), Arunachala began the question and answer portion of the session. Vivian must have provided the questions we told her we would ask Arunachala the day before, because he picked up a piece of paper and began with: 'So we have two questions from Alan and Ruth.' He started to read out the first question, when I interrupted him. 'I no longer have any questions', I said. Arunachala asked me if I then understood what it means to be enlightened. I replied 'Yes!'. He then moved on to answer the next question.

It occurred to me that I had just awakened; and funnily enough, at the exact point when all the maps and models predicted I would. I felt finished, complete, whole. This was a knowledge, not a state or trance. Most peculiarly, I saw that my future was not concerned with magick per se, or with any tradition for that matter. My destiny lay not at the hands of the authors of *The Book of the Law*; the ultimate, absolute truth, and so myself, was beyond it all. It would take me a week or so before my new vision would begin to take shape.

For the next hour, Arunachala held forth, without once resorting to the pseudo-advaita crap Vivian had come out with. However, he seemed to believe that the initial results of the self enquiry technique—mastered within eight days—is the same thing as awakening. Perhaps this is because Arunachala—just

A Desert of Roses

like Ramana—was already enlightened when he first tried such a technique, therefore leading him to conclude that it must lead directly to awakening for everyone.

Outside, during the informal ‘fellowship’ period, both myself and Ruth were disappointed in the fact that no one spoke. They remained as if still in the satsang: silent, some with eyes closed, some even laughing to themselves as if privy to some incredible cosmic joke. I got the impression that Vivian really didn’t like me, especially after interrupting Arunachala. Sadly, no one even mentioned the fact that I had publicly announced I had just become enlightened. Was this because they simply assumed I had just understood self-enquiry? Did they believe themselves enlightened because they had taken part in an eight-day program? Or could they not entertain the idea simply because I was obviously nothing like Arunachala, who at one point even said that he had no answers, and that it was only the being that spoke through him that did?

I bought a DVD of the session just to get my enlightenment on film, and noticed the large Ganesha statue in the garden. Ganesha was there at the beginning (my first magical act to kick start the process) and at the end! Om Ganapati!

On the way back to the hotel we agreed to discuss at a nearby café what had happened for both of us and what we got out of the experience. Ruth was to be the first person I would tell I was enlightened, and it seemed like such a ridiculous thing to say. However, Ruth suspected what had happened (which isn’t a surprise considering I announced it at the satsang; what is more of a surprise is that no one else did) and told me that she got very excited on the way to the café. At this point I felt very lucky indeed; not many people would act so appropriately (one ex of mine would have been absolutely disgusted at such an announcement). To have a partner who can understand what it means to be enlightened and back you all the way is a blessing indeed.

It now seemed obvious that Arunachala Ramana was the prophesied hierophantic ‘king’ or ‘Caesar’, with a tattoo, who would provide the ‘supreme ritual’. He had led me down the throat of the adversary—the ‘something nasty at the end of the

tunnel'—and I had 'slain the dragon'. And the whole experience was to take me in a completely new direction.

However, the fact that I encountered the gnome symbolism prior to this whole experience suggested that myself and Duncan had perhaps made the error of amalgamating many of the predictions or symbols provided by Tempe into a description of just one event. Future experiences, such as encountering the boat and the 'swallow' symbolism, would corroborate this.¹²

Latitude and Longitude

My first day as an awakened person lasted thirty-six hours, because we travelled non-stop to the Andaman Islands: the very co-ordinates supplied by Tempe during the second working.¹³ I saw the trip as a well-deserved holiday from the task of getting enlightened, before my life's real work could begin.

As we travelled, every now and again Ruth would ask me if I felt the same. I would check and I always did. However, old habits die hard, and I found myself trying to hold onto awakening (even though it was way beyond such a notion) and fretting that it might go (again, which was impossible). The conceited nature of these two actions were abundantly clear to me, but I cannot say I suffered from them.

A million questions now sprang up to replace the hundreds I had before awakening, and I would spend the coming days developing new ideas about enlightenment, whilst wrestling with the old, useless habits and perspectives based on chasing it.

16th March

I received news of Duncan's enlightenment, and I was surprised at my own surprise that it would occur just then. However, after considering everything else that had happened with *The Baptist's Head*, it made perfect sense.

I couldn't wait for what we were going to do next!

DISCOURSES

When Magic Turns Paranormal

This is a loose transcript based on my notes for the talk I gave at *The Colours of Chaos*.¹⁴ Some of the themes covered I've previously addressed elsewhere, from a slightly different angle.¹⁵

Two Types of Magic

I would like to suggest that results from magical acts come in two flavours.

Sometimes people say to me: 'I got a spectacular result from some magic the other day. I wanted a new job, so I did a ritual. Then I looked in the newspaper, saw some ads, sent off for an application form, had some interviews, and then I got a new job.'

My reaction: 'Oh. That's really amazing. (Not.)'

But then a part of me thinks: Well, it's about the person's experience. They experienced the result as amazing, so that's what happened for them.

But then I see sense again, and I just can't help concluding: 'No. That's not magic. That's just getting your shit together and acting like you've got half a brain.'

It's only the second flavour of results that I would bother to call 'magic'. This is the type that also makes good stories. The first type doesn't, because they simply follow the rules of everyday cause and effect: you get a job by applying for one, whether you've done a ritual or not. Good stories are based on screwing about with events, or unexpected coincidences and significances.

I did a working recently to get myself abducted by aliens. (I wanted to see what all the fuss was about.) Various things happened¹⁶, but it reached a climax when, a week after the working, a friend and I were treated to a procession of UFOs right outside my window. In fact, half of Sussex saw them; there was a wave of UFO sightings across the south of England that weekend, which was reported in the local press.

Now *that's* what I call magick! Okay, it's not fair to compare an intent to get abducted by aliens with an intent to get a new job. Agreed. So, instead, let's compare the relationship between the intent and the result in each case.

A Desert of Roses

Regarding the aliens, I'd expected the result to be a vision, maybe, or a lucid dream. Instead, I saw three UFOs and half the county got involved in a UFO flap. (The fact that the 'UFOs' were actually Chinese lanterns isn't relevant, because I don't believe in flesh-and-blood aliens anyway; but a UFO flap is a UFO flap.)

Regarding our first case: I want a job, I do a ritual, write-off for and get a job. The everyday laws of cause and effect are not being stretched.

In the case of the aliens, the probabilities against the result that manifested seem much higher. You get that wonderful buzz—the thing that keeps a lot of us doing magic, I suspect—that feels as if the whole universe is being levered into position, as a consequence of the working that we've done.

Actually, it *hasn't*, and later on I'll suggest why not.

The Paranormal

Question: Should any result gained through magic be viewed as a paranormal event?

Does it depend on how you define 'paranormal'? Perhaps you're expecting me to do that here, but I'm not going to, because I'm guessing we're already broadly in agreement: telepathy, precognition, psychokinesis, clairvoyance.

What these boil down to, I'd suggest, is a violation or bypassing of the laws of cause and effect that usually obtain in our experience of mind, time, matter, and the mundane senses.

It's not that I want to big-up these 'laws of cause and effect'. All I mean by them is a set of assumptions by which we normally make sense of the happenings in our daily lives.

Paranormal phenomena, on the other hand, do not belong among these everyday happenings. For most people, the paranormal arises spontaneously, unexpectedly, and is generally unwanted. However, magicians are not 'most people'. Most magicians, I'm guessing, have experienced the paranormal. Some of them as the direct result of magical workings; although many, or perhaps most, as the unexpected side-effects of magical workings. What sets magicians apart from 'most

people' with respect to the paranormal is this *intentional* aspect. We set out to *make* something unusual happen. Most people do not invite these sorts of things to happen to them.

So, there's a relationship between magic and the paranormal, but it's not as simple as saying that magic is the means by which the paranormal is caused. For instance, there are other kinds of people besides magicians for whom the paranormal manifests through intention.

I want to examine one of these groups of people: they don't use ritual, instead they use *experiments*. They don't have ouija boards or go into trances, instead they have various bits of hardware and—most importantly—*statistics*. They call themselves *parapsychologists*. But just like magicians, sometimes they persuade the paranormal to manifest in their laboratories.

Parapsychology

The history of parapsychology begins with the Society for Psychical Research (SPR), which was founded in 1882. Early paranormal research now reads to us like after-dinner parlour games. Interesting, but anecdotal. A shift occurs in the 1930s, coming from Duke University in North Carolina, where J.B. Rhine for the first time concentrates exclusively on a *quantitative* approach toward the paranormal.

Whately Carington

I want to concentrate on a parapsychologist from the transitional period between the two approaches, by the name of Whately Carington.¹⁷ An unsung hero. Obscure. Most likely to be mentioned in connection with the researcher Samuel Soal, the British equivalent of J.B. Rhine.

Soal set out to replicate Rhine between 1936 and 1941. He had 160 subjects. More than 128,000 trials. After five years of results he'd discovered *nothing* above chance.

It was Whately Carington who suggested to Soal that he re-examine his results and look for 'displacement effects'. By this, Carington meant that although the subject might give an incorrect guess to the card they were supposed to be guessing, how

A Desert of Roses

did their guess compare with the (also unseen) card that had been turned up in the previous trial, or the card that was about to be turned up in the next trial?

When Soal did this, he discovered that two of his subjects had scored hits several millions above chance—but on the trial *before* or *after* the one they were supposed to be guessing. Soal was able to replicate these results in subsequent experiments.

Hang on! If a subject is correctly guessing not the current card, but the one that comes after it, in *the future*, is this telepathy or precognition?

Carington had recognised the importance of displacement effects as a consequence of his own experiments, which were as follows: he collected a couple hundred volunteers; gave them a pile of prepared questionnaires; every evening at the same time he opened a book in his study and made a drawing based on a random word; he left the drawing over his fireplace, then he locked the room until next morning.

These days we'd call it 'remote viewing'. Carington's subjects were invited to remote-view the drawings (they lived all over Britain) and record their impressions on the forms. The results were assessed independently, and were found to indicate scores significantly above chance.

After a while, Carington decided to enclose a photograph of his study in with the forms. He simply wanted to heighten his subjects' sense of participation in the experiment. He did not expect what happened subsequently: the number of hits jumped up dramatically.

The photograph was playing the part of what Carington would later call a 'K' object or 'K' idea. The 'K' object increased the number of hits—Carington theorised—because it supplied a *link* between the subject and the drawing. By showing them the study in which the drawing hung, it seemed to have the effect of putting the subject more fully in mind of the target, the drawing.

'K' Objects

Carington's view of the paranormal gets around the alternative view that the paranormal relies upon transfer of information, or

energy, or particles between people. Or that it depends upon some kind of latent or exotic sensory ability. Instead, he held the view that entities are linked and give rise to one another in a manner similar to how ideas are linked to one another in the mind. Carington looked to the classical philosophical notion of 'The Association of Ideas' as the key to understanding paranormal phenomena. The 'K' object works because it forges a link between between the subject and the drawing.

In magic, 'K' objects are everywhere.

A ritual is a 'K' object: the symbolic link between an intent and the magical result.

The ritual often involves further objects acting as 'K' objects, usually in one of two flavours: (a) sympathetic magic ('like attracts like'; a symbolic representation, such as an effigy of the person who is the target of the ritual); or (b) associative magic ('the part is connected to the whole'; such as hair, or blood of the target, or a possession of theirs). You don't *need* these things; often the ritual itself is enough of a 'K' object—Carington didn't *need* the photo to score above chance. But it helps! And I've often heard magicians express the view that you can't beat a good magical link in order to really nail a result in sorcery.

Parapsychologists and Magicians

Hang on... The magician has ritual, the parapsychologist has their experiment, but it looks as if they're *both* doing magic. Both are expressions of intention, setting up an intentional situation in order to create a link to a desired outcome.

The paranormal is the violation of classical cause and effect. So, it seems, is magic. If I command a goetic demon to bring me cash and I discover a wad of twenties in the street the next day, this is not the usual relationship of cause and effect that obtains between myself and money.

But the laws of cause and effect are never violated to the extent that what happens ceases to have meaning. (Is that possible?) As Carington suggests: the paranormal adheres to the laws of the mind. ('The Association of Ideas.') A demon is a 'K' object; a concept to form a link between me and some cash. This

A Desert of Roses

makes no sense in terms of classical physics. But the idea of a demon fetching me some cash is perfectly comprehensible in terms of how our minds work; what's not to understand?

Carington was writing in the 1930s and 1940s, so didn't have the benefit of a later idea, which squarely addressed the notion of meaningful, non-causal correspondences between events: *synchronicity*.

Synchronicity

Carl Jung published his essay 'Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle' in 1952.

Synchronicity is a very useful idea for thinking about magic and the paranormal. Without it, you tend to be left with many loose ends. For instance, how do you tell the difference between telepathy and precognition? What seems to be telepathy may be someone remote-viewing the result of the trial in the future—i.e. precognition + clairvoyance.

Arthur Koestler, another key figure in parapsychology, was one of the first to suggest how synchronicity helps us out of these kinds of problems. Koestler was interested in quantum physics as a model for the paranormal (Koestler, 1974). Trouble was, each type of phenomena seemed to require a different quantum-physical model to explain it. In the case of psychokinesis, where everyday objects start rolling around, some kind of interface between the quantum and the level of classical physics would be required.

It can't be right to have different explanations for different bits of the paranormal when, as we've seen, those bits aren't really distinct anyway. Luckily, synchronicity does the job in one go.

Jung suggested there was a separate force at work in the universe apart from causality. We don't have to look only for *a* causing *b*. It might be, Jung suggests, that given *a*, then *b* sometimes likes to happen with it. ('Likes to happen' is probably the best our language can do to describe the synchronistic relationship between things.)

Telepathy can be viewed not as a biophysical mechanism, but as a *correspondence* between my intuition and thoughts in

someone else's mind; precognition as the *correspondence* between my intuition and events in the world; even psychokinesis: a *correspondence* between my intention and the physical behaviour of an object. I concentrate. It moves. A cause? Or a correspondence?

Lovely. But unfortunately acausal, meaningful correspondences between mind and matter are very difficult to conceptualise.

An example of synchronicity: the famous dream of the gold scarab. A patient of Jung is telling her dream of a gold scarab, when a golden beetle flies through the window.

The scarab in the dream is matched with the scarab in reality. The meaning of the scarab hieroglyph *kfr* (rebirth, renewal) is matched with the effect it has on the patient.

It's this same idea we found in Carington: the idea that events give rise to one another not only through cause and effect, but also through the meaningful affinities they share, which Carington referred to as The Association of Ideas. Events are related more in the way that ideas in the mind are related than the way that objects in classical physics are related to each other.

Synchronicity: great idea. Unfortunately Jung doesn't always handle it particularly well.¹⁸ Acausality is not an easy concept to handle. Sometimes Jung seems to suggest that synchronicity occurs because of the activation of an archetype. In the case of his famous patient: the activation in her unconscious of the archetype of rebirth (the scarab) led to the synchronicity. But that has to be wrong, because in that case the archetype would have *caused* the synchronicity (no matter the exact mechanism), and *causal* is supposedly the one thing that a synchronicity isn't. Beware Jungians!

The practices of magic, psychotherapy, parapsychology can be said to 'cause' synchronicity only in a very limited sense, in that they provide a context in which synchronicity is invited to arise. In the same way that going to school provides a context for learning; going to school doesn't *cause* learning to occur.

We have to distinguish this 'context' from what occurs within each specific example of a synchronicity, or within each act

A Desert of Roses

of magic. Having a dream about a scarab can't be said to have caused a golden beetle to fly into the room—that's a truly acausal event—but the practice of Jungian psychotherapy certainly did provide a context for this to happen.

Synchronicity and Magic

The most common outcome from magic is synchronicity pure and simple. Fairly commonly a synchronicity will arise as an unexpected side-effect, alongside or instead of the expected result. This is the type of thing which, when you first start magic, leaves you thinking 'Surely that's just a coincidence, which would have happened anyway, even if I hadn't done a working'.

After about a hundred of these, you might stop talking about 'coincidence' and start to enjoy the feeling that your magic is able to lever the whole of reality into an altered shape all around you. But this attitude is just as dim because, once again, it's *causal*. I really don't advise you to go around believing that you or your magic causes the acausal.

But rituals can in themselves cause certain things to happen, and I think this may account for the 'lame' type of magic I mentioned at the beginning. Someone may perform a ritual, and the act may cause them to focus their efforts seriously enough to actually apply for a job, which they may not have done otherwise—and, surprise, surprise, they get one.

Is this magic? I'm still loathe to admit it. The ritual may be said to have caused a result, but it caused it in a way that (a) was definitely causal, albeit on a psychological level; and (b) doesn't need any explanation outside of a bit of ego psychology.

The Transpersonal Factor

Where a true synchronicity occurs the 'K' object acts at a transpersonal level. All I intend by this is that there's no immediate cause—physical or psychological—at the individual level to account for the result. In the case of Jung's patient, no amount of personal development, visualisation, imagination,

going to the gym, reading books by Ken Wilber could 'cause' a golden beetle to fly in through the window. And yet a beetle flew in.

What is this factor that somehow takes the K object onto a transpersonal level?

(You're expecting me to tell you, aren't you?)

Well, it's a mystery. In magic, it has been called 'True Will' (by Aleister Crowley) or 'Kia' (by Austin Osman Spare). In Buddhism, 'buddha chitta'. In Daoism, it's 'the Dao'. In Platonism, 'the One'. In Jungian psychology, 'The Self'.

Sometimes it arises in magic, sometimes not. If it could be guaranteed, then it probably couldn't be said to be acausal, because in that case we would have found a means to 'make' it happen. Nevertheless, as one progresses along the magical path its appearance becomes more common, and the experience of it becomes more integrated into everyday life. It even starts to have effects outside of intentional magical acts. One's whole life begins to become synchronistic. In Daoism there is the term 'wei wu wei'—'doing without doing'—which seems to be describing this state.

Two things about this transpersonal factor are clear: (1) it's acausal; (2) any amount of wanting or willing it to happen guarantees that it won't. This is why the dreaded 'lust of result' has such a deadening effect on magic. Wanting something to happen fixes the 'K' object on the individual, causal level, and you get no result, because all the 'K' object does is put you in mind of how badly you want a result—or perhaps you get only an egocentric, psychological result.

Conclusion

Are all magical results paranormal?

No. Some are psychological.

What is the relationship between magic and the paranormal?

At the risk of sounding cheesy, reality is stranger than our habitual ignorance allows us to perceive. The paranormal arises out of the influence on our daily lives of this realm beyond our ignorance. Magic is one means, among others, that enables us

to shed our ignorance and experience the transpersonal reality that lies beyond it.

I hope this has provided food for thought, and some structures for thinking around the relationship between the paranormal and magic.

Magick Works: A Response

‘Waving our hands and declaring the self to be an illusion’, writes Julian Vayne in *Magick Works*, ‘does not help us understand the self’ (Vayne 2008: 45). So I’d better defend my hand-waving and declarations unless I come to be regarded as a ‘Bloodless Adept’, which is Julian’s term for his interesting take on what constitutes a ‘Black Brother’.

Suppose just for a moment the Buddha got it right and there is no self. Imagine it doesn’t exist. It is nothing. An illusion. Does this mean we have to stop taking drugs and all find jobs as accountants? Course not! If there is no self then it’s true *already*, regardless of how things seem. So the net impact on reality of our realising the truth of the proposition that there is no self would be—*zero*.

However, Julian prefers to insist: ‘in all cases there does seem to be a self’ (Vayne 2008: 45). Personally, that’s not my experience. The closer I’ve looked the less likely it seems—which is a relief, because if I thought there was a self then I’d be obliged to define it. Not that Julian doesn’t shirk this task. He makes a decent stab at it, but his view relies in part on that interesting yet flaky book *The Quantum Self* (Zohar 1990) and an insistence upon the supposed ‘peculiar quantum properties of neural tissue’ (Vayne 2008: 51).

If Julian asserts there is a self presumably it’s because his experience suggests so. Yet there’s a problem with defining something at the heart of experience in terms of something that cannot be experienced directly at all—i.e. quantum reality. This reminds me of when I was on retreat and our teacher, Mr. Goenka, assured us that the tingling sensations we experienced whilst practising vipassana meditation were a manifestation of a quantum-level phenomenon. I was sceptical that my physical

sense organs, which are organised at the atomic level, could be capable of representing changes in the subatomic realm. My scepticism was confirmed when I made an experiment: I discovered that the tingling *stopped* if I held my breath. So either the tingling was an effect of oxygenation, or I was owed a big fat Nobel Prize for discovering my breath was the bridge between the atomic and subatomic realms.

Even good practising Buddhists like Mr Goenka are not immune from using quantum physics for talking bollocks. To be fair, Julian's model of the self rests on more than pop physics:

[W]hat are we left with? With a self that comes into being through interaction, that is rooted in the body but also exists as the context of interactions in a non-local field of consciousness... The self is an apparent property of this non-local consciousness when it is 'contained' within a specific identifiable body. It has an individual history but is predicated on its relationship with others. (Vayne 2008: 53)

In short: the sense of self arises only in the context of an other that gives it shape. Without 'the other', there is no self. Personally, here's where I'd call off the search altogether, but Julian seems to believe there is something salvageable from this 'self', despite the way he has exposed it to be completely dependent on 'the other'.

His definition, above, is an interesting idea, but—again—is something we could never experience. Sure, you can have an idea of the self coming into being through interactions, but I could never experience myself as that, because the interactions of which my self would consist depend upon an other whose experience is not available to me. This model cannot therefore account for my sense of 'I am me'.

The self is not defined by an idea, because we have lots of ideas, but we don't mistake all our ideas for the self. By the same token the self cannot be a feeling either: examining the feelings that constitute our sense of self we discover nothing special about them. What makes a particular feeling 'me' or

'mine'? The answer seems to be that it is this very process itself by which we are constantly mistaking the other for 'me'.

In other words, the self is a mistake. The mental equivalent of an optical illusion. (The Buddhists call it *ignorance*.)

Magick Works is a wonderful collection of lectures, rituals and personal experiences, with a particular emphasis on the importance of entheogens in magical exploration. Julian's knowledge of entheogens and their uses is everywhere in evidence, and so too his eloquent sensitivity to the states of consciousness to which they provide access. Here, I think, lies the reason for his insistence on the notion of a self as a valid tool in magickal work.

Magick, for Julian, is 'the path of pleasure, freedom and power'. The Black Brother, on the other hand, is someone who resists the process of enlightenment, which entails a widening and dissolving of the ego into 'the other'. There are many who would agree with this, but Julian puts his own spin on the model:

Many 'Xepherites' [i.e. Black Brothers] don't smoke dope because drugs destabilize the boundaries of the ego. Ironically the most 'satanic' of modern occultists may also be some of the most sober! (Vayne 2008: 48)

The Black Brother, then, resists ecstasy and pumps effort into maintaining a rigid ego boundary. Julian's view exposes excellently the futile efforts of the Black Brother. Imagine, spending your days shoring up the everyday sense of self. They are probably also part of the killjoy establishment, set on denying the rest of us the freedom to use drugs. The reason for this denial—argues Julian—is simple: 'they fear ecstasy' (Vayne 2008: 146).

But—hang on. Alcohol produces ecstasy, yet the establishment sanctions it, despite the casualties that pile up each weekend. And what about television? Doesn't that produce a trance-like ecstasy too? And so too computer games and other consumer gadgetry. Plus shopping. Plus advertising. And let's

not forget everyone's favourite: mindless repetitive work. In fact, it soon becomes apparent that the establishment depends and thrives upon our elective use of ecstatic trance-states to facilitate its processes of production and consumption.

The establishment doesn't fear ecstasy; it depends upon us being *dependent* upon ecstasy. Although it's possible to mount an argument that these trances are not freely chosen or in our interest, if the meaning of ecstasy is to 'get out of ourselves' then that's obviously why we go shopping and watch *The X Factor*.

Now, if there were no self would ecstasy be possible? How could we 'get out of it' if there were no 'it' to get out of in the first place? This is the reason, I think, why Julian insists on a notion of self, because self is the other of ecstasy, and the absence of one appears to threaten the existence of both.

Julian describes the attainment of the grade of Ipsissimus as 'the peak experience of magick... we might imagine it as a series of ecstatic moments' (Vayne 2008: 53). Enlightenment, however, is not a state—ecstatic or otherwise—but a form of understanding. So please don't mistake me for a Black Brother or killjoy Bloodless Adept! Entheogens are sweet; so is booze, *The X Factor* and barbecue-flavoured Pringles. But the states they evoke lead to something sweeter still, when apprehended as experiences in the service of understanding.

If we want to get up the nose of the establishment, I'm not sure how we should proceed. The establishment is formed of mindless dependencies. It's like a drug-pusher or a junkie: what it can't use it most likely doesn't even perceive. But if we can see through the illusion of self then we are foreclosing on our dependency on socially-sanctioned ecstasies. Provided we don't merely substitute these for non-sanctioned types, this means the-powers-that-be simply can't use us any more. Yet most likely we simply drop out of sight, rather than attaining some kind of Che Guevara moment.

The assumption of a self can lead to the view that there are types of experience that bolster that self, in opposition to other experiences offering ecstasy. From this position it may seem

A Desert of Roses

'the path of pleasure, freedom and power' lies in swapping the one set of experiences for the other.

An alternative, however, lies in abandoning the notion of self. The Ipsissimus then takes on the significance not of someone who has found a way to 'get out of it' permanently, but has instead reached the full understanding that there's nothing to get out of.

The Cross Correspondences

The Cross Correspondences are often described as the best evidence ever produced for the survival of the personality after death. They are a voluminous collection of writings or 'scripts' produced by a group of mediums between the years 1903 and 1931, purportedly representing communications from a group of dead people. Chief among them were three prominent and founder members of The Society for Psychical Research (SPR): Henry Sidgwick, Edmund Gurney and Frederick Myers.

The SPR was founded in 1882 and marks the beginning of organised research into the paranormal. Back in the day, paranormal phenomena attracted the interest of the brightest minds. Presidents of the SPR included professors, members of The Royal Society and even a Nobel laureate. Sidgwick, Gurney and Myers were themselves exceptional bright-sparks and after they passed on, members of the SPR reasoned that if anyone could produce evidence of survival then these three were probably better placed than anyone else—assuming, of course, they *had* survived. And so, a series of sittings with a talented medium was arranged, and—sure enough—communications from the three of them started to come through. However, these weren't your standard 'Fred likes how you've decorated the kitchen' type of communications. For starters, they arrived through a *group* of mediums, some of whom were aware of each other, but some of whom weren't and—in addition—were widely separated from each other geographically. What's more, some of these mediums contacted the SPR unprompted with messages from the dead individuals concerned, even though the project was a secret within the organisation.

The messages themselves contain floods of strange imagery and disjointed phrases, which were a puzzle even to the mediums who channelled them. Yet when they were examined by interpreters appointed by the SPR they were found to consist of allusions and quotations from an astounding range of classical and literary texts. Some of the scripts only yielded their full meaning when read in conjunction with other scripts, which—it should be remembered—had been produced by different mediums in different locations with no knowledge of what their colleagues were producing. The communicators from ‘the other side’ had been formidably versed in the classics, to such an extent that the interpreters were still teasing out obscure meanings years after the scripts been produced. Many of the references that emerged had highly specific relevance to the lives of the individuals from whom they had supposedly originated.

Star bedecked the head—the broidered robe—the stars singing in their spheres. You have made a mistake about the robe, but never mind—I want a simple sentence known to you and you will not write it. The love that waits beyond Death. Say that—try again—she looked long, gazing, gazing—piercing the distance with eager eyes, that is better the plighted troth—roses for a maiden dead say that try again Gurney—let the pencil move freely—Help—there is one who asks your help—try again. (Roy, 2008: 201)

This is just a tiny sample. Although the messages on the surface seem vague, senseless, or at the very least wildly indirect, this allusive and distributed form of communication had the advantage of validating itself against its supposed origins. It couldn’t *all* be due to the imagination of the mediums concerned, but indeed appeared to be originating from several specific—albeit disembodied—personalities.

Yet if these texts are really the overpowering evidence for after-death survival that some people claim, why hasn’t every-

A Desert of Roses

one heard of them? There are various solid reasons why not. Firstly, the scripts and their interpretation are complex: anyone who wants to form an opinion is going to have to take time out and study them and the context in which they were produced. (I certainly wouldn't relish writing up the topic for Wikipedia.) Secondly, although partial accounts of the scripts have appeared in public (for instance Heywood 1978: 75-87), for years the SPR kept researchers at a distance, because some of the material was of a highly personal nature. These days, however, everyone who might have been personally affected by the revelation of this 'personal material' has sadly passed on. For the first time ever, the complete saga of the Cross Correspondences has been told in *The Eager Dead: A Study in Haunting* by Archie E. Roy (2008) and the full story is more bizarre than anyone could have imagined.

Archie Roy is a conservative soul. His book is partly a eulogy of the Victorian era and it's hard to criticize him for this, because back then it seems people really did know their place and behaved themselves, yet had big ideas and achieved great things, and—due to precisely this attitude—Britannia well and truly ruled the waves. The original members of the SPR likewise were drawn from the ranks of the great and good among the British establishment. But the image of gentlemen scientists fearlessly confronting the great question of existence breaks down decisively, in my opinion, once the communicators beyond the grave started to reveal 'The Plan'.

To describe 'The Plan' demands a sketch of the relationships and personalities of some of the people involved. Members of the illustrious Balfour family were active participants on the SPR scene. Henry Sidgwick had married a sister of Arthur James Balfour, who himself subsequently became one of the sitters, thus adding a British Prime Minister to the roll-call of luminaries connected with the SPR, for he indeed fulfilled that office between 1902 and 1906. Arthur Balfour never married and was a very private individual. (When you think of how Gordon Brown had to do the decent thing and got hitched as soon as it looked half-likely he might get the top job, you realise that Balfour wouldn't have stood a chance of election these

days.) However, he had fallen deeply in love during his younger days, with Mary Lyttleton, who died prematurely of typhus. For the rest of his life he remained faithful to the memory of Mary.

The entities sending their communications through the scripts implored that Arthur Balfour should sit with one of the mediums, a 'Mrs. Willett', whose real name was Winnifred Coombe-Tennant, at the time a well-known public figure involved in various aspects of social reform, and a British delegate to the League of Nations. At the time she safeguarded her credibility by keeping her mediumistic activities a closely-guarded secret. The scripts that resulted from this sitting and subsequent sessions convinced Arthur Balfour—because of their references to intensely private matters that no one living could have known about—that the communications were genuine, and were indeed originating from his lost love Mary who was waiting for him beyond the grave. Mary afterwards became a regular member of the group of communicating entities.

Not content with reuniting divided lovers, the dead, it seemed, wanted to get even more 'hands-on'. Edmund Gurney declared his love for medium Winnifred Coombe-Tennant through the scripts, and slowly 'The Plan' was revealed: that Winnifred should bear a child, whose paternity would be shared among the dead communicators, although chiefly by Gurney. And this child would be no ordinary baby, but a messiah who would lead humanity into a new golden age of peace.

At the time, Winnifred was locked in a loveless marriage to an older man; happily, however, she discovered a mutual attraction to one of the sitters, Gerald Balfour, brother of Arthur. Gerald was also married—but no matter; the result of their liaison in 1913 was a son, Henry Augustus Coombe-Tennant.

Henry's true paternity was also kept secret—although the undisguisable physical resemblance and some dropped hints enabled various people to work out that Gerald was really Henry's dad. Gerald's wife eventually came to terms with what had happened; the reaction of Winnifred's husband, however, has gone unrecorded.

A Desert of Roses

So, what of the new messiah, Henry Coombe-Tennant? I know what you're thinking: the fact he's not a household name doesn't bode well for the authenticity of 'The Plan'.

Given his pedigree, it's unsurprising that Henry turned out to be another bright-spark. He went to Eton, then up to Cambridge, and from thence into the army. He saw active service during the Second World War, was taken prisoner by the Germans, escaped, and parachuted back into active service again, this time as a secret operations agent in occupied France. What Henry did after the war is not a matter of public record, because he worked for the British intelligence agencies, particularly in the Middle East. By this stage of his life he was aware of the grand destiny that had supposedly been mapped out for him, yet the people close to 'The Plan' began increasingly to despair of how he seemed less and less likely to realise it. The final blow to their hopes came in 1960, when Henry underwent a religious conversion, became a Roman Catholic, and entered a monastery. Major Henry Coombe-Tennant became Dom Joseph Coombe-Tennant. He died at the monastery in 1989.

The full story of the Cross Correspondences is indeed a very tangled web—and this summary isn't the half of it! Archie Roy's book runs to almost six hundred pages and involves far more than the outline I've presented here. But let's break down what we've got so far:

1. Members of the British establishment engage in communication with spirits.
2. The spirits communicate in a specific kind of language, and assist in the decoding of the message as part of their communications.
3. The spirits issue prophecies and injunctions for the purpose of bringing about historical change.
4. The communications culminate in an injunction to perform a sexual act that contravenes the moral codes of the era.

We can call this work 'psychical research' if we like, but in 1582, when John Dee and Edward Kelley undertook something amazingly similar, it was regarded differently.

Unsatisfied with his progress in the fields of science and mathematics, Dee, a close advisor to Queen Elizabeth I—and

probably a spy in her service—began seeking contact with angels and to this end enlisted the services of Kelley as his scryer or medium. The results of their work included books of prophecy and magick dictated in the angels' own language, 'Enochian'. The angels also instructed Dee and Kelley to travel around Central Europe and reprimand its monarchs for their ungodly ways. Incredibly, they did so, and yet somehow avoided execution. The end of their association came shortly after the spirits instructed them to swap wives. Dee was horrified by the prospect of this 'cross-matching', as he called it, but was convinced it was the will of God, and so in May 1587 it went ahead. The traditional interpretation of the breakdown in the magical partnership of the two men is the failure and embarrassment caused by the wife-swap, but this is perhaps debatable (Tyson 1997: 32). A circumstance not often mentioned is that a son was born to Dee's wife the following February (Woolley 2001: 295). Dee never raises the question of the child's paternity in his diaries, but he must have wondered.

And perhaps we're left wondering too: whether it's inevitable that anyone attempting sustained work with spirits, whether in the name of 'science' or 'psychical investigation', will eventually be talked into committing some kind of faintly absurd sexual *faux pas*. By the time the participants find themselves considering whether they *should* make a baby so he can become a messiah and save the world, or *should* swap wives in order to realise the will of God, perhaps they also need to admit they abandoned scientific method a long way down the road behind them.

What they're doing is dubious science, but possibly effective magick. Sex magick, of course. Imagine if the spirits had asked Aleister Crowley to perform a similar act. He wouldn't have batted an eyelid, because the advantage of Crowley's approach is clearly visible in this context: by consciously freeing himself from the taboos of his culture through sex magickal practice (he was, after all, a contemporary of the SPR researchers) Crowley side-stepped the neurotic torments of guilt and disgust that Dee endured and the SPR sitters also had to contend with. Crowley also forearmed himself against the embarrassment, the disap-

pointment and sense of anticlimax that possibly scuppered the Dee-Kelley working, and perhaps also spoiled the outcome of the SPR communicators' plan. Crowley's approach also immures the magician against a further possibility: that the spirits are simply *dicking the participants around*. Whether you understand 'spirits' to refer to independent entities, or repressed psychological complexes, in the cases of both Dee and the SPR it looks suspiciously as if the spirits were pushing the sitters beyond the limits of what was considered acceptable behaviour, just so they could roll about laughing.

Meric Casaubon (1659) was among the first to express in writing the opinion that the spirits with whom Dee trafficked were devils, not angels. It's difficult to decide whether the 'cross-matching' was proffered to Dee as a practical joke, or an authentic tantric working that might have widened his spiritual consciousness. However, the SPR communicators' plan for making a baby that would save the world is certainly—I'd suggest—tending toward a corrupted teaching. The idea that another person can eradicate your suffering is naive. (Too bad that a great deal of modern Christianity is based on precisely this interpretation of the life of Christ.) A teacher might be able to point the way, but—putting aside wishful thinking—each of us must do our own work to liberate ourselves. Depending on someone else for this leads only to the dead-end of blind faith.

At the beginning of the twentieth century there was a strong messianic impulse at work in the culture. Within the Theosophical movement this took the shape of the belief that the child Jiddhu Krishnamurti was destined to become the World Teacher. In European society at large it might be argued that the ultimate manifestation of this messianic current were the fascist dictatorships of the 1930s. That Krishnamurti eventually rejected his role as World Teacher, and spent the rest of his life teaching 'you must become liberated not because of me but in spite of me', suggests that this Theosophical messiah had a lot more spiritual weight behind him than the fascist ones.

The SPR communicators always claimed they were the surviving personalities of Sidgwick, Myers and Gurney, but the sitters were never completely able to eliminate the possibility of

what they called 'super ESP'—the possibility that the communications came from a telepathic source that had access to the personalities and experiences of dead people, but was not those dead people itself. In other words, could something have been *pretending* to be the people concerned?

If the messianic nature of the teachings doled out by the spirits seems suspect, the question of the spirits' identity is doubly so. Here we arrive at the central paradox of trafficking with dead people. To affirm their identities as the dead, the spirits had to demonstrate they possessed the more or less intact personalities of the people in question. Yet if those personalities were indeed still active, then in what sense could they be said to be 'dead'? It would be more accurate to describe them as merely 'disembodied'. But then if they were disembodied, why did they demonstrate such a concern with earthly, bodily issues—the spirit of Gurney professing its love for the medium Winnifred, for instance; or Mary wanting to sort out hers and Arthur's relationship issues? The *karma* (in its proper sense) of all these dead people was still very much active. What's more, by engaging with it, the sitters were allowing that *karma* to continue to spin the wheel of suffering upon earth.

Our confidence in the dead is perhaps undermined even further when we consider the following description by the spirit of Gurney of the state that he finds himself in:

The nearest simile I can find to express the difficulties of sending a message—is that I appear to be standing behind a sheet of frosted glass—which blurs sight and deadens sound—dictating feebly—to a reluctant and very obtuse secretary. A feeling of terrible impotence burdens me—I am so powerless to tell what means so much—I cannot get into communication with those who would understand and believe me. (Roy, 2008: 178)

He seems to be implying that he's still subject to perceptions of some kind (sight, sound), to desire, to a division of self and other... If he's really dead, he doesn't seem to have made a

A Desert of Roses

good job of dying! Certainly, he doesn't strike me as a wise entity whose advice I'd be confident to trust; he simply sounds like a man with 'issues'. But what else could we expect of a personality that has survived death? It's just *a personality*, after all. And don't we have enough of those to contend with on this side of life—our own personalities included?

Dee adopted a preferable approach, electing to talk to spirits that had never been human. If their injunctions seemed bizarre at times, this was presumably because the sphere of earthly concerns was the only domain in which they could make their extra-human intentions intelligible to us.

I began Roy's book with anticipation, because I'd read impressive things about The Cross Correspondences, and I do believe they represent a magickal working on a comparable scale to the angelic workings of Dee and Kelley. But I never expected I would come away more suspicious of the SPR work as a consequence.

One of my suspicions is positive, however—and that concerns the assumption that the SPR working was a failure. When Henry entered the monastery, there was still some forlorn hope that he might one day become Pope and change the world. He didn't, of course. But, like Jiddhu Krishnamurti, the Theosophists' intended messiah, there is the possibility that he attained personal liberation and in this sense transformed everything. It's too bad that Henry's upbringing and his work for the secret services instilled in him the habit of keeping silent about his personal experiences. However, among the effects left at the monastery after his death, Roy recovered the script of a talk Henry once gave about his life. It contains the following reticent yet suggestive passage:

[W]hen I was serving in Baghdad, I became involved in a sequence of events and experiences whose significance seemed to me to transcend their actual content. I don't want to be questioned about these events or experiences. It will be sufficient to say that there was a period of profound mental and physical suffering, during which (if I may put it this

way) my own ego, which had for so long been the self-sufficient centre of my inner life, disintegrated. I have grown a new ego since, of course, though not a self-sufficient one, but at that time there was nothing to hold me together. I was in pieces, and if the pieces were to be reassembled, a new principle of unity would have to be found. (Roy, 2008: 538)

If Henry during his time as a monk attained personal liberation, it might be argued that the SPR working was the most glittering success imaginable. If so, then maybe the universe itself had the last laugh, for from the reanimated *karma* of undead spirits Henry had been born, and had been considered a failure by all concerned because he failed to live up to his promised destiny. Yet perhaps, in Henry, that undead *karma* at last found its cessation, and he attained a form of fulfilment that the dead souls who fathered him simply couldn't match.

Magick and Enlightenment: A Recap

During the introduction to some dharma workshops I attended at the weekend, everyone was invited to say something about their practice and their connection with Buddhism. Explaining myself to a Buddhist group was an interesting exercise in making clear the relationship between magick and dharma.

The aim of the Western Magickal Tradition—I explained—is the same as that of Buddhism: *enlightenment*. The specific act of magick that fulfils this aim is known as The Great Work. The magician achieves The Great Work through the invocation of an entity known as The Holy Guardian Angel. The angel leads the magician across the Abyss, which is the gap between our ordinary perception and metaphysical experience. This culminates in the magician's first awakening, a temporary experience of enlightenment. By engaging in further work with the angel, eventually the magician achieves union with it—which is equivalent to 'full' or 'final' enlightenment.

In Buddhist terms, the angel is a representation of *Emptiness*. Angel and Emptiness are the same thing. Magick is the art of

experiencing Truth, so the Western magician uses the angel as a dualistic representation of non-dual, unrepresentable Emptiness in order to bring about a direct experience of Emptiness through magical means. Because it employs magick, the Western Tradition often proves the most direct and fastest route to the realisation of enlightenment, but it is not without certain risks to the ignorant and unwary.

Where the Western Tradition has fallen down, however, is in the clarity of its teachings. The Buddhist teachings are more straightforward, whereas western occultism has been subject to vigorous suppression by exoteric religion, and has also been corrupted and misunderstood by its own supposed practitioners.

The most common corruption of the Western Magical Tradition is the practitioner's inability or refusal to use magick in the realisation of The Great Work, but instead to limit its use to sorcery or 'low' magic. The Buddhists texts on meditation accept the development of psychic powers or *siddhis* as a corollary to awakening, and include similar warnings on the dangers of mistaking these powers as an end in themselves or a substitute for enlightenment.

In the Western Tradition, however, competency in magick is an absolute prerequisite for The Great Work. The reason for this is simple: to summon the angel, one must be familiar with the technique of *invocation*; to communicate with the angel, one must know *how to work with spirits*; to make decisions about directions to be taken, *divination* is essential, etc. In short, The Great Work demands proficiency in all areas of magick.

When properly understood as a genuine tradition, the Western Magical Tradition places magick in the service of enlightenment. As the magician moves surely and swiftly towards the realisation of the aim (which is *inevitably* successful because it is the expression of a magical act) then his or her magical abilities are developed and perfected at the same time.

It is for this reason that the Holy Guardian Angel is often described as 'the future magical self'. Union with the angel—let us remember—is the realisation of Emptiness, and so magick

placed at the service of enlightenment bootstraps the magician into awakening to his or her ultimate nature.

Thank You, Dr. Gotama

I attended some dharma workshops at the weekend, and was surprised by the number of psychotherapists that were present, most of whom came with the specific aim of applying Buddhist ideas to their work. These days, you can train and qualify as a psychotherapist through various organisations that teach Buddhist-inspired therapy.

Having had plenty of experience on both sides of the fence, this troubled me. The therapists I spoke with all seemed of the opinion that Buddhism and therapy share a common approach and aim. Yet none of them seemed interested in the idea that maybe the dharma probes into a deeper level of truth which therapy never goes near.

One person I spoke with described how Buddhist techniques can be used to help patients realise that their thoughts and feelings are simply that—thoughts and feelings, rather than ‘the truth’. This is fine and helpful, of course. Yet the aim of dharma is not to ‘accept’ our thoughts and feelings, but to wake up to the fact there’s nothing there to own them.

Of course, patients who present for therapy in most cases aren’t in a mental state that would benefit from confrontation with the truth of no-self. But presumably the therapist *is*, so doesn’t this oblige the therapist to explore the dharma more deeply?

If you were ill and you consulted someone who gave you medicine for your complaint, but later you discovered that the person prescribing the medicine decided what to give you by asking *their* doctor—then, indeed, you might not care too much, as long as the illness went away, but if the therapists want to hand out Buddhist medicine surely *they’re* obliged to understand fully what they’re giving out?

Otherwise, we’re left with a situation where people hop onto the dharma, and hop off before they’ve gone anywhere—i.e. as soon as they’re able to function within the ‘normal’ parameters

A Desert of Roses

of society. The danger is that therapists will get into a habit of leaning on Buddhism, but never arrive at an understanding that it has something far deeper to offer.

Letter to a Dharma Teacher

April, 2009

Dear B-----,

People don't write letters on paper any more, so I hope this one isn't too much of a shock. It was good to see you at C----- the other week, albeit from a distance.

I listened to a recording of one of your talks on awakening, and I hoped we might exchange some views. I enjoyed the talk. Do you remember last year when I came to you in interview and said I believed I was an *anagami*? I thought about your response a great deal afterwards, and took seriously your advice that below the type of emptiness I'd experienced there was a deeper level where phenomena become unfindable. I wondered if I'd confused a type of emptiness that is one of the three characteristics of phenomena (perhaps 'emptiness' in an adjectival sense) for 'emptiness proper', which I had not yet experienced. I wondered if you were suggesting that emptiness is a complete cessation of experience, such as that supposed to occur in *nerodhi samapatti*. I kept an eye open for signs pointing in this direction, but I never found them.

In your talk, you spoke very pertinently on the popular conceptions of the enlightened person—'radiant', 'youthful', 'Asian', etc.—and you made reference to the 'ten fetters' model as perhaps a better guide than these common notions. However, I've arrived at the view that the ten fetters model is perhaps just as distorted as the popular misconceptions. For instance, the arahat is supposedly free of 'delusion'. What, *all* delusions? How could that possibly be true for a human being? The idea that someone becomes incapable of any particular action or emotion whilst that person retains a human form seems to me a poor basis for a model of awakening, because what could prevent an arahat from exhibiting a certain action or emotion if he or she was moved to do so?

The arahat may have realised the deathless, but they have not become it. Even if we suppose they have somehow transcended their humanity (which personally I don't), why would this take the form of disabling certain actions and emotions? Suppose we grant that an arahat has total control over his or her motivation (although I suspect this isn't true either), it still makes no sense to declare that a person *could not under any circumstances* do or feel certain things.

You mentioned in your talk that character and behaviour are not sufficient bases on which to make a judgement of a person's character, yet this is precisely what the ten fetters model does. I think it's a poor model, produces confusion, and we should chuck it out!

These are not entirely my own ideas. I've been following closely the work of Daniel Ingram (2008), an American dharma teacher. Ingram throws out the ten fetters model and proposes instead a revised four-path model. I'm sure you'll check it out if you're interested, but, in brief, Ingram regards the stages of awakening in terms of changes in the relationship between the practitioner and emptiness, rather than—as in the ten fetters model—the practitioner's progressive inability to act like a human being.

In Ingram's model, the stream enterer has merely glimpsed emptiness for the first time. The *sakadagami* has seen emptiness more than once. The *anagami* has begun to see emptiness on and off 'in real time'. The arahat, finally, has 'identified' with emptiness and is in a fluid relationship with it pretty much full-time. ('Identified' is the wrong word, I know, but more convenient than 'de-identified with everything other than'.)

One of the consequences of Ingram's view is a radical deflation of attainments. Sure, you don't need robes and nice teeth to be an arahat, but neither are you free of delusion, nor do you act without making karma, etc. The popular misconceptions of awakening are misleading, but there's a whole lot of misinformation in the traditional teachings—or so Ingram's reasoning suggests (Ingram, 2010).

Which brings me back to my failed search for 'emptiness proper' after my retreat last year. I didn't find it because I was

A Desert of Roses

already in relationship with it. I *was* an *anagami*. At least, according to Ingram. According to the ten fetters model I would have had to be virtually incapable of being either nasty or stupid, and so I was indeed wide of the mark.

Since last year I've undergone another major development in my practice, which my most recent retreat was an opportunity to evaluate. I see what you mean now by that 'deeper level'. It's not that phenomena cease to arise—which is what I took you to mean—but as if consciousness penetrates to a layer prior to those phenomena taking form. So, I see sensations prior to the mind applying (for example) the three types of *vedana* to them. The *vedana* has ceased, in a sense, I suppose, but it seems more the case that the practitioner has seen far enough down the chain of dependent-arising to view things from a place that is prior. *Nerodhi samapatti* feels similar: not the cessation of cognition, but penetration to a level where (simply) the basis of that which becomes cognition does not arise.

Anyhow—the upshot of all of this is that it seems there are perhaps quite a few dharma teachers striving toward a model of arahatship that they will never attain because it isn't possible, but is a fiction created by corrupted teachings—a common problem in all the world's great religious traditions. If it is the realisation of the deathless that the Buddha emphasised above all in the process of awakening—as you stated in your talk—then when this has been attained, and is available to awareness pretty much all of the time, where else is there to go?

Of course, it's easy to imagine that feeling there is somewhere else to go means that something must have been left undone. But again, the absence of doubt or striving seems to me too much to expect of a human being, which, I'm convinced, is what the arahat always remains.

You know what else this entails, don't you? But—if you haven't already done so—there's no need for you to touch the earth as witness to your attainment. I've already witnessed it for you!

With very best wishes, and thanks for the help and inspiration you've given me.

Duncan.

You Can't Be Serious!

Are Alan and myself really claiming to be enlightened?

Yes, we are.

Are we serious?

Completely.

But we're also up for answering queries and criticisms from anyone who's interested enough to have any. In fact, I've taken the liberty of answering a couple that no one has even put to us yet. (But I bet they're thinking them.)

Why do you claim to be enlightened when everyone knows that's impossible?

The Buddha got shirty sometimes when people asked him this. He would reply with similes of blind men presuming to tell sighted people there's no such thing as colour. A declaration that enlightenment is impossible from someone who hasn't made the proper efforts to see for themselves carries no authority, of course. But the general question whether enlightenment is possible is completely valid and deserves a considered response.

Enlightenment entails an encounter with something that lies beyond experience: the Absolute. The assumption that enlightenment is impossible arises from the contradiction in the proposition that this unknowable can be known, or that that which is not a part of experience can somehow be sensed.

I used to hold this view myself, and no one was ever more astonished than me to discover that the confrontation with the Absolute simply makes this everyday logic of 'this or that' redundant.

If we wonder that something outside our experience can be available to our experience it's because we have identified a particular range of our awareness as 'us', as 'our experience'. Yet, in reality, we are simply not what we appear to ourselves to be. When we take the trouble to look, the self cannot be found in any sensation, idea, feeling or thought, but is something beyond all of these. The self, therefore, is already not any part of experience. The encounter with the Absolute, then,

A Desert of Roses

does not bring us into contact with anything alien to or in contradiction with the true self. Enlightenment is the moment when we realise that this everyday logic of 'this or that', 'self or other', does not apply to our true identity.

Buddhism teaches that there are six realms of existence: hell realms, hungry ghosts, the animal kingdom, the human world, the realm of the warring gods, and the heavenly gods. But it states that to be born in the human world is the most fortunate of births, because only in the human world is there the possibility of enlightenment. Clearly, there is something special about being human with regard to the process of awakening.

I've started to wonder whether this special human attribute isn't something specifically to do with our cognition, something to do with how we can know and react to truth, because the attainment of enlightenment turns on *realisation*: the truth we arrive at through our understanding doesn't remain at the level of ideas but enters into experience, into our existence. At the moment of realisation all of our efforts to get enlightened are finalised into a new relationship with reality. We *become* the fruit of our efforts.

If we understand magick as the art of experiencing truth, it might be said that human beings can become enlightened because they have the ability to practise magick.

You've simply deluded yourself by meditating too much!

This one, I imagine, is likely to be levelled at us by the green meme, post-modern crew. *If you believe you're enlightened, they might say, then that's how it will seem to you; it's 'true' from your perspective.* They might even add: *And that's okay, because there's nothing worse about that 'reality tunnel' than any other, as long as it's the one you've chosen to go down.*

Unfortunately, the critic who assumes that being enlightened simply entails *believing* yourself to be so is probably going to be the least inclined or able to grapple seriously with the practices that actually lead to enlightenment, and thus unlikely to gain a direct understanding for themselves that this is *not* how things stand.

It took me three and a half years to arrive at that moment of awakening which occurred last month. Three and a half years spent meditating every day, or going off on retreats. During those sessions I looked closely at my moment-to-moment experience and disciplined my mind away from fantasies, speculation and idle philosophising to concentrate exclusively on what was there in front of me, in immediate awareness. And the rest of the time, when I wasn't sitting in meditation, I was trying to do exactly the same thing in my daily life.

Does looking at what's right in front of you seem likely to lead to delusion? Does it seem likely that someone who has dedicated him or herself to this practice for a number of years and continues to do so will be more 'deluded' than someone who, on the basis of no experience whatsoever (because, according to him or her, there couldn't be any authoritative experience) has simply assumed they know better?

You decide!

Buddhism on the Tree of Life

What's the one thing that's certain in life?

Death is.

And what's the cause of death, by which I mean what's responsible for the death of all living things in all cases?

Why, that would be birth.

And what's the cause of birth in all cases?

Reproduction, generation, the fact that things come into being.

And what is the cause of coming into being?

Something like 'lust'; our clinging onto life.

And what is the cause of this clinging?

Craving after things in the world.

And what is the cause of the craving?

The seeking of pleasure. Feeling.



The Wheel of Life (Bhavacakra). The nidanas are situated in the outer rim of the wheel.

Of the feeling?

Our sensory contact with things.

Of the sensory contact?

Perception itself.

And what is the cause of perception?

That things are perceptible—i.e. that they have a form we perceive or a name that enables us to think about them.

And what is the cause of things having a form or a name?

It's the way we're hard-wired, I suppose, so I'd say: the brain and body.

And what is the cause of the body?

Well, in terms of individual experience, which I guess is what you mean, the body arises as sensations within the mind.

The cause of the mind?

Consciousness.

The cause of consciousness?

Well, there can't be consciousness on a personal level without something to be conscious of, so the cause of being conscious is the fact that 'stuff' arises for us to be conscious of. The Buddhists call this stuff 'formations'.

And what is the cause of formations?

Formations arise because we fool ourselves we're separate from the universe. This allows stuff to appear as if it were really something 'out there'. So I'd say that the cause of formations is fundamental ignorance.

And what is the cause of ignorance?

If I knew the cause of ignorance, I wouldn't be ignorant! Ignorance is the final answer from a human perspective. It's as far as we can go.

The Nidanas

This chain of cause and effect from which the cycle of birth and death arises is also known as the Buddhist theory of *dependent origination*. The everyday world appears to us as a universe full of things, but enquiring into its nature along the lines described above reveals that reality is not composed of solid objects at all, but is a constantly arising and self-renewing process of becoming. The universe is not a noun but something like a verb: rather than being themselves, things are always in the process of becoming other things. Nothing in the universe possesses the invulnerability to change required for it to truly be itself, but instead relies on other things for its form, its apparent identity.

When an enlightened person awakens, the lived experience of dependent origination is what it might be said he or she awakens to. Dependent origination is an essential component of Buddhist thinking, although not the most commonly-known teaching, because it's quite technical. On *The Wheel of Life*, those paintings that show the Lord of Death in the centre holding the wheel of samsara (they've got one in the toilet of my local Buddhist centre, see overleaf), twelve of the links in the chain of causes described above are portrayed in pictures around the wheel's outer rim. They are known as the *nidanas* ('causes, foundations').

In a lesser-known sutta¹⁹, the Buddha described a further sequence of *nidanas*, which have not (as far as I know) been assigned a traditional pictorial representation. These are the so-called *transcendental nidanas*. They demonstrate that the process of dependent origination is circular because they're the converse of the standard *nidanas*, pointing not to the downward path of birth, suffering and death, but to the upward path beyond suffering toward liberation.

The Transcendental Nidanas

What does birth lead to?

Suffering and dissatisfaction.

What does suffering lead to?

Blind faith. For most people that's what they put their trust in—faith in something better, or faith in it all being worthwhile.

What does faith lead to?

Gladness. Cheerfulness.

What does gladness lead to?

Getting happy-clappy. Rapture.

Rapture leads to...?

Getting blissed-out. Tranquility.

And Tranquility?

True happiness.

Where does happiness lead?

To concentration. The mind can focus at last, because it's undistracted.

Where does concentration lead?

To insight, or—as it's also known—the Knowledge and Vision of Things as They Really Are.

And where does the Knowledge and Vision of Things as They Really Are take us?

To disenchantment, because beyond all that suffering and bliss, at the end of the day, stuff is just stuff, innit?

And disenchantment?

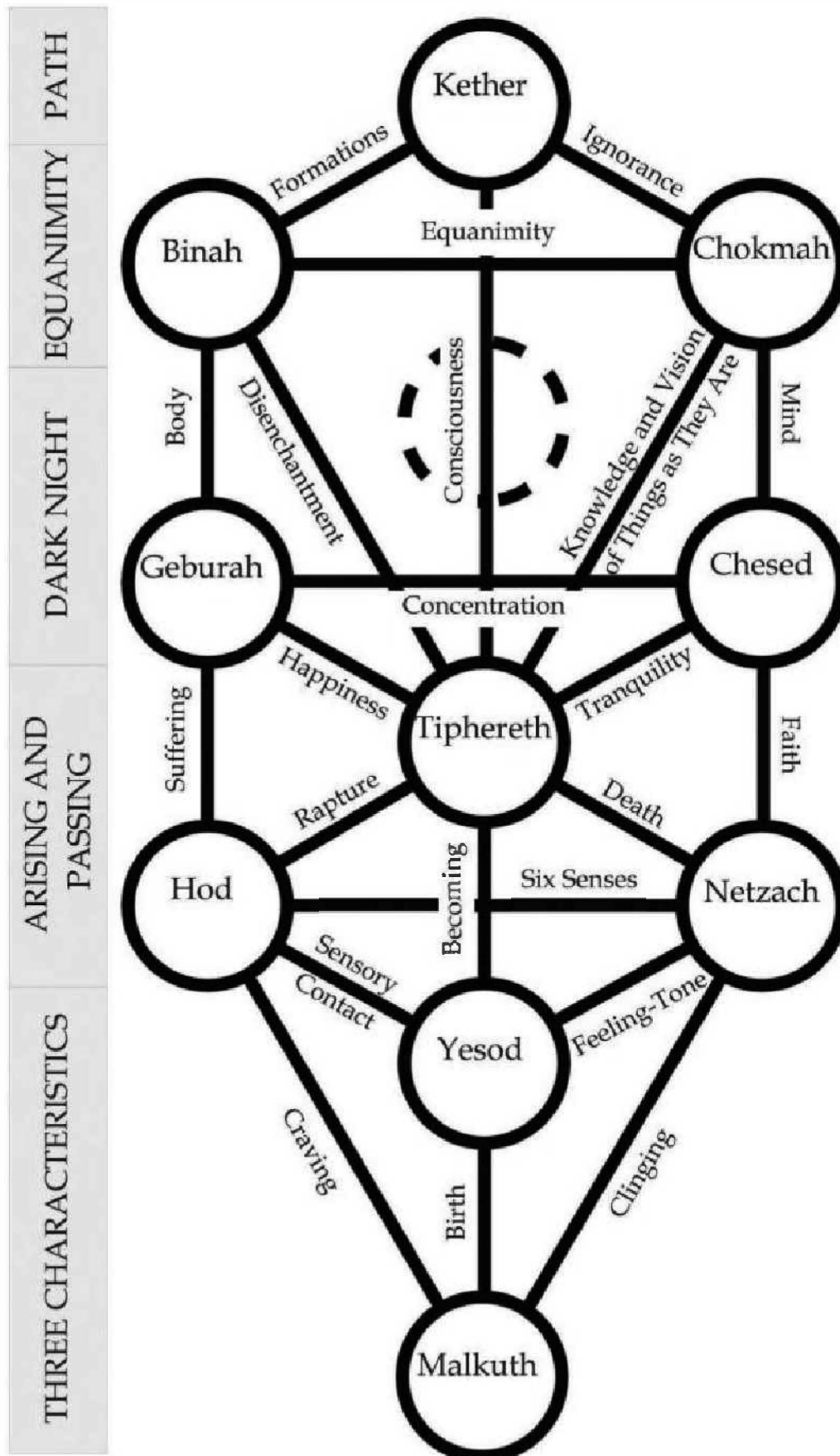
To dispassion. To equanimity. We accept things for what they are.

And equanimity?

To liberation. The end of The Great Work.

And then?

Arrival at the knowledge that the illusion has been seen through. (Traditionally known as 'knowledge of destruction of the cankers'.)



Twenty-Two(-ish)

Now, have you been keeping count? That's twelve standard nidanas and twelve transcendental. Twenty-four in total. Twenty-four? Why, that's almost *twenty-two*, a number dear to the heart of every western occultist! Twenty-two letters in the Hebrew alphabet. Twenty-two major arcana in the tarot deck. Twenty-two paths between the sephiroth on The Tree of Life.

The idea of mapping the nidanas onto the paths of the Tree of Life didn't appeal to me simply because of a near-miss numerical correspondence. The Tree of Life depicts the stages by which the Divine expresses itself through the metaphysical and temporal. The nidanas portray a Buddhist equivalent to this: how samsara is forged by the mind's turning away from emptiness.

The theory of dependent origination argues that reality is more like a verb than a noun, in which case the nidanas are really only arbitrary points along the continuum of dependent arising rather than actual 'things'. This allows us a bit of flexibility, I think. If we want to add or drop a nidana here or there, regard one as two or *vice versa* for the purposes of our model then this doesn't necessarily do injury to the spirit of dependent origination.

'Liberation' and 'knowledge of destruction of the cankers' I decided don't sit on the tree at all, but are metaphysical events 'above' Kether. Given the close similarity between 'gladness' and 'rapture', I figured we could drop the former. 'Name and form', similarly, I thought might be said to be embraced by the subsequent nidanas of 'mind' and 'body', so 'name and form' also got the chop. And would you credit it—that's twenty-two remaining!

Does it work? I'll let the reader decide. Nidanas such as 'birth', 'formations', 'consciousness' and 'ignorance' seemed to have places ready and waiting for them. Others fitted less intuitively, but made complete sense after a little reflection. Maybe a couple or so aren't so clear.

For good measure, I also threw into the mix Daniel Ingram's suggested correspondences between the vipassana jhanas and

the sephiroth.²⁰ He suggests some quite broad designations, which places 'the three characteristics' around the level of Malkuth and Yesod; 'the arising and passing away' is at Hod, Netzach and Tiphereth; 'the dark night' gets underway at Geburah and Chesed and draws to a close with Da'ath; 'equanimity' is at the level of Binah and Chokmah; 'path' is Kether.

A table of correspondences between the nidanas and the tarot trumps is presented for consideration at the end of this article, using Crowley's designations of the paths and the tarot. (I've opted for the traditional, non-Thelemic names of the trumps.) Here, again, many of the correspondences are strikingly obvious (e.g. The Fool = 'ignorance'); others more subtle but strongly relevant (e.g. The Tower = 'six senses'); and others slightly puzzling (The Sun = 'sensory contact').

Of course, you could map the nidanas to the tree in different ways—perhaps better than the way I've chosen—but the opportunity to map major Buddhist concepts like 'ignorance', 'equanimity' and 'suffering' onto the key symbols of western esotericism seemed too good to pass by.

The Tempe Working Explained

On the 15th June, 2009, we attempted contact with an astral representative of the Great White Brotherhood, the universal body of enlightened beings. We were successful. On two further occasions the operation was repeated and we communicated with the spirit known as 'Tempe' a total of three times. On each occasion Tempe made a number of predictions that seemed especially to concern what would occur on Alan's impending trip around the world. Over the course of these workings, and almost in spite of our really stupid questions, it became obvious that Tempe only really cared about one thing: *enlightenment*.

We produced a commentary on these three workings as we recorded them, and Alan wrote three speculative articles and an additional commentary. These formed a whole section of our previous book, *The Urn* (Chapman & Barford, 2009b). At the current time (August, 2009) the majority of Tempe's predic-

Path	Tarot	Nidana
0	Fool	Ignorance
1	Magus	Formations
2	High Priestess	Consciousness
3	Empress	Equanimity
4	Emperor	Feeling-Tone
5	Hierophant	Mind
6	Lovers	Disenchantment
7	Chariot	Body
8	Justice	Happiness
9	Hermit	Tranquillity
10	Fortune	Faith
11	Strength	Concentration
12	Hanged Man	Suffering
13	Death	Death
14	Temperance	Becoming
15	Devil	Rapture
16	Tower	Six Senses
17	Star	The Knowledge & Vision Of Things As They Really Are
18	Moon	Clinging
19	Sun	Sensory-Contact
20	Judgement	Craving
21	World	Birth

Nidana-Tarot correspondences

A Desert of Roses

tions have come to fruition but have thrown a completely different light on those yet to happen. Furthermore, the fulfilment of the prophecies to date has demonstrated just how wrong our previous interpretations of Tempe's predictions were, and just how much bullshit (read: 'insane occult conspiracy') we projected onto some of Tempe's answers.

So, here is the Tempe working explained, with the benefit of more recent events.

DUNCAN: I've really been looking forward to you writing this up. The parts of the prophecies that directly concerned me I've already mentioned in passing elsewhere, but most of what Tempe said seemed to be about you, so I'm fascinated to hear how it has come true. Or not. So, come on then: what new light can you shed on the first working?

ALAN: Okay. Well, then: Tempe first appeared to us holding a book and a crucifix. The book contained a table, six squares by six. The name of the book was *Lemegeton*. The number of the book was 16. The cross was 23.

DUNCAN: This puzzled us at the time...

ALAN: But we worked out that 'book' = 16 = 'camel', 'magus' and 'Kamael'—i.e. my magical name—i.e. *me!* The cross = 23 = 'Tempe'. So, I am the book and Tempe is the cross. The cross represents the concept of the messiah, which we'll come back to later. The numbers in the six by six table, remember, add up to 666.

DUNCAN: I've never mentioned it before, Alan, but I suppose you've noticed you have the same initials as Aleister Crowley. I didn't like to draw attention to it, because I thought you might start to think you were the next messiah or something...

ALAN: After this was the part about my meeting in the following March with a 'king' or 'caesar', a member of The Great White Brotherhood. Tempe suggested he would wear some kind of snake adornment. He would be jovial, welcoming, dressed in white and have the number 60. Well, on March 6th I met the Advaita Vedanta guru Arunachala Ramana during my travels in India. He was certainly enlightened (and in this sense

a 'king' or 'caesar' and a part of the Great White Brotherhood). He looked a bit like Father Christmas ('jovial'), had two tattoos (one of which was a scroll, which was perhaps the 'twisted snake') and, as a guru, was certainly a 'hierophant' (= 60).

DUNCAN: That is pretty amazing, because I don't think either of us expected your enlightenment to come so quickly. When Tempe said that you would meet a guru, I assumed it was someone who would simply help you along—not the person who would help you finish up. A hierophant indeed!

ALAN: But it's all there in what Tempe actually said. He also gave the guru the number 61 = 'supreme ritual'. Finishing up the process of enlightenment is the supreme ritual, and—as Tempe also predicted—this has taken me in a completely new direction since then, with the start of the *Open Enlightenment* (OE) project.²¹

DUNCAN: Okay, I'm looking at the text, and at this point Tempe goes into a lot of grim stuff about 'The Adversary', 'giant squids' and 'Black Brothers'...

ALAN: Yes. It's clear now that The Adversary and 'NONE' (which was the name Tempe gave it—hey, there's a big clue there in the name) are *not* literal entities, but are my visionary or astral encounters with the embodiment of fear and therefore ignorance. The Adversary is defeated by each individual at the moment of enlightenment. 'NONE' is therefore the master of those people who can only view the world through the lens of fear and of those who consciously resist enlightenment, sometimes called the Black Brothers.

DUNCAN: You're not so hot now on the notion of an actual conspiracy?

ALAN: No, because the description Tempe gave us of what makes a Black Brother indicates that the Black Brother isn't concerned with keeping the world unenlightened; rather, he's simply self-obsessed. The Black Brotherhood is not actively working to 'unenlighten' the world; it simply wishes to promote its own debased and ignorant interests. Unfortunately, a misunderstanding takes root in our interpretation of Tempe at this point in the text. Although Tempe seems to talk about literal Black Brothers, he is actually using the Great White Brother-

A Desert of Roses

hood and Black Brotherhood as symbols for enlightenment and ignorance from this point onwards. For instance: when I asked him whether the battle would be fought in people's minds, he replied with a specific image of a single mala bead turning into my head. Quite clearly, what he meant was that the battle is actually going to take place only within my head. Tempe was, in effect, only ever interested in talking about our (mine and yours) enlightenment. A bit later on he gives us an image of the 'aura' of the White Brotherhood with too much 'black' in it, and vice versa... So if the White Brotherhood is enlightenment and the Black Brotherhood is ignorance, then Tempe is simply giving us an accurate description of where we both were at the time in the process of enlightenment: the penultimate stage of enlightenment is precisely when emptiness arises and passes away in real time—i.e. enlightenment and ignorance are mixed up.

DUNCAN: I certainly remember the way Tempe seemed to be ducking various questions at this point, as if he deemed them not worthy of an answer.

ALAN: Because they were the *wrong* questions. Remember the part where he said it wasn't about one of the sides winning, but about them both operating in the correct way, because one of the sides was operating incorrectly?

DUNCAN: We never did get to the bottom of that...

ALAN: Well, 'not operating correctly' simply means 'not enlightened yet'. He was just telling us that we had some work left to do.

DUNCAN: The imagery turns a bit utopian and messianic after this point, as I recall: 'Sunrise over the earth. Intense light over the whole planet...'

ALAN: Enlightenment, again. Both in a personal sense and a global sense, with regard to the aims of the OE project that was the result of my enlightenment.

DUNCAN: And the cathedral, which reflects in its architecture the union of all the traditions...

ALAN: Again, it represents both the personal experience of enlightenment (because the event itself is literally the realisation that enlightenment is *beyond* all and any tradition), and the

vision of the global progress of enlightenment that is the object of OE.

DUNCAN: So if the cathedral is not strictly literal, does this mean (as we assumed) we've got to physically build it? And what about the 'three hares'? We've taken that as the logo for the OE project; are we still okay to use it?

ALAN: The hares are fine, but it's clear now that they too were a symbol that encompassed both my impending personal enlightenment (the 'underworld experience', or 'initiation' which was part of Tempe's original message about the hare) plus the transpersonal aspect of the OE project.

DUNCAN: People we've spoken with so far have already raised the question whether Tempe's cathedral might be a bit too—erm—'kitsch' or 'retro' to deserve to exist in reality.

ALAN: The whole premise of OE rests on a recognition that enlightenment is the root of all religion. For the general public, this would be a whole new perspective on history. It's only with this perspective on the past that the 'cathedral' of enlightenment can be built.

DUNCAN: So you're making me wonder—yet again—whether this thing needs *literally* to be built, or whether Tempe was pointing to a new historical perspective rather than actual bricks and mortar...

ALAN: From the start, the idea that Tempe was predicting the actual building of a 'cathedral' (or *Open Enlightenment Centre* as I prefer to call it) was irrelevant. I just wanted to build it, and even more so now! It will be an architectural rendering of the enlightenment experience. So who knows, maybe Tempe was also predicting the literal building of the 'cathedral'...

DUNCAN: What about the stuff that comes after this in the text: 2012, peak oil, global warming?

ALAN: The stuff about solar flares and sunspots relates to an argument I'd recently had online with an idiotic Voudon priest, which boiled down to the issue of confusing the planes. Tempe was showing us here that confusing the planes may prove an obstacle to educating the public about the nature of enlightenment. That other stuff you mention was, I'm afraid, just a brief interlude of pointless occult speculation. Tempe's

A Desert of Roses

symbolism simply points to self-centred interests and ignorance as the source of the world's problems.

DUNCAN: Tempe is saying there's nothing special about 2012, then. It's just the usual greed, ignorance and fear. Business as usual.

ALAN: But he tries to steer us back on course with the next part of the message: the 'poisoned fish' from 'Yemen'.

DUNCAN: I never knew Yemen had such a thriving fishing industry until Tempe clued us in.

ALAN: We sussed at the time that 'fish' = 24 = 'truth', 'word', and that the *ichthys* (Greek for 'fish') was a secret symbol for Christ to the early Christians. He also gave us the number 44 = 'prophet'. Remember how Tempe appeared at the beginning with a crucifix in his right hand? Furthermore, Yemen is not only important biblically, but has also been home to numerous Jewish and Islamic messianic movements over the centuries. Tempe is therefore pointing out here how enlightenment (the 'truth' or 'word') has been firstly ill-conceived and then intentionally degenerated ('the poisoned fish') in regard to past, orthodox religion. The messianic movements of the past have failed. He returns to this theme in the second working.

DUNCAN: So that just leaves the stuff about the moon, the alien tripods, and perhaps some form of faked alien invasion engineered by The Black Brotherhood...

ALAN: Whatever that's about, it obviously hasn't happened yet, but we have a better grasp now on Tempe's perspective. He referred to 'healing lunar light' and gave us the number 34 = 'purple', 'mother', 'beautiful', 'vision', 'flower'. Based on what has gone before, it's likely that Tempe is talking strictly in terms of enlightenment. Tempe is representing enlightenment as a 'purple light'. The presence of a 'hare' has been noted by numerous cultures in the markings on the moon's surface. The hare, of course, is the symbol for OE. So perhaps 2012 will see an increase in public education regarding enlightenment.

DUNCAN: I've been reading about the importance of the colour purple during the Byzantine Empire. Byzantium was the place where the Greek tradition survived in Europe from the fall of the Roman Empire right through to the middle ages. Its

rulers wore purple robes that no one else was allowed to wear and there was also a chamber made of purple stone in the Great Palace where the Empress was taken to give birth. The 'caesars' of Byzantium therefore had a special word to describe themselves: *porphyrogennetos*, which means 'born in the purple'. So purple came to signify legitimacy and the continuation of the Greek tradition. Interesting... So much for the alien invasion, then?

ALAN: My best, conservative guess at this time is that there will be public hysteria around aliens, no doubt tied in with the 2012 myth, and a few ignorant individuals will make a lot of money off the back of it. That's probably all Tempe is saying.

DUNCAN: Which brings us finally to 'the gnome with the pineapple'. So, did you meet any fruit-bearing dwarfs on your travels, or not?

ALAN: Unsurprisingly, it's not as simple as that. In Verkala, in India, I met an entrepreneur who identified himself as a 'gnome' (see above, p. 51). But it wasn't until later, at the beginning of March, that I met Arunachala Ramana and became enlightened (as Tempe predicted). The gnome was certainly someone I met on my travels, but perhaps the entrepreneur who identified himself as such was just a synchronicity, whereas Arunachala was the 'actual gnome'. Or maybe Tempe's predictions are a series of synchronicities that he has presented together, from which we have concluded he was describing one event when in fact he wasn't. There's more stuff in the second working that seems to support this idea.

DUNCAN: Nice. Looking over the text of the second working, a lot of it is explicitly concerned with the difficulties of communicating with Tempe. We certainly knew there was a problem, even if we weren't aware at the time exactly what it was.

ALAN: Yes. The vision began with the rune NIED, inverted, which indicates: 'setting off on the wrong path and that to continue in the same manner will result in failure'. Because of the pointless occult speculation we'd forced Tempe into during the last working, this second operation began with completely the wrong intent and expectations.

A Desert of Roses

DUNCAN: We just kept at it, though, until he gave in and started to talk with us. There were some interesting results from the part where you asked him: 'Who is Alan? Who is Duncan?' He stated that you were 'a head on a platter made of a fountain of white light' (i.e. The Baptist's Head). Me, I was: 'The wand. The snake. The eye in the pyramid'. In March this year, after I'd heard about your enlightenment, I received a spontaneous vision whilst I was meditating in which I saw a vast eye staring at me, and then my soul was transferred into the inside of a pyramid where your soul was already waiting. This was quite clearly a prophecy that my enlightenment would occur after yours. Yet again, Tempe is not predicting a specific event or giving an 'answer' to questions, but throwing out a kind of synchronistic marker—i.e. I'm not 'the eye in the pyramid' in any specific sense, but his provision of this symbol loaded my subsequent vision of the eye and the pyramid with a huge whack of synchronistic meaning that it wouldn't have had otherwise.

ALAN: I was obsessed with finding out whether the speculative articles I wrote after the first working were correct or not. His answers with regard to two of them are non-committal, but I think his response of 'an energy biding its time that is not going in a particular direction' with respect to what I wrote in 'Unreasonable Foresight' (Chapman & Barford, 2009b: 180) is a polite way of saying it's all fantasy. He was telling us a faked alien invasion was not going to happen, and then I insist on asking him how to prepare for it! At this point he gave us the tarot card, THE SUN, which indicates we should enjoy life by concentrating on the positive and looking for its realisation. It was his attempt to get us back on track, but once again it proved futile. As we continue to persist, he gives us the Greek letter Omega, which means 'last'. I think now that he was trying to tell us this nonsense must come to an end!

DUNCAN: After this he falls silent and I start to sense explicitly that he doesn't want to answer these sorts of questions.

ALAN: Didn't stop us, though. We take his presentation of the rune ANSUZ to mean the ability to sail through the coming

crisis. But this probably meant at the time 'will you please just let go of all that crap!'

DUNCAN: And next there's some interesting stuff about the 'false messiah', which was the meaning we took from the references to the Yemen in the first working. Including that freaky bit when he gave me the number '555' at exactly the same moment as you were looking at the clock (which I couldn't see) and the time was '5:55'.

ALAN: It's not there in the original commentary, due to our confusion, but 555 is a number that represents me, as discussed in my magical record (Chapman & Barford 2009a: 83f). It all makes complete sense once you consider that I am the 'false messiah' who 'is imprisoned at the moment'—i.e. I'm not enlightened. The false messiah is also described as 'a head on a stick', which I think demonstrates Tempe's sense of humour. I ask him when I should set up a new magical order and he replies with an image of tunnels at the end of which is something nasty. As I discussed elsewhere, this simply means: 'When you're enlightened'.

DUNCAN: He combined that last image with a specific message: 'You are with someone. An older figure. Near water or on a boat. It is positive. 33'.

ALAN: 33 = Indian, blessing. This is quite obviously the eighty year-old guru I met in India.

DUNCAN: Which brings us to those freaky co-ordinates! '1792. 1813 or 1830.'

ALAN: Tempe's answer here is stunningly precise. On the day of my enlightenment, I travelled to the Andaman Islands, which match the first set of co-ordinates: 17'N 92'E. It was here that I formulated the idea of *Open Enlightenment*, the new 'magical order'. 18'N 30'E is the border of Egypt and Sudan, where I ended my around the world trip at Abu Simbel. This is without doubt the most mind-blowingly accurate prediction Tempe has made, which he provided at a time when I was actually planning to travel the world in the opposite direction.

DUNCAN: I went on-line and checked it out for myself, and I think it needs pointing out that the co-ordinates are not spot on. The first set, for instance, are actually somewhere at sea to

A Desert of Roses

the north-west of the Andaman Islands. But both sets are obviously in the right area. It is quite mind-boggling, especially given that neither of us at the time had any detailed understanding of longitude and latitude and—as you say—your travel plans were completely different back then.

ALAN: When I asked him if there were anything else he gave me the word 'Caesar'. Whilst attending a beach party in the Andaman Islands, I saw a man dressed as Julius Caesar. Tempe also mentioned 'a boat' and 'swallows'. In April, I visited Thailand and on a white-water rafting trip (which most certainly involved a boat) a man struck up a spontaneous conversation with me about swallows. These were separate events from my meeting with the guru. So, again, we're left wondering whether Tempe's predictions are just synchronicities, or whether it's better to consider some of them as referring to a number of events but rolled into one answer.

DUNCAN: In the next part of the working we waste a lot more time on pointless questions, but as we turn to the theme of when we're going to get enlightened the answers become more revealing again.

ALAN: The meaning of the answer in my case is even now not entirely clear. He describes an unusual character like 'the German character Eszett surmounted by a cross', which we've not been able to trace.

DUNCAN: I think now that this might have been ʃ or *lezh*, a symbol for 'the voiced alveolar lateral fricative', the guttural L-sound that in Classical Arabic is represented by the letter *Dad*. Most people pronounce this sound with the left side of the tongue. The Prophet Mohammed, reputedly, could pronounce it on both sides at once. This symbol might therefore be taken to mean: 'something that only a prophet can do'. It's not clear, is it? What Tempe said regarding my case, however, was a bit more obvious: 'A honey bee. A dart. A lance.' After I heard of your enlightenment, I contacted my Holy Guardian Angel and asked what I needed to do in order to finish up the process. My HGA communicates through the runes and the answer I received was: TIR (inverted), BEORC, WUNJO. In all his communications, my HGA has used WUNJO to represent

enlightenment. BEORC resembles the letter 'B'. TIR is in the shape of an arrow. Tempe, then, was looking forward to this message from my HGA, but the 'bee' is actually a 'B', and the 'dart' or 'lance' isn't literal, but the symbolic representation of an arrow that is TIR. It's that same mode of synchronicity rather than literal prediction.

ALAN: After this I asked him whether our work was related to the prophecy of Crowley's successor given in *The Book of the Law*. Tempe replied with an image of plants and bulbs that flower and die with no trace, yet return the next year. And then the image of a monk. I think this makes it clear that our work is a different but successive expression of the tradition of magick. We didn't grasp this at the time, though, and it seems from this point as if Tempe has finally had enough and becomes frustrated with the method of communication.

DUNCAN: Our attempts at allowing him to possess us physically proved pretty lame, although some of the stuff he said when speaking through you seems clear enough.

ALAN: Yeah: 'The basis is to advance, not to stall and wonder... It is done. I'm gone.' He's being pretty explicit. We've spent the most part of this second working wasting his and our time with the pointless speculative occult fantasy.

DUNCAN: Luckily we got mostly back on track in the third working, which was my favourite. This was the one in which Tempe presented us each with three images or aspects of ourselves. Later, we carried out what we regarded at the time as an unrelated magical exercise with the tarot, to examine our karma. It was only later we realised that Tempe had predicted exactly the cards that appeared in our tarot spreads. So in his usual way, he had again underscored the significance of an apparently unrelated event with a huge whack of synchronistic meaning.

ALAN: When I asked him if the six images he'd given us were a symbol of our temple, he replied with the Greek letter *Gamma* and the Latin word '*Felix*'. *Gamma* is the third letter of the Greek alphabet—he gave us *three* images each, remember. *Gamma* is also used to denote a variable in mathematical equations. '*Felix*' means 'happy' or 'lucky'. So what Tempe seems to

A Desert of Roses

be saying is: 'here are three variables related to your happiness'. In other words, he's making it clear from the outset that this is about our respective karma. We didn't know it at the time, but he was showing us what we'd have to deal with post-enlightenment.

DUNCAN: It's as if this time he was determined to keep us on track, and was making it very clear from the outset that he was talking about us and our development. But there was also that puzzling series of images where he showed us the Tao with the Yin and Yang curled together like foetuses, and the line formed where their bodies met forming the profile of an old man, the Holy Guardian Angel. And then the rune PERDHRO.

ALAN: The rune is thought to represent mystery or something hidden. I think now that it was pointing to the discovery of the hidden aspect of the self that is revealed during enlightenment. As for the rest of it, I can think of two interpretations: firstly, that the Tao is the Absolute, expressed through the interplay of youth and age or the life-span of the human being; or secondly, that the foetuses are the past or the beginning, the Tao is the present, and the HGA is the future or end-point of human development. Perhaps this is also a general schema representing the three-part depiction of our karma delivered both by Tempe and the tarot exercise.

DUNCAN: That's quite nice. That makes a lot more sense now.

ALAN: The most important aspect of the communication, however, is of course Tempe's prediction of the bad time we would have after enlightenment, dealing with the habits, perspectives and behaviours based on the separate sense of self that had built up in us over a lifetime. In other words, the way that we would both be forced to deal with our unique karma.

DUNCAN: Yes. In both our cases it was exactly as predicted both by Tempe and the tarot.

ALAN: With the separate self-sense gone and replaced by enlightenment, the conceit of karma becomes blindingly obvious; and yet alongside that, for every second of every day, the newly enlightened human being must endure the seemingly

endless cycling of their frustrated and pointless beliefs and actions.

DUNCAN: For me, it was mostly about doubt and my clinging to the idea that I was still searching for something. Even though it was evident to me that all of that was truly over, at the same time the *habit* of questioning and seeking continued to arise obsessively. At the time, I joked about how, if I weren't enlightened, then enlightenment would be a pain in the arse. But I think there's a lot of truth in that joke! Tempe's depiction of my karma certainly helped me understand and deal with what was happening.

ALAN: Given time, of course, this discomfort subsides, as enlightenment slowly but surely has its effect on the personality, allowing old habits to die eventually and new ones—based on wholeness—to take their place.

DUNCAN: The analogy I'd suggest is of a stick of incense: the experience of emptiness is the saltpetre that keeps the stick burning; enlightenment is the fire; and karma is the stick of incense itself, that slowly gets reduced to ash.

Understanding Actual Freedom

In the Western tradition of enlightenment, known as magick, there is a conceptual tool called the Great Chain of Being that can be used for ascertaining the nature or aims of a teaching or tradition.

The Great Chain of Being can be described as a series of levels of experience that constitute the totality of reality. This is a simple version: physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, non-dual.

With each successive stage (or *holon* as Wilber prefers to call them, because they transcend but include the previous stage) there is a growth in awareness. For instance, a beginner in meditation may at first become aware of the frantic activity of the mind for the first time, and with continued practice will eventually begin to experience spiritual events. Eventually the growth in awareness will reach the non-dual and enlightenment occurs.

This growth or climb up the stages, from the gross to the subtle to the unconditioned, is called *initiation* by magicians, as well as by many other genuine enlightenment traditions.

But not all teachings are really initiatory; some teachings are presented by people who have no experience of real initiation. The symbols, terms and culture of genuine traditions are appropriated by these pseudo-initiates for various purposes—fame, delusions of grandeur, escapism, etc. The New Age scene is a great example of a pseudo-initiatory movement.

Pseudo-initiates are easily spotted because they cannot help ‘confusing the planes’. ‘Confusing the planes’ simply means confusing one level of experience (say the *mental*) with another (say the *non-dual*). When someone thinks an intellectual insight is enlightenment, then they have confused the planes. When someone thinks happiness is enlightenment, then they have confused the emotional level with the non-dual level. I’m sure you can find many more examples.

Pseudo-initiates are prone to confusing the planes, because having no experience of initiation they use terms reserved for the spiritual and non-dual levels to refer to their own limited experience of physical, emotional and mental events.

However, there is something a lot worse than the pseudo-initiate. It’s called a *counter-initiate*.

If genuine initiation is a growth upwards towards the higher levels, and pseudo-initiation is no movement at all (usually stalling at imagination or the mental level), then counter-initiation is actually a movement *downwards*.

Counter-initiation first denies the spiritual, then the mental, then the emotional, eventually reaching just the physical alone. Counter-initiation is pure reductionism and its goal is unconscious oblivion, with the eventual denial of even the physical itself.

Why would anyone desire oblivion? Because it is the imagined ultimate escape from fear. Fear of the world, of other people, reality, and death.

Counter-initiation is a parody of genuine initiation, and confusion of the planes occurs for the counter-initiate as a complete reversal of the levels: the physical becomes the non-dual. Note

how closely this resembles 'emptiness is form' and other non-dual teachings; but the difference here is that the counter-tradition is based on confusion, not clarity; separation, not wholeness.

Certain members of the Dharma Overground—a website dedicated to honest, practical enlightenment—have become proponents of a movement called *Actual Freedom*. To cut a long story short, some of their comments have not been received well by some of their peers. I've decided to examine Actual Freedom in the light of the model of initiation presented above.

Where does Actual Freedom fit?

From the Actual Freedom website:

Actual Freedom offers a third alternative to either remaining 'normal' or transcending the normal by practising an awareness of an 'inner' world to rise 'above it all'. Actual Freedom is an alternative that offers not only the elimination of the self, that lost, lonely, frightened and very, very cunning entity, but the elimination of the Self, that superior God-like spiritual entity as well.

Actual Freedom is to be free to constantly delight in the physical universe, its immediacy, its infinitude and its purity. To be this sensate, sensual body with awareness freed of any psychological entity whatsoever, enabling one to fully live this moment of being alive. At last to be a free autonomous human being, one emerges into this paradisaical fairy-tale physical world where a veritable smorgasbord of sensual pleasures become apparent. With heightened senses one is able to see and experience the actual world as it is without the grey-coloured glasses of 'normal reality' or the rose-coloured glasses of the 'spiritual'. Then and only then one is able to realize one's destiny. Then one is able to be the universe experiencing itself as a sensate human being.²²

A Desert of Roses

Already made your mind up? There's a lot more.

Richard, the founder of this movement, actually states 'Everybody has got it 180° wrong'. So instead of aiming up—as in the usual spiritual quest—we need to turn around and go in the other direction: towards the physical.

Actual Freedom actively denies the spiritual, while attributing the usual descriptions of the benefits of spirituality to the physical level of experience alone. We are told that a purely physical existence will bring freedom, peace, harmony, happiness and compassion (although Richard prefers the term 'harmlessness'). These are all things promised by enlightenment, or realisation of the non-dual.

Furthermore, a moment of being aware of the physical alone is described as a PCE, or 'Pure Consciousness Experience'. So Richard is equating the physical with Consciousness itself! This is another parody of non-dual experience.

Here Richard describes the ego and the soul:

Given that the instinctual animal 'self' in humans has morphed into a sophisticated and cunning psychological and psychic identity that appears to live within the flesh and blood body, it is obvious that the instinctual animal passions can only be eradicated by eliminating both the psychological 'self' and the instinctual 'self'.

The elimination of one's 'self' needs to be total—both 'who' you think you are as a social identity and 'who' blind nature has programmed you to instinctively feel you are ... in spiritual terms, both the 'ego' and the 'soul'. The good news is that with the extinction of who you think and feel you are what you are will emerge—a flesh and blood human being, free of malice and sorrow and free of any metaphysical delusions whatsoever.²³

He equates the ego with the psychological self, but instead of the usual understanding of the soul as a spiritual entity, he claims the soul is nothing but the 'instinctual self'. Here the

soul is reduced to the lower emotional / higher physical level of experience. Again, a complete reversal of the planes.

There are many more examples to be found, but let's skip to the final and ultimate parody of enlightenment itself. What can we expect when the 'social identity has been disempowered' and we are 'actually free'?

One can apperceive prime characteristics that actual freedom factually shows. In psychiatric terms, for example, these are called:

1. 'depersonalisation' (selflessness... the absence of an entity that is called ego and Soul or self and Self).

2. 'alexithymia' (the absence of the affective faculty... no emotions, passions or calentures whatsoever).

3. 'derealisation' (the condition of having lost one's grip on reality... the 'real world' is nowhere to be found).

4. 'anhedonia' (the inability to affectively feel pleasure... no hormonal secretions means hedonism is not possible).²⁴

Depersonalisation is a psychotic parody of no-self. Alexithymia is a psychotic parody of equanimity. Derealisation is a psychotic parody of emptiness. Anhedonia is a psychotic parody of non-attachment.

This is as close to living oblivion as one could hope for: feel nothing, desire nothing, think nothing, imagine nothing.

Survey says...

Actual Freedom is a counter-tradition.

Richard is a counter-initiate.

If you are a practitioner of Actual Freedom, you have been seduced by a parody, and your spiritual development is literally heading in the wrong direction.

Psychosis is not enlightenment.

My advice (like you need it): drop this now, and get back to the good stuff. Theravada, Magick, Sufism, whatever; anything but this crazy shit!

Politics and the Occult

There are many beliefs but only one reality.

Or at least, by claiming reality is singular I mean there's only one venue that can play host to our beliefs. (By all means apply your beliefs to a personal or simulated reality, if you like, but don't expect the rest of us to notice.)

So—our beliefs are applied to a domain of experience that we can share (to a greater or lesser extent) or else our beliefs cannot be seen to have been applied at all. This domain is the consensus reality.

Politics can be viewed as a guardian at the threshold of consensus reality. Politics is a word to describe those processes by which we organise how beliefs are applied or held in abeyance. These processes are how consensual reality is made, and also determine to an extent the content and characteristics of that reality.

Given the close relationship between politics and belief, it's not surprising that occultism has embroiled itself in politics since the beginning—especially politics in its more radical or revolutionary forms, sometimes progressive, sometimes reactionary. Because the occultist doesn't limit his or her experience to the consensus reality, the notion of 'heaven on earth'—or 'enlightenment', if you like—is not just an ideal but a viable proposition. Changing the consensus reality so that others can also find their way to heaven on earth is often one of the main aims of occult politics.

Many who stick to the consensus view regard politics as a kind of meta-belief—that is, as merely a belief itself concerning what other kinds of belief it is appropriate to hold. They suppose that engaging with politics determines our beliefs, which in turn shape our actions, and in this way earth might be brought a step closer to heaven. The occultist, on the other hand, doesn't make a hard and fast distinction between action

and belief. Occultism recognises that adopting a belief is itself an action that reshapes reality—unless you'd like to insist that your mind isn't a part of reality, an absurd notion, which is nevertheless a key tenet of the consensus view. For whoever realises that not only are action and belief indistinguishable, but also reality and whatever we suppose stands 'outside' or 'against' it and seeks to change it, then for that person the work of building heaven on earth is over.

Power Trip

Power is not the definition of politics but merely one of its effects. Consensus reality is the domain of experiences that we can share and agree upon, and power is a word that describes the extent of the ability possessed by an individual or group to shape and define those experiences, relative to other individuals or groups.

Because the occultist recognises realities over and above the consensus, he or she has a quite different relationship to power from a person limited by the consensus view. The occultist recognises that the measure of power is always relative, and therefore has a meaning only in those places where the standard of that measure is agreed upon. (As someone once put it: 'Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's'.) The occultist may indeed seek to acquire and exercise power, in order to reshape the consensus reality in a way that enables others access to the realisation of heaven on earth, but this honourable intention is no safeguard against wrongdoing or harm. Power is the ability to shape the consensus, which inevitably suppresses certain interests whilst advancing others. Power will always have the same kinds of effect on people's lives regardless of who wields it.

History is largely the story of the groups or individuals who have held power and what they have done with it. Conventional history, therefore, is often written in answer to the question: *Who?* But this is a question of marginal importance to occultists, who ask it only as a means for exposing the illusion of identity.

Secret History

Gary Lachman's recent book *Politics and the Occult* (2008) casts interesting light on the relationship between occultism and politics over the past four centuries, but Lachman regards the project of building heaven upon earth from within the consensus view—that is, as largely a matter of *belief*.

The historian's assumption is that occult beliefs arise in reaction to the politics of an era and that their aims go largely unfulfilled. This perspective informs the widely prevalent view within academia that occult and esoteric traditions can be understood through historical analysis. Yet a history of occultism told by occultists would present a radically different view.

Throughout the ages, esoteric groups have attempted different solutions to the question of the relationship between power and the attainment of heaven on earth. Sadly, this is not a solvable problem because the goal of heaven on earth lies outside consensus reality, whereas the sphere over which power can have an influence is entirely within it.

Power and politics are therefore incapable of delivering the New Jerusalem. No doubt, they're important tools for changing consensus reality, but heaven on earth depends upon transcending consensus reality, which would imply either a politics that contradicted its own principles or a power that denied its own authority, neither of which seems very viable in the consensus reality.

In the Seventeenth Century the answer posed by the Rosicrucians was the setting up of a worldwide network of enlightened healers, dedicated to seeking wisdom in all the nations of the world and curing the sick for free. But after the publication of their manifesto, with its invitation to anyone sharing these aims to join in, no further communications were ever received, causing many to conclude that its members were non-existent and the whole movement a hoax.

This view of Rosicrucianism supports the consensus view that belief is determined by politics but is insufficient in itself as a form of action or practice. On the contrary, we should view Rosicrucianism as having been extraordinarily successful, be-

cause anyone seeking to become a Rosicrucian had no option other than to fill the gap opened by the non-existence of the movement. In the 'hoax' of Rosicrucianism was a direct lesson that building heaven on earth proceeds not from espousing belief for its own sake, but only for the sake of simply getting on with the job. There is no separation between act and belief in Rosicrucianism; anyone serious in their belief in Rosicrucianism *was* a Rosicrucian.

Rosicrucianism was a successful political manifestation of occultism because it came so close to actually embodying the paradoxical form of power that is the closest in consensual reality that something could come to transcending that reality. It should be noted, however, that at the time the evident 'non-existence' of the movement attracted much mockery and derision from mainstream culture. Outside the mainstream, meanwhile, Rosicrucianism has remained quietly influential even down to the present day.

By the Eighteenth Century, various forms of Freemasonry had picked up the mantle from Rosicrucianism, yet the political organisation of these occult groups was in a sense almost a mirror image of Rosicrucianism. Instead of 'non-existent' members, we encounter in Freemasonry and its offshoots an image of enlightened beings so mysterious yet so endowed with power that they have become virtually inaccessible to anyone except those with high, elite connections. Unlike the Rosicrucians, groups such as The Bavarian Illuminati weren't ridiculed for not existing, but were feared for existing 'too much'—as invisible networks wielding undue political influence.

In the Nineteenth Century another shift becomes apparent in Theosophy. The largely inaccessible and semi-divine 'Hidden Masters' were still in evidence, pulling the strings of human destiny from their Himalayan hideaways, but (luckily for the rest of us) Madame Blavatsky presented herself as on hand to transmit their wisdom.

The leading figures among the Traditionalist movement of the Twentieth Century, such Julius Evola and René Guénon, organised themselves as a kind of Protestant response to Theosophy's Catholicism, insisting that anyone could access the

A Desert of Roses

Hidden Masters directly for themselves—because Guénon, Evola and company *were* those masters! The Traditionalists presented themselves as an elite band of enlightened leaders, inviting others to participate in their mission of steering the ignorant masses away from the disaster of modernity.

Who's A Nazi?

This last group raises a crucial issue, of course, because of the marked similarity in the way they organised their aim of creating heaven on earth with the way the fascist dictatorships of the time went about organising the consensus reality of Europe. But, as I've argued, politics concerns the processes by which belief is organised in the relative domain of consensus reality and has no bearing on the creation of heaven upon earth, which concerns the absolute.

In my view, the Rosicrucians took a better approach because it was far more subtle, but the elitism of the Traditionalists does not rule out the attainment of their aim. Anyone in doubt should take a look at Evola's *Introduction to Magic* (2001), which still stands as one of the clearest, most direct and culturally diverse books of magical practice ever written. The practices described in that volume certainly work, and most probably did work for those that followed them.

You can call me a Nazi apologist if you like—but you'd be wrong. In fact, I'm an apologist for *occultism*, which was something that Hitler despised, despite rumours to the contrary in the sensationalist literature about the Nazis that sprung up afterwards—much of which has now been debunked (Lachman 2008: 195).

The distinguishing feature of occultism with respect to politics is its refusal to separate action from belief and its recognition of a reality beyond the consensual. From this perspective, using elitism as a tool to bring people closer to the absolute doesn't entail belief that elitism in itself is good, and neither does it hold elitism as a final goal. It does imply, however, a willingness to use that particular tool and an assumption of its usefulness. In these respects the way that the Traditionalists organised their aims was seriously flawed.

Lachman mentions how in the history of the occult we repeatedly encounter ‘good guys saying bad things’ (Lachman 2008: xvi). Having noted in occultism the intentional merging of belief and action, and the observance of realities beyond the consensual, we are in a position to better understand why this is the case.

Good guys said bad things because they sometimes used their bad beliefs to achieve their good aims.

How this reflects on the future of occultism is, of course, difficult to predict. Many occult organisations of the present day are modelled on those of the past, or represent amalgamations of older forms. What seems a fresher departure, however, are those esoteric organisations that have modelled themselves on modern corporations—such as Ken Wilber’s *Integral Institute* or Andrew Cohen’s *Evolutionary Enlightenment*.

Perhaps this is an attempt to shed from esotericism any aura of the esoteric altogether; to repackage the project of heaven on earth as an unthreatening ‘commodity’ that anyone can purchase. But as a tactic, it brings occultism dangerously close to the consensual reality that it must in fact transcend in order to realise itself. It will be interesting to see to what extent this type of organisation succeeds in its aims, and what the consequences in the consensus reality might be. Personally, my expectations are not great.

The Words of the Magi

The following is an interview conducted by Cole Tucker, originally posted on the website Plutonica.net on 18th September, 2009.

COLE: Did you formulate the Core Practice techniques immediately after attaining the Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel (K&C), or did it follow your successful crossing of the Abyss?

ALAN: I attained the K&C using a free-form ritual technique, but I came to develop a simpler method based on Father Thomas Keating’s Centred Prayer as I persisted in invoking the HGA through the years.

A Desert of Roses

COLE: The bare-bones Core Practice described in Alan's essay bears a strong family resemblance to vipassana meditation. Duncan has mentioned a long-standing interest in Buddhism. In your work, each of you pay homage to Daniel Ingram and his fantastic work. At what point did you pick up the links between wisdom traditions and decide to adopt vipassana into your regular practice?

ALAN: I've never adopted vipassana as part of my regular practice, although it was during my crossing of the abyss that I came to realise the same process was described by the Therevada progress of insight model. Later, I discovered the same process described in the Ten Zen Ox-Herding Pictures, the alchemical process, and many other traditions.

DUNCAN: My chaos magical training demanded regular meditation practice, but I'd fallen out with Buddhism ten years beforehand and had not practised since then. I discovered Ingram's work on the Internet and found it absolutely awesome. Suddenly so much dropped into place that had been missing from my engagement with Buddhism a decade earlier. Chaos magic had instilled in me the realization that you can 'just do it', and the practice of magic in general had laid the groundwork for understanding how reality is malleable and constructed from the mind. Ingram's mastery of vipassana was daunting at first, not least because of the intense sensations of envy it aroused in me. But everyone is crap at meditation in the beginning. If you keep at it and do it properly you make progress. The largest part of my practice has been straight-up dry vipassana. It was Alan who took up Ingram's work and showed me the links between it and the other maps of enlightenment, including the A.'.A.'. / Tree of Life model. The realization that the aim of magic is the same as enlightenment I owe to Alan.

COLE: Like Crowley, you each evoked Choronzon during the period of crossing the Abyss. Could you touch on the nature of this entity? Do you think the traditional Abramelin work of calling up the legions of Hell and binding them to the Great Work operates in an analogous manner? Any words of advice or warning for those working towards the K&C?

ALAN: Choronzon can be considered the embodiment of a particular stage within the process of enlightenment known as 'The Spiritual Crisis', the *dukkha nanas* (in Theravada Buddhism), or 'The Dark Night' (in Christian Mysticism). Engaging with the process of enlightenment on a magical basis entails the manifestation of these stages as visions, synchronicities or—in this particular case—as an encounter with an entity. It is not necessary to engage with the process in strictly magical terms, and for the dry meditator he or she need not expect an encounter with Choronzon although they will most certainly experience the Spiritual Crisis. The Abramelin work of calling up the legions of Hell and binding them to the Great Work is something entirely different from the encounter with Choronzon. The binding of the demons can be considered preparatory work in ensuring all aspects of the self are in line with the aim of the magician. Using such a model, this work would take place before reaching the stage of the Spiritual Crisis. Working with Abramelin demons, in my opinion, is neither necessary nor desirable in magically engaging with the process of enlightenment. If anything, they are nothing but a pain in the arse. My advice for people working towards the K&C is to invoke often, don't be scared, and persist.

DUNCAN: You certainly do not need intentionally to evoke Choronzon if you are engaging with the process. He will come. I remember getting hung up on trying to force his appearance—but this was a waste of time. Confusion, disgust with the process, and the certain realization that it is all completely pointless are among the most common and the most powerful manifestations that Choronzon can take. Be especially on your guard against these.

COLE: Your records of attainment for the grades of Magister Templi and Magus are rich and wonderful. I find myself returning to them regularly and find the cutting through the bullshit really refreshing. In the Church of Satan and Temple of Set, each Magus utters a Word which supports that of the current Aeon. I didn't find any mention in your own works regarding this issue, although Alan mentions it in one of his essays (Chapman & Barford, 2009a: 23). Comments?

A Desert of Roses

ALAN: I received a word from my HGA whilst performing the core practice some time during the stage of Magus. This word led to my discovery of the English Qaballah. It encapsulated my definition of magick and would later reveal the function and meaning of *The Baptist's Head*. It perfectly encapsulated the sphere into which I was cast out (see below, p. 140). Reference to this word is found in my magical record.

DUNCAN: My word too was received well into the grade of Magus, during an intense dream in which a horrifying creature appeared. I recognised I was dreaming, mastered the fear and embraced the monster. The dream then continued, and the word was given. It is an archaic Greek word that means 'to deceive'. It appears in Homer, where it is used in a context that reveals its meaning as 'deception' but in a sense very close to 'perception'. It confirmed for me that the source and the destination of my development lies in the Platonic tradition. An account of this is included in my magical record. (See above, pp. 11-14.)

COLE: Onto the controversy! On April 3rd, 2009, the first post on your site Open Enlightenment went up. Correct me if mistaken, but this reflected each of you claiming to have experienced the big one, final enlightenment. To start off, since this event happened after you each completed the tasks of Magus, does this mark the entering of the grade of Ipsissimus? Considering the mythology of the grade in the context of your writings, it seems that maybe this is where the Buddhist practice of morality comes into play. If a task of the Ipsissimus is to get everyone (each rock and grain of dust) into the boat of Enlightenment, then the job is never done and so no living person can claim the grade. Am I just talking out of my ass here?

ALAN: I'm afraid so! Yes, enlightenment proper is the attaining of the grade of Ipsissimus, and accounts of our experience with enlightenment can be found on *The Baptist's Head*, as well as on Open Enlightenment. So yes, you can consider myself and Duncan Ipsissimi (not sure if that is the correct plural!). I'm pretty sure a lot of people will find such claims delusional, insane, impossible or egotistical. I emphatically urge anyone reading this not to believe a single word we say; all I

ask is that you give fair consideration to our records of the process of enlightenment, and repeat the practices we followed to confirm our experiences for yourself, if you are interested in enlightenment. Contrary to more or less everything I bet you've heard on the subject, enlightenment is a very real, natural human development that is not dependent on race, sex, education, wealth, sexual preferences, culture or geographical location. Enlightenment is your birthright as a human being, and you don't have to engage with it on a solely magical basis, or even entertain the pompous sounding titles we've inherited from the 19th Century for the various stages of the process. The Buddhist practice of morality is one of the three trainings undertaken by the Buddhist at the very beginning of his or her practice; it cannot be separated from the other two, concentration and wisdom. The equivalent of an Ipsissimus in the Buddhist model is the arahat, but it would make no sense for an arahat to begin morality training only after enlightenment. Likewise, morality for the Thelemite begins before enlightenment in its form as the expression of the True Will. The grade of Ipsissimus is not defined by Buddhist morality, nor is the task of the Ipsissimus to enlighten everyone and everything. For a definition of the tasks of the various grades of the A.'.A.', please see 'One Star in Sight'.²⁵

COLE: Duncan, I was hoping that we could delve a bit into your magickal background, establish the credentials as it were. In your bio, you mention paranormal experiences as a teenager leading to your first magical experiments. Would you care to expand on that?

DUNCAN: They were nothing too untypical for anyone who dabbles in those areas. Most of it resulted from making and playing with a Ouija board when I was about thirteen. We had spirits giving us messages, objects moving around, some anomalous energetic phenomena.²⁶ The most important aspect of this was that, in later life, those experiences just kept coming back and wouldn't leave me alone. I was trying to settle down into a 'normal' life with a proper job and responsibilities, but how can you do that when you've witnessed for yourself reality refusing to behave in the way that we're told it ought to? That's what fi-

nally determined me to take up magick. I ought to have done it much sooner.

COLE: Once you took up magick, did you move straight into results-oriented work? How did you approach the Goetia? Do you think missing the lion-hide belt spelled disaster, something more basic like neglecting triangle/circle, or just divided Will and poor concentration?

DUNCAN: My first self-consciously magical work was learning how to scry. I bought a picture-frame, painted the glass black, and sat on Halloween night staring into it by candlelight. I had visions of a woman dressed as a priestess and then set off on trying to find out who she was. (The goddess Athena, it turned out.) At the same time I took up Goetia—just because I thought that was what magicians did. My first Goetic working was in order to attract some ‘like-minded people’. Of course, you don’t need to resort to Goetia for something like that—it was a completely stupid and poorly thought-through intent... But a few days after the ritual (the demon manifested as a wailing voice in the wall of my bedroom—which was pretty freaky) I was on an interview panel to select a new software developer at the place where I worked. After the person we chose had started work, I borrowed a CD from him that contained some software—but also a lot of pirated eBooks on magick. It turned out that the person I had selected was deeply into magick and he introduced me to the Chaos Magic scene. I’m still in contact with him; he’s also the person who’s had the most mind-bending results from working with Goetia that I’ve ever come across. But I soon learned from experience that Goetia is ‘leaky’ magic (as another magical colleague brilliantly described it). After the first ritual, a glowering sense of brooding evil lingered in my home for days. Shortly after another ritual, my girlfriend’s hair caught fire. On that occasion, whilst doing the evocation, objects inside the circle started rolling across the carpet—which seemed very evidently a message from the demon that it could ‘get at me’ whenever it liked. I haven’t touched Goetia since, although I confess I have since taken part in group Goetic workings. The problem with Goetia is that it’s simply a shitty magical framework. Why bother working with

entities that *want* to fuck you up, when there are other entities that obviously have your best interests closer to heart?

COLE: Now, you have stated that Alan's success with his HGA working led you to begin your own. Did this decision come as his results were just so interesting or did you feel an existential hole in or revealed by your practice?

DUNCAN: It's difficult to remember now. I don't think I sensed a lack in my practice at the time, because I doubt I'd advanced far enough to be aware of such a thing. I was already getting some interesting results in my own work, including invocations of LAM (see above, p. 19f) according to the instructions provided by the Typhonian OTO. In one of these visions LAM explicitly told me to approach Alan for advice—so I did. When I saw the amazing work he was doing and its results, I followed along. (Thank you, LAM.) The problem with a lot of magicians is that they have big egos and so are always having to convince themselves that they know the best way to do things. But it's so important to recognise people who know more than you do, listen to what they say, and test out their ideas for yourself. It was obvious to me that Alan was onto something important. Daniel Ingram has said that the reason he got enlightened was that he learnt how to follow instructions. And he's another wise old stick to whom I'm very indebted.

COLE: I think your account of attaining the K&C is fascinating, and mirrors my own in a way. You had decided to memorize *Liber Samekh* and work it until you attained, then hit a home run on your first time working through it. Both of our experiences, along with Alan's (and really, many suggestions that Crowley gives), contraindicate the position that attaining the K&C is something only for supermen. Crowley's own experience and his need for multiple attempts adds to this expectation. Did the mythology surrounding the K&C make it difficult for you to accept that the event had actually occurred?

DUNCAN: I didn't use *Liber Samekh*, as such, it was the plain old Bornless Ritual. And I confess to not having much knowledge at all at the time of the traditional procedures.

ALAN: I just assumed that, magick-wise, anything Crowley could do I could do, because he's just a human being.

A Desert of Roses

DUNCAN: Because we had both come up through a Chaos Magick background, you have the expectation that you can get results straight away, regardless of the amount of fuss you make about it. I think that in retrospect this must have helped a lot, because I didn't have the assumption that what I was doing had to be virtually impossible or take a lifetime.

COLE: I had the understanding that after the K&C, I would never have any trouble deciding what to eat for breakfast, whether the girl favoured me or not, and my entire career path would be laid out before me. What do you say to those individuals who would challenge your attainment of the K&C? The OTO is not exactly churning out individuals who have attained the K&C. This in an organization dedicated to Crowley's word and praxis. Do you think this reflects on your claim, or the organization more?

ALAN: First of all, most people who have dealt with the topic entertain a bad model of the K&C usually as a result of a naive view of how magical results manifest. For instance, if I believed that the K&C can only occur as a literally physical manifestation of the HGA in a puff of smoke to address me in a booming biblical voice, possibly in Hebrew, then I would say it is near-enough impossible for anyone to gain the K&C. I can't comment for every member of the OTO, because I haven't met them all, but it's probable that an organisation 'dedicated to Crowley's word' will have bought into Crowley's histrionics on the subject (and many OTO members that I have met have done just that). Sadly, it's my experience that most Thelemites have failed to acknowledge the wonderful contributions of Chaos Magick, leaving them looking somewhat naive when it comes to practical magick. With bad expectations of both magical results and the K&C, it's no wonder that not many Thelemites have even attempted the K&C, and those that have, have failed.

COLE: As you have developed through the stages of Enlightenment, what changes in your Relative abilities have you noticed? I remember the claim that magickal effectiveness gets about 10 times better after the K&C. With your account of the Andrew Cohen seminar (Chapman & Barford, 2009b: 15f), I can't help wondering, do you have the ability of shaktiput

now? Does just being in your presence accelerate others development?

DUNCAN: Magickal effectiveness has improved vastly, but I don't do as much practical sorcery as I used to. Things seem to fall into place more easily on the whole, and there hasn't been as much need. The Absolute takes the place of all that.

ALAN: Working with the HGA is a magical engagement with the process of enlightenment. The biggest lesson for me in gaining the K&C was the revelation that I am not the centre of the universe. It is not the magician that 'does' the HGA but the HGA that 'does' the magician. The egotistical whims of the magician are set aside in favour of the will of the universe. As such, the view of a causal relationship between a magician and his magical results becomes largely redundant. What is normally called 'magical results' certainly increase, but it would be foolish to consider these results as a product of some kind of newly acquired super-powers. Regarding 'shaktiput' or the transmission of enlightenment from one person to another, my comments on the will of the universe apply here too. It is not the case that a person who has experienced enlightenment possesses either enlightenment or the magical power to transmit this experience. Shaktiput is simply a case of intersubjective enlightenment between two or more individuals who are ready and able to experience enlightenment. It's not a question of whether myself and Duncan can 'transmit' enlightenment to others, but whether or not a person is capable of experiencing intersubjective enlightenment.

DUNCAN: Certainly, no one has made any comments to me about any radiance or auras manifesting from my direction.

COLE: Following your claim of experiencing full enlightenment, I noticed quite a furore from the parts of the online Buddhist community that I follow (presumably based upon this). Did the response from these communities, supposedly dedicated to traditions of realization, surprise you?

DUNCAN: Outside of Dharma Overground, I don't tend to follow many Buddhist websites, so the 'furore' was lost on us. The resistance of Buddhists to what seems to me the whole point of their tradition never ceases to amaze. I meditate at a

A Desert of Roses

Buddhist Centre every week, and am constantly a witness to cases of people who have been 'meditating' in this tradition for decades without even a whiff of the first jhana. When I attempt to introduce even the mildest technical terms into discussions, these are shunned or denied. I've not declared my arahatship to people at the centre, but I suppose it'll come out one day. I hope they won't throw me out. So, the short answer is: no, this reaction from self-professed Buddhists doesn't surprise us at all. But by no means all Buddhists share the same view, and we're proud to be friends and allies with many of the ones who don't.

COLE: It seems you continue to receive discouragement from what I'll refer to as the Enlightenment Community. In light of this, I'd like to go back to your criticisms of Western occultism and Chaos Magick in particular. Do you cut any slack to a tradition which allows for individuals within it to attain without it when other groups who claim to support attainment suppress frank discussions about it and often seem to disbelieve in the possibility of attainment?

ALAN: The point of Chaos Magick is not enlightenment but the use of belief as a tool. Chaos Magick is therefore not an enlightenment tradition and so its lack of enlightened practitioners is not comparable to the failings of the enlightenment traditions of the east. It should be noted that Chaos Magick is flexible enough to recognise and accept enlightenment as a real, natural and attainable human experience, being a practice-based tradition. The mainstream examples of Buddhism, yoga and other eastern traditions of enlightenment are, in contrast, examples of dogma. I have never come across an ineffective Sufi lineage.

DUNCAN: We give Chaos Magick a hard time, but we know the chaos magicians can take it! So far, the chaos magicians we've debated with have lived up to the motto of 'nothing is true, everything is permitted', because they've tolerated our criticisms and not thrown us off the scene. I've never come across a more tolerant and intelligent group of people. But, as Alan says, Chaos Magick is not an enlightenment tradition and its affiliation with the tenets of post-modernism has rendered it

narcissistic and egocentric in many respects. It doesn't admit the Absolute, and therefore it doesn't have the means to entertain even the concept of enlightenment—at present.

COLE: The two of you both support experiencing final enlightenment before focusing on engaging the relative. In particular, I'm thinking of Buddhist paths of Morality and Concentration. *The Book of the Law* professes a very different understanding of Morality practice than Old Aeon traditions. Duncan, you mentioned having moved away from practising. Not to pick on you, but you described an ambivalence which continues, though you have experienced enlightenment. What are your thoughts on New Aeon Morality practice? Has the peer-group of Old Aeon practitioners perhaps facilitated this trend? I haven't seen much explicitly addressing these issues on your sites.

ALAN: I know your question is aimed at Duncan, but predictably I have something to say. As someone who is not a Buddhist, I do not ascribe to the 'three trainings', nor do I see morality as a set of rules to be followed. This does not mean that I promote the idea of getting enlightened first and dealing with life later. The morality of *The Book of the Law* is summed up nicely in a single sentence: 'Do what thou wilt'. From the Thelemic viewpoint, morality is a question of acting in accordance with your true nature. Yes, *The Book of the Law* attributes behaviour to the hermit in complete opposition to the traditional view of the ascetic, but this is merely a device to illustrate that enlightenment is not simply the province of celibate troglodytes. It should be remembered that *Liber Legis* is delivered from three distinct perspectives on the same subject; we shouldn't make the mistake of literalism ('stamp down the wretched and the weak', etc.). 'Do what thou wilt' is only realised when we engage with the process of enlightenment, and so the magician begins to exercise Thelemic morality the minute he or she lets go of the reins and allows his or her true will—which is indistinguishable from the will of the universe—to exercise itself unencumbered. Now, it's not in Duncan's nature to get shit-faced and act like a whore; it would just be silly to expect to find him in a purple bed covered in

A Desert of Roses

jewels, with a huge stash of spice in his cupboard. This is simply not his 'will'.

DUNCAN: However, I do own a leopard-skin bedspread... In fact, Alan and I are both sitting on it right now... My own views on morality are that it is something to be *inferred* from actions rather than *applied* to them. Once the true nature of the relationship with the Absolute has been realized, no other view seems tenable because all the 'shoulds' and 'oughts' that divided the self formerly (or seemed to) are now seen for what they are: reactions and sensations arising within the relative. After enlightenment, it's less easy to mistake them for rules or injunctions that appear to proceed *from* the Absolute. For this reason it seems to me to do no harm landing enlightenment as soon as possible, otherwise it's more likely that a model of morality based on an idea of following rules (or, indeed, on breaking them) will persist. This is not free, because any model that bases itself on rules is by its nature cut off from the Absolute and emerges from a divided and false self. Old habits die hard. Enlightenment doesn't destroy anything, so it doesn't make habits go away, but it does make it easier to see them for what they are, and so over time they become easier to deal with.

COLE: In the essay 'Magic with a K' (Chapman & Barford, 2009a: 227), Alan claims that Setianism is a counter-tradition and that it traffics with entities who prohibit the metaphysical process. Correct me if I'm wrong, but I think this comes from the Setian seeking the goal of immortality for what they refer to as the Isolate Intelligence of each individual. In *Uncle Setnakt's Essential Guide to the Left Hand Path* (1999), Don Webb mentions the Setian's quest for enlightenment. Stephen Flowers addresses how Crowley could achieve enlightenment and be a 'Lord of the Left-Hand Path' in his book of that title (Flowers, 1997). If the emphasis on relative immortality is indeed the issue (and if I have misunderstood please explain where I went wrong), at what point is the qualitative line drawn between feeding yourself and providing for one's general needs and one striving for immortality? I think that we agree that certain transitional structures of the relative self are destroyed in the

Enlightenment process, but deep structures of the relative self appear to remain—how else could we continue this discussion?

ALAN: The problem with Setianism, and the viewpoint you give here, is the very essence of the counter-tradition itself: the misunderstanding of enlightenment, or of our essential nature. The idea that the ego has to die, or is somehow destroyed or damaged by enlightenment, is a false belief; but nevertheless, it is a very real fear. We are born believing we are a subject or separate self, and that we must die; the motivation of the Setian is based on a perfectly understandable reaction to this, resulting in doing everything possible to re-enforce the subject, such as investigating the naive hope of physical immortality. But the truth is that we are not subjects or separate, and our essential nature was never born nor can it die. The direct, personal experience of this is enlightenment. Many of our actions, perspectives and behaviours are based on the ignorance of our nature, and the futile wish for immortality, for a self or subject that never existed anyway, necessarily drops with enlightenment. This doesn't mean that we are no longer human with everything that entails; and far from being a 'transcendence' or 'escape' from being human, it is the realisation of an absolute intimacy with all experience: it is the acceptance of everything and the avoidance of nothing. With enlightenment, for the first time in our lives, we can enjoy being human simply for its own sake, just as it is. Also, contrary to what many a supposed 'left hand' magician would have you believe, the difference between the Left Hand Path and the Right Hand Path is one of method, not aim. They both facilitate enlightenment. See Tantra for a valid example of the Left Hand Path.

COLE: As Magi, an essential part of you burns as dust in the City of the Pyramids, but what about the sphere into which your 'Star cast forth to give light to the earth?' Could you tell us more about your sense of mission and plans for the future? Do each of you feel like you shine in the same areas, or do you have complimentary roles? Where does this lead to?

DUNCAN: I had a dream about an organisation called 'AY-IN Waste Disposal' when I went on my first retreat. The path AYIN on the Tree of Life shows that I was cast out into Hod.

A Desert of Roses

I'm an intellectual and literary soul at heart. I'm good at technical crap, little details, and I want to write lots of books about interesting things. My HGA informed me it is an aspect of the archangel Gabriel, who is often associated with communication, healing and the emotions. In one of our Enochian visions (or maybe it was a personal HGA working—I'm not sure) we were told that our future magical destiny involved Alan driving a tank, and myself manning an ambulance that followed in its wake. Make of that what you will!

ALAN: We should be careful not to take the Thelemic model of the process of enlightenment as a literal description of what is experienced. It is metaphor (even though I have seen the various different stages occur during vision), and extremely helpful and accurate at that. But there is no burning of essential parts! 'Casting out into a sphere' is a metaphor for the individual acting in his or her true nature as a result of undergoing the process of enlightenment. The Tree of Life is a complete filing system for any experience or phenomenon one might encounter, and this includes the personality. Generally, my nature fits very nicely under the sphere Geburah, and once I had crossed the abyss, or enjoyed a peak experience of enlightenment, this is the sphere I was 'cast out into'. I'm not afraid of confrontation that results from simply telling the truth. As such, I expect my future to include a lot of abuse from people who don't like what I have to say. I've had it from occultists for saying magick, Crossing the Abyss and the Great Work are not the sole province of 'special people', and I'm currently under attack from Buddhists and the wider 'enlightenment' community for talking about enlightenment as if it was an ordinary, natural experience available to everyone. Bring it on!

EPILOGUE

What is The Baptist's Head?

Back in 2005, three chaos magicians decided to start a podcast, in part inspired by those other podcasting chaos magicians, The Viking Youth.²⁷ A name was required, and coming across the automated prophetic magical head of St. John the Baptist in Grant Morrison's *The Invisibles* (Morrison 1996: 202), I wondered if 'The Baptist's Head' might be appropriate, considering we would be talking about magical matters. Duncan and Shawn liked the name, and so it stuck.

Five podcasts in and Shawn had left, and Duncan and I had found ourselves embarking upon an unexpected and marvelous magical journey. The Baptist's Head became a record of our progress in completing the Great Work of Magick, sometimes known as awakening, realisation, liberation or enlightenment. Just over one year had passed and we had achieved the first traditional big step in reaching our goal (called 'Crossing the Abyss' in the Western tradition, or 'stream entry' in Theravada Buddhism), we had generated enough material for our first book, and it was obvious that the final destination of the Baptist's Head would be our respective awakenings. Traditionally, there is one more big step before full liberation, and I entertained myself with the absurd notion that we might produce another two books, one for each successive year, with the next step and final awakening conveniently occurring within that time frame.

I still can't believe that this is exactly what happened.

If you think that stretches credulity, consider the following: not only did both Duncan and I become enlightened within the same time-frame (we really do have a strange relationship), but our awakenings were predicted a year before during a magical operation undertaken on a whim to contact the Great White Brotherhood, or the One True Body of Saints.²⁸

Early on in my magical progress, I had been identified as 'The Camel', which as far as I was aware simply indicated an animal in service to humanity, and the path of *Gimel* on the Tree of Life that leads to *Kether* the Crown (God). For me, it was also a symbol for Truth, the crux of my new definition of ma-

A Desert of Roses

gick (hence the title of my little book *The Camel Rides Again* [2007], which re-introduced the concept of truth into magick after the extreme relativism of postmodern magick). 'Camel' also played upon Kamael, the name of my Holy Guardian Angel (HGA), and KIMIL, my 'word' (a personal magical formula traditionally revealed during the process of awakening) that incidentally led to my development of English Isopsephy²⁹ and my adaptation of Centring Prayer for working with the HGA.

Up until my enlightenment, my practice had been heavily magical, as the above demonstrates. But with my final awakening, and as predicted by the Great White Brotherhood, I dropped the trappings of tradition and became concerned with the phenomenon of enlightenment as a human event, not a magical or religious one. My priority became presenting the unity of those traditions that all described the same natural, human experience of realisation, and I began the Open Enlightenment project.³⁰

Subsequently, whilst travelling in America, I chanced upon a copy of *The Sufis* by Idries Shah. Turning its pages, everything was suddenly brought full circle:

[T]he Arab mystics, anciently known as the Near Ones (*muqarribun*) ... believed that essentially there was a unity among the inner teachings of all faiths. Like John the Baptist, they wore camel's wool, and may have been known as Sufis (People of Wool)... (Shah, 1971: 28-9)

So I was a 'camel' indeed! Was the original Baptist one as well? It is important to note that (according to Shah) the Sufi is not just an Islamic mystic (Shah even goes so far as to say that Sufism predates Islam), but a true Sufi is anyone who has reached enlightenment, being beyond the confines of any one tradition or religion.

Shah had a lot more to reveal regarding the Head of the Baptist:

In Sufi terminology, *ras el-fahmat* (head of knowledge) means the mentation of man after undergoing refinement—the transmuted consciousness. (Shah, 1971: 254)

As legend has it, the Knights Templar were accused of worshipping a head, sometimes called a 'Baphomet' or 'Bafomet'. Could this be a corruption of *ras el-fahmat*? Or perhaps *bufihimat* (Arabic: *abufihamat*), the 'Father' or 'chief seat of understanding'? It's worth noting that the Arabic root for 'knowledge' or 'understanding' is FHM, the same root for the word 'black':

The Baphomet is none other than the symbol of the completed man. The black head, negro head or Turk's head... is a crusader substitute word... for this kind of knowledge. (Shah, 1971: 255)

The shield of Hugues de Payen, the co-founder of the Templars, carried three black human heads, and the 'wondrous head' theme recurs throughout medieval history. Pope Silvester II made a brazen head, and Albertus Magnus spent thirty years making his marvellous brass head.

However:

The artificial head is not made of brass. Artificial it is, in that it is the product of 'work' [the Great Work] in the Sufic sense. Ultimately, of course, it is the head of the individual himself...

In Arabic, 'brass' is spelled SuFR, connected with the concept of 'yellowness'. The 'head of brass' is a rhyming homonym for 'head of gold', which is spelled in exactly the same way. The Golden Head (*sar-i-tilai*) is a Sufi phrase used to refer to a person whose inner consciousness has been 'transmuted into gold' by means of Sufic study and activity...

The phrase, 'I am making a head,' used by dervishes to indicate their Sufic dedication in cer-

A Desert of Roses

tain exercises, could very well have been used by Albertus Magnus or Pope Silvester, and transmitted in the literal sense, believed to refer to some sort of artefact. (Shah, 1971: 255-6)

So, right from the beginning, and oblivious to our ignorant minds, the Baptist's Head was literally a hidden Western symbol for enlightenment, and our 'building' of the site with descriptions of our magical exploits and progress was none other than the making of our own 'heads'!

The final synchronicity here is the fact that the magical organisation that introduced me to Duncan, and thereby inadvertently led to the Baptist's Head project, has as its patron the 'spirit of the life energy of our planet', depicted in a composite form of man / mammal / reptile (sometimes known as the Sabbatic Goat) and called *Baphomet*.

I'm at a loss to describe exactly how all of this occurred, but ultimately it doesn't matter. What matters is: when are *you* going to make a Baptist's Head of your own?

Notes

1. Poe (1838), chapter 24.
2. *Feu*: French: fire, light; *feo*: Spanish: ugly, plain; *foy*: Scots: a farewell feast, drink, or gift, as at a wedding, from Old French *voie*, from Latin *via*, road. Light on an ugly road? A 'Road to Damascus' experience?
3. *Elephairo*, Ancient Greek, 'to deceive'. E. Cobham Brewer, *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* (1898). The significance of this word is discussed further in the main article, below. In Greek Qabalah *ελεφαιρο* enumerates to 5 + 30 + 5 + 500 + 1 + 10 + 100 + 70 = 721 = 'star' = 'shaft, stem'.
4. See article 'The Cross Correspondences', p. 80f.
5. See Chapman & Barford (2009a), p. 297f.
6. After doing some research I've determined that the material cause for this may have been the action of ice-crystals in the atmosphere.
7. See article 'The Twittergatha', p. 32f, for other tweets I wrote at and around this time.
8. See Chapman & Barford (2009a), p. 65.
9. See Chapman & Barford (2009b), p. 137f.
10. Vincent Horn is the originator and host of the *Buddhists Geeks* website and podcast.
11. See Chapman & Barford (2009b), p. 31-33.
12. See article 'The Tempe Working Explained', p. 109f.
13. See Chapman & Barford (2009b), p. 190-1.
14. A conference held at Conway Hall, London, on 6th September, 2008.
15. See Chapman & Barford (2009b), p. 282f.
16. See Chapman & Barford (2009b), p. 380f.
17. See Carington (1976) and Heywood (1978) for more on Carington's research and its position in the history of parapsychology.
18. See Mansfield (1995) for an in-depth investigation of synchronicity and criticism of Jung.
19. Known as 'The Upanisa Sutta' or 'The Discourse on Supporting Conditions'. See Bhikkhu Bodhi (2010).
20. See <http://tinyurl.com/3yflnch21> (interactivebuddha.com).

A Desert of Roses

21. See: <http://www.openenlightenment.org>.
22. <http://tinyurl.com/2ffnypr> (actualfreedom.com.au).
23. <http://tinyurl.com/2cjpyzv> (actualfreedom.com.au).
24. <http://tinyurl.com/25q64dk> (actualfreedom.com.au).
25. This text by Crowley and its significance was discussed in Chapman & Barford (2009a: 210f).
26. These experiences are discussed in detail in Barford (2010).
27. At the time of writing (June, 2010) The Viking Youth seem to have fallen silent and haven't produced a podcast in over a year. Their website: <http://www.thefeedlot.org>.
28. This was, of course, 'The Tempe Working'. The working itself is documented in *The Urn* (Chapman & Barford, 2009b) and its results examined in the present volume, p. 104f.
29. Or 'English Qaballah'. See Chapman & Barford (2009b), p. 215.
30. See <http://www.openenlightenment.org>.

References

- Barford, Duncan (2010). *Occult Experiments in the Home: Personal Explorations of Magick and the Paranormal*. London: Aeon.
- Bodhi, Bhikkhu (2010). 'Transcendental dependent arising: a translation and exposition of the Upanisa Sutta'. <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/bodhi/wheel277.html> (accessed June 2010).
- Borges, Luis Borges (1985). 'Nightmares'. In: *Seven Nights*. Translated by Eliot Weinberger. New York: Norton.
- Brewer, E. Cobham (1898). *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*.
- Carington, Whately (1976). *Thought Transference*. New York: Creative Age Press.
- Chapman, Alan (2007). *The Camel Rides Again: A Primer in Magick*. Brighton: Heptarchia.
- Chapman, Alan (2008). *Advanced Magick for Beginners*. London: Aeon.
- Chapman, Alan & Duncan Barford (2009a). *The Blood of the Saints*. Brighton: Heptarchia.
- Chapman, Alan & Duncan Barford (2009b). *The Urn*. Brighton: Heptarchia.
- Crowley, Aleister (1974). *The Book of Thoth*. York Beach, ME: Weiser.
- Evola, Julius, and the UR Group (2001). *An Introduction to Magic: Rituals and Practical Techniques for the Magus*. Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions.
- Flowers, Stephen E. (1997). *Lords of the Left-Hand Path*. Runa-Raven Press.
- Heywood, Rosalind (1978). *The Sixth Sense*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Ingram, Daniel (2008). *Mastering the Core Teachings of the Buddha*. London: Aeon Books.
- Ingram, Daniel (2010). 'An essay about arahats'. <http://www.interactivebuddha.com/arahats.shtml> (accessed June, 2010).

A Desert of Roses

- Koestler, Arthur (1974). *The Roots of Coincidence*. London: Pan Books.
- Lachman, Gary (2008). *Politics and the Occult: The Left, The Right, and the Radically Unseen*. Wheaton, IL: Quest Books.
- Mansfield, Victor (1995). *Synchronicity, Science and Soul-Making*. Chicago & La Salle, IL: Open Court.
- Moore, Alan & J.H. Williams (2003). *Promethea: Book 2*. Titan Books.
- Morrison, Grant (1996). *The Invisibles: Say You Want a Revolution*. New York: DC Comics.
- Poe, Edgar Allan (1838). *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*.
- Powers, Tim, Gwen Lee & Doris Elaine Sauter, eds. (2006). *What If Our World Is Their Heaven? The Final Conversations of Philip K. Dick*. London: Duckworth.
- Roy, Archie E. (2008). *The Eager Dead: A Study in Haunting*. Brighton: Book Guild Publishing.
- Shah, Idries (1971). *The Sufis*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Tyson, Donald (1997). *Enochian Magic For Beginners*. Woodbury MN: Llewellyn.
- Vayne, Julian (2008). *Magick Works: Stories of Occultism in Theory and Practice*. Oxford: Mandrake.
- Webb, Don (1999). *Uncle Setnakt's Essential Guide to the Left Hand Path*. Runa Raven Press.
- Woolley, Benjamin (2002). *The Queen's Conjuror: The Life and Magic of Dr Dee*. London: Flamingo.
- Zohar, Dana (1990). *The Quantum Self*. New York: Quill/William Morrow.

INDEX

- Abramelin 128-9
 absolute, the 95f (see also: 'Emptiness').
 abyss, the 21, 89.
 Actual Freedom 117.
 Adversary, The 107 (see also: 'NONE').
 Aeneas 13.
 aethyr 39, 44f.
 Alexithymia 121.
 aliens 67-8, 111.
 anagami 23, 92.
 Andaman Islands 63, 113-114.
 Anderson, Reb 28.
 angels 11.
 arahat 35, 93.
 Arunachala Ramana 56f, 106-7, 111.
Ask The Family 16.
 Association of Ideas, The 71.
 Athena 132.
 Aurobindo 52.
 Auroville 55.
 automatic writing 40.
- Balfour, Arthur James 82f.
 Balfour, Gerald 83f.
 Baphomet 145.
 Bavarian Illuminati, The 125.
bene elohim 11.
 Black Brotherhood 78f, 107f.
 Blavatsky, Helena Petrovna 125.
Book of the Law, The 137.
 Borges, Jorge Luis 13-14.
 Buddhism 91f, 97f, 131, 135-6; Therevada 128; Zen 128.
 Byzantium 110-1.
- caesar 62.
 camel 143-4.
 Carington, Whately 69f.
 Casaubon, Meric 86.
 casting out 139-40.
 cathedral 108-9.
 centred prayer 127.
 chakra 23, 25, 30f, 34.
 chaos magick 128, 134, 136-7.
 Choronzon 39f, 128-9.
 cobra 49.
 Cohen, Andrew 53, 127.
 compassion 30.
 confusing the planes 109.
 consciousness 36.
 Coombe-Tennant, Henry Augustus 83f.
 Coombe-Tennant, Winnifred ('Mrs. Willett') 83f.
 core practice 127-8.
 counter-initiation 118.
 Cross Correspondences, The 80f.
 Crowley 19, 44, 75, 85-6, 133, 134.
- Daoism 75.
 Dark Night, The 129.
 Dee, John 84f.
 Delusion 92, 96-7.
 demon 50, 71-2.
 depersonalisation 121.
 derealisation 121.
 Dharma Overground, The 119, 135.
 doubt 34-5.
 dragon 48, 63.
- ecstasy 78f.
elephairo 12f.
 Emptiness 23, 25-6, 28-9, 32, 54, 89-90, 121 (see also: 'The Absolute').
 enlightenment 7-8, 21f, 36, 60f, 95f, 135f, 144.
 Enochian 85.
 equanimity 121.
 ESP 87.
 Evola, Julius 125-6.
- '555' 113.
 Flowers, Stephen 138.
 Freemasonry 125.
 fruition 46.
- Gaia House 27f.
 Ganesha 57, 62.

A Desert of Roses

- gnome 51, 62.
God 36.
Goenka, S.N. 76-7.
Goetia 132.
Grant, Kenneth 19.
Great Chain of Being 117.
Great Work, The 89f.
Gurney, Edmund 14, 80f.
- Harpocrates 19.
head (of the baptist) 144f.
Heracles 48.
Heru-pa-khered 19-20.
Holy Guardian Angel, The 22, 39f, 89, 114-6, 140; Knowledge and Communication of 127f.
Hidden Masters 125.
history 123f.
Homer 12-13, 130.
Horn, Vincent 51.
Horus 20.
- India 47f, 113.
Ingram, Daniel 93, 103, 128, 133.
initiation 188.
intention 28-9.
Ipsissimus 80, 130-1.
- Jehovah's Witness 33.
jhana 24.
Jung, Carl Gustav 72f.
- 'K'-object 70f.
karma 28f, 35, 87f, 115f.
Keating, Thomas 127.
Kelley, Edward 84f.
ketamine 44f.
Knights Templar 145.
Koestler, Arthur 72.
Krishnamurti, Jiddhu 86, 88.
- Lachman, Gary 124, 127
LAM 19f, 133.
Lao-Tzu 19, 21.
Left-Hand Path 138-9.
Lyttleton, Mary 83.
- magick 90, 96.
Magnus, Albertus 145-6.
magus 139; the word of 130.
Marx, Harpo 19.
Matrimandir, The 54-55.
Moore, Alan 19.
morality 137-8.
Morrison, Grant 143.
Mother, The 54.
Myers, Frederick 14, 80f.
- Nazism 126.
nerodhi samapatti 24, 94.
nidana 97.
Nishida Kitaro 35.
no-self 121.
'NONE' 107 (see also: 'The Adversary').
- Obi 39f.
Occultism 122-3.
Odysseus 13.
Open Enlightenment 8, 130.
OTO 134.
ouija 131.
- paranormal 131-2.
Payen, Hughes de 145.
Penelope 13.
Poe, Edgar Allan 11.
politics 122f.
Postmodernism 96.
power 123f.
prophet 114.
pseudo-initiation 118.
psi 68f.
psychosis 121.
psychotherapy 91f.
Pure Consciousness Experience (PCE) 120.
- Qaballah (English) 47.
- Ramana Maharshi 50, 54, 55f.
reality 17, 122.
remote viewing 70.

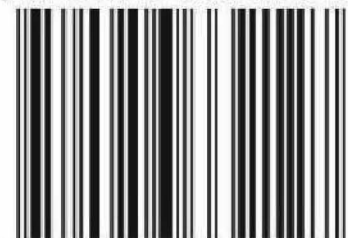
- René Guénon 125-6.
Rhine, J.B. 69.
Rosicrucianism 124f.
Roy, Archie E. 82.
- sakadagami 93.
salvia divinorum 14f.
samadhi 52.
samatha 36.
Satan, Church of 129.
scarab 73.
self 76f, 95, 120.
Set, Temple of 129.
Setianism 138-9.
sex magick 85.
Shah, Idries 144f.
shaktiput 134-5.
Shiva 48, 49.
siddhi 90.
Sidgwick, Henry 14, 80f.
Silvester II (Pope) 145-6.
Soal, Samuel 69-70.
Society for Psychical Research (SPR)
69, 80f.
solipsism 36.
Spare, Austin Osman 75.
Sufism 144f.
swallow 114.
synchronicity 72f, 112.
- tarot 49-50, 54, 103-5, 115.
Tempe 7, 28, 104f.
Thelema 131.
Theosophy 86.
Titmuss, Christopher 22f, 34.
Traditionalism 126.
trance 45.
transcendental nidanas 100f.
transmission effect 56 (see also:
'shaktiput').
Tree of Life 97f.
Tubeway Army 26, 34.
Tucker, Cole 127f.
Twitter 21, 32f.
- UFO 67-8.
universe 46.
- Vayne, Julian 76f.
vedana 94.
Viking Youth, The 19, 143.
Virgil 12-13.
Vivekananda 50.
- Webb, Don 138.
wei wu wei 75.
Wheel of Life 98.
White Brotherhood 107f.
Wilber, Ken 127.
World Egg 55.
- Xepherite 78.
- Yemen 110.
YouTube 18.
- zipper 15f.

**Baphomet initiation The Great Chain of
Being karma Ganesha doubt The Cross
Correspondences salvia divinorum self
Rosicrucianism enlightenment Aurobindo
Thomas Keating sufism Daoism psi arahat
compassion core practice reality UFO vedana
wei wu wei the wheel of life Theosophy ouija
The Knights Templar Ramana Maharshi Shiva
nidana Idries Shah emptiness psychotherapy
John Dee shaktiput Edward Kelley fruition
Hidden Masters gnome S.N. Goenka ecstasy
Whately Carington The Bavarian Illuminati
The Absolute aethyr Arunachala Ramana SPR
Christopher Titmuss Abramelin Harpocrates
left-hand path Frederick Myers Krishnamurti
Zen bene elohim The Association of Ideas**



Heptarchia

ISBN 978-0-9563321-2-7



9 780956 332127

Cover design by Julia Ingle
Philosophy / Occult / Magick