Essays from Beyond the Stars
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On Astrology

Introduction

Since I’m an astrologer with two decades of professional experience who has written and published a large astrological textbook, one might assume that I must therefore be an expert on everything concerning astrology. Nothing could be further from the truth. Astrology is a diverse discipline, covering a wide range of topics, each of which has its own philosophies and techniques.

While I admit to a time long ago back in the stone age of the early 1970s when I fantasized becoming the “World’s Foremost Authority on Astrology,” that delusion didn’t last more than a couple seasons before I realized I had my own peculiar path to follow, and that astrology was simply a tool I would shape to my own device — an important tool, without question, but nonetheless, just one of a number of different ways of looking at the universe that I would need to seek out, understand, and use. Soon it became obvious that, with regard to astrology, I would take what I needed and ignore the rest.

10,000 sessions later, I have remained faithful to my realization, my “cut and paste” approach to astrological systems and techniques. My interests have become clearer, and as they clarified, my study, thinking, and experience with astrology formed itself around my own particular needs, both as a person and as a professional.

In fact, one of the qualities that drew me to astrology in the first place was the almost total lack of cultural organization surrounding it. Ever since my first year of college, I’ve been something of a lone wolf. When told to put on a white lab coat and count the number of times a rat pressed a lever to get a pellet of food, my response was, “Thanks, guys, but no thanks.” As far as I’m concerned, everything is open to study; I believe there are no taboo subjects, so anyone who
wants to scientifically probe the depths of behavioralism should certainly work out to his heart’s content. That particular direction, however, was not really of any interest to me. So I headed off in my own direction and have continued that way ever since.

A significant motivation for my studying astrology was the fact that no one would be looking over my shoulder, telling me what I had to know, what I could and couldn’t do with my knowledge. Astrological organizations exist, of course — the American Federation of Astrologers (AFA) and the National Council for Geocosmic Research (NCGR), to name two of the largest — but they don’t carry the authoritative clout of the American Medical Association or the National Football League to monitor their respective practitioners.

So I was free to go my merry way, pursuing precisely what I wanted to pursue, namely, the use of astrology as a language: a multi-layered, interconnected set of symbols that could describe the characteristic psychological ways individuals grow through and perceive their worlds, revealing the machinery of their personalities and the essence of their life-purposes.

In the area of my specific ambitions, I’ve succeeded fairly well in mastery of the system. There is always more to learn, of course, and I continue to reform and refine my understanding, but generally speaking, I consider myself expert in the astrological areas of my personal interest. And in gaining my expertise, I’ve become familiar with many other levels of astrological technique. Familiarity, however, is not the same as expertise, and astrology is a diverse enough discipline that much of it extends beyond the scope of my interest and study.

**specialists versus generalists**

No one expects a podiatrist to be an expert on the latest developments in cancer research. No one expects a psychologist to be an expert on the newest techniques in heart surgery. No one expects an endocrinologist to be an expert on the philosophy of geriatrics. Sure, they’re all professional doctors, and yes, they all passed through a general education in medicine, but both their disciplines and their particular experience are highly specialized.

Curiously, however, when people learn that I’m a professional astrologer, most of them tend to presume that I will be expert in every area in astrology. Perhaps they assume that astrology is unbelievably simple (certainly a reading of the popular press would suggest that people imagine this to be so…). Well, astrology is not simple. On the contrary, it is as sophisticated and complex as any other psychological science. So I cannot claim to be the “astrological answer-man.”

On the other hand, I have been at this business for two decades now, nearly half my life, and — with regard to astrology at least — I know the difference between my ass and a hole in the ground, as the pundit once said.
questions, questions, questions...

Naturally, I field a lot of questions. Both the questions themselves and the issues they cover come in every conceivable variety. Some are laughably misinformed and nonsensical (“...what does it mean to have Virgo in Taurus?”), others arise out of the mass-mind media of astrology-as-entertainment (“...can Leos get along with Aquarians?”), and many involve considerations of technical interpretation (...“does a Venus-Saturn square indicate the possibility of being an incest victim?”). Often the questions contain philosophical or metaphysical assumptions that have little to do with astrology per se. In fairness, however, almost everything I’m asked is very sincere.

The answers to the questions are a whole different kettle of fish. Much of the time people are looking for one definitive answer, and since astrology is so diverse and multi-leveled, there is rarely only a single response to any specific question. That’s a problem. I have to figure out which answer people are looking for. Then too, many questions can be answered with a simple “yes” or “no,” but that usually doesn’t provide any real understanding of the issue, so I have to figure out just how much the questioner truly wants to hear.

Often, I know the answer to a specific question but cannot convey it because the questioner doesn’t have enough experience or familiarity with “astrological thought processes” — the philosophies and techniques of my discipline — to understand the answer. Other times, I don’t really have the “answer” to a certain question about astrology, but because I am well-educated and reasonably facile with words, I sound like I do. As often as possible, when I don’t know the answer, I admit that I don’t know.

Many of the questions I’m asked concerning my discipline come up time and time again, and the issues they address seem to reflect enduring areas of general interest. I’d like to address in this essay some of the topics that recur in the minds of many people I meet — clients, friends, students, and other bemused observers investigating the mysteries of life.

The explanations that follow should not be understood as the last word on any of these issues. They are my opinions, relevant to my particular experience, and based on my peculiar interests and biases. It’d be nice to keep that in the back of your mind as you read...

what is a horoscope?

An astrological horoscope — usually called a “chart” — is a map of certain celestial bodies measured with respect to any of a number of astronomical and earthly frames of reference. The word itself comes from the Greek, *hora* (hour)
plus skopos (watcher) — literally, an “hour-watcher.” Generally, charts are circular and two-dimensional (flat), although the realities they represent are technically three-dimensional.

Charts come in many different varieties, but the kind I deal with day-to-day, the ones that form the bulk of my work with clients, are called “birth charts” or “natal charts.” As used most often in western culture astrology, a natal chart is a map of the major bodies in our solar system as they appeared at a certain moment from a certain location on the earth, namely the birth-moment and birth-place of a given individual.

Depending on the drafting skills, artistic bent, or computer program of a particular astrologer, the graphic diagram of a natal chart can look very exotic, filled as it is with arcane symbols, colored lines and the like. Suffice it to say, however, that there is nothing mysterious about the chart itself; it is an accurate mathematical representation, with technical symbols used to represent lines of demarcation, major bodies, abstract points of significance, and geometric relationships between those various factors. An astrological chart is no more occult than a chemical formula on a blackboard.

**what does the chart represent?**

A natal chart is a blueprint of the individual’s life-to-come. It reveals, in symbolic terms, the machinery of intention and perception through which the person will create a sense of humanness, as well as a relatively unique psyche and personality.

In a very real sense, looking at a natal chart is like looking at the blueprint of an automobile. The chart doesn’t “say” anything, any more than a car’s blueprints say anything. We provide all the interpretation. We have to understand the basic symbology of astrological blueprints, and then we have to look at the diagram with sensitive and trained eyes.

Based on a knowledge of the structural factors involved, astrologers study a natal chart to discover the basic components of design — form and function. We want to figure out what this human vehicle is designed for, what the designer had in mind when the blueprint was created. We want to imagine how it feels to “sit behind the wheel” of this particular human machine, what it must be like to drive.

So when I’m sitting with a client who’s come for a session, as I’m listening to the story of his or her experience in life, I’m studying the basic blueprint of the life-machine, striving to connect what’s said with what I see in the basic abstract design. The process involves active listening combined with precise, focused observation, and I’m funneling all my perceptions through certain basic questions that circulate through my mind: Why does this chart (and, more importantly, the person I’m sitting with) exist in the first place? What is the
purpose of the human machinery in the blueprint? What needs are fulfilled? What can the driver expect from the machine in terms of performance? How must the vehicle be used by the driver to get maximum efficiency out of the design? What should the driver understand about the idiosyncrasies or paradoxes of the machinery?

To use somewhat over-simplified and comical terms, if I’m doing a session with someone and I see from the blueprint that the fundamental design revealed by the natal chart is that of a Formula One Ferrari, I won’t tell the person to take it for a Sunday drive in the country with the family. On the other hand, if the chart looks like your basic Chevy Station Wagon, I won’t recommend entering it in the Indianapolis 500.

I think of myself as a kind of “mechanic of the soul,” someone who analyzes, diagnoses, and makes recommendations to people on how to better operate and maintain the psychological machinery they’re driving toward individual fulfillment in experience, creativity, sharing, and learning.

**is accurate birth-time important?**

Yes, it’s very important. If we really want to work with the system, we need to know the time of birth accurately, to within ten or fifteen minutes. Obviously, people born on the same day, month, and year share certain fundamental tonalities of perception, but the variation within any given day from hour to hour is truly dramatic. The charts of two individuals born in the same city just hours apart have completely different life-directions and purposes.

There are instances that arise in my work where birth-time is unknown. Often I’ll be exploring a significant relationship for some client — a lover, parent, or friend — and the only available information about the other person is birth-date and year. No birth-time. In those situations, I can still discern the major interconnections between the charts, at least in rudimentary fashion, but I must rely on my intuition to supply all the details.

Charts without birth-times are a lot like songs without melodies. We can see the basic chord structure, we can hear the rhythm of the piece, but it’s the melody that makes each song special and unique, and we can’t get at the melody astrologically without the time of birth.

**what’s not in the chart?**

There are many levels of life we can’t see in charts. We can’tdependably predict the economic level of cultural origin, for instance. Whether a person’s initial family is rich or poor, culturally exalted or impoverished, is simply not indicated by the chart itself. We can see how a person experienced his family’s
wealth and position, whether he felt wealthy or not, but we can’t determine the 
objective level of cultural background. Nor is one’s formal religious training 
something we can use charts to discern. Again, we can see the individual’s 
natural bent toward religion, and we may be able to suggest an ideal religious or 
spiritual framework, and once we know the actual conditions of religious 
training, we can form opinions about the person’s characteristic way of 
imprinting on or reacting to his exposure, but we can’t literally discern what the 
objective conditions were.

An extreme example of what we cannot see in a chart is biological sex. If 
we’ve got just a chart without a name, there’s no way to tell whether the person 
is male or female. That’s simply not a chart factor. We can see a great deal about 
how the individual will develop and use sexuality or gender roles in living, but 
we can’t tell the person’s actual sex. For that, we need a source of information 
beyond the chart. I can’t look at a chart and tell whether a person has blue or 
brown eyes, whether he likes or dislikes ravioli, whether she has a high or a low 
IQ. Some astrologers maintain that they can see these things in a chart, but I 
can’t.

All in all, a great many basic and significant aspects of life are not defined by 
arrology, at least for me. Perhaps the most important dimension I find lacking in 
charts is the consciousness of the designer/driver of the human vehicle, the 
Spirit itself.

who is the designer?

As a professional astrologer (and also as a person), I assume that somewhere 
within each of us exists a level of knowing and awareness far beyond the 
ordinary self of personality, beyond the ego, beyond the conscious “I.” Different 
people use different terms for this Self-that-Knows: Spirit, Soul, Higher Self. 
Whatever we choose to name it, this Knowingness is woven invisibly and 
intangibly into the very fabric of each of our human selves. It’s not “GOD” in the 
ultimate, universal sense, being far too personal for that, too focused on and 
linked with this particular individual human being. This knowing part of each of 
us is the “Designer” of the chart I have in front of me, the One who chose (or, at 
least, agreed to live through) this life. That intention is revealed by the natal 
chart, the symbolic blueprint of the human vehicle of personality.

The problem is that the Designer of the human vehicle is often not the same as 
the Driver, and that’s where the information from astrological charts can be 
helpful.
who is the driver?

How would feel if you bought a sophisticated computer for your business, but when you opened the box and unpacked the various components, you found no operating instructions? If you were the designer of the computer, you wouldn’t need an instruction manual, for you’d know how to put it together, how to operate it, and how to repair it when it glitched. But if you were just an ordinary consumer, you wouldn’t know the first thing about how to assemble the components, much less how to operate the computer once assembled. You’d feel lost, frustrated, and ripped off.

Being human is somewhat the same situation. We “awaken” at birth into these incredibly sophisticated, very unique machines — human bodies, where, despite their generic similarity, yours is vastly different from mine in the particulars of spiritual design, form, function, and purpose. We awaken into our bodies only to discover that there is no operating manual in the box. Genetic codes exist, of course, to provide the machine language of the central processing unit, but where is the operating software? Where is the coherent interface that makes sense of the instructions? These bio-machines could hardly be called “user-friendly.” Not only are there no instructions for using our bio-computers, but we’re forced to begin using them before they’re even fully assembled.

Where this and all such mechanistic metaphors break down is in the relation of the machinery to the user. For human beings, the separation between biology and consciousness is obscure. Our sentience does not apparently exist independent from our bodies, at least insofar as we can measure. The symbiosis between awareness and corporeality is so utterly interwoven that no clear boundaries can finally be drawn.

Consider the ramifications if the Designer and Driver of the human vehicle were plainly one and the same consciousness. The driver would always know the designer’s intentions. This is a perfect solution for a simple, easily-driven vehicle. But for a complex vehicle that will be driven in an endlessly challenging environment, perhaps a different allocation of energies is required. Human beings are such complicated vehicles, and the earth is that endlessly challenging environment. All our awareness has been reserved for driving the vehicle, since sometimes just keeping it on the road is more than we can manage. Where we’re headed, and why we’re headed there, are secondary concerns in the pragmatic hierarchy of life, even though they are ultimately of primary spiritual importance. In ordinary life, we are not naturally aware of the Designer. With the “unnatural” advent of true maturity, however, we may remember at least part of our connection with the Designer.

The blueprint of the human vehicle — the natal chart — does not contain any indications about consciousness. Yes, the “signature” of the Designer is implicit
in the diagram, but charts don’t run themselves. The Driver makes the choices about where to go and what to do and who to be with and how to live.

When I do an initial session with a new client, the first thing I try to discover has absolutely nothing to do with the chart. I sit with the person and talk conversationally, listening carefully as I refer to the basic blueprint. I need a “feel” for how in touch this person is with the basic design of his or her vehicle. I’ve got to answer the question: what consciousness is behind the wheel of this human life? In other words, who’s driving?

Once I’ve made contact with the Driver, then the whole purpose of a session becomes the attempt, through shared conversation, to reconnect the “awareness” of the Driver with the “Consciousness” of the Designer.

why do people come for sessions?

$60 an hour isn’t exactly chopped liver and cream cheese, so why would people want to spend their hard-earned money having a session with me? The superficial reasons are all variations on the same theme. My clients have a problem, or a crisis, or a decision to make. They’ve come to a crossroads and aren’t clear about which direction will lead them where they want to go; or they’re speeding down the highway of life, going so fast they’re getting nervous about their brakes; or their vehicle’s broken down and is sitting by the side of the road, and they need a tow, or a gallon of gas, or a jump start. Often there’s no apparent “problem” at all, but their road map is getting dog-eared and hard to read, and seeing me is a little like buying a crisp, new, updated map. Since human lives don’t come with instruction manuals, each one of us has to create our own “road map” for living, and we all get wrapped up in creating, refining, and reading our own maps. Sometimes keeping clear in our lives gets to be a bit much.

Have you ever been driving across the country, peacefully breezeing down the interstate, and you miss a turn somewhere and end up dumfounded on the outer loop of some strange major city, whizzing through congested rush hour traffic, headed for God knows where? I have. And inevitably, you’re almost out of gas, and the starter’s acting up so you better not kill the engine, and the coffee on the dashboard just spilled into your lap, and the guy behind you is coming up in the rear view mirror at 70 miles an hour, and it’s snowing so the windshield wipers are just making a mess because you forgot to change them last tune-up, but it doesn’t matter because your defroster’s on the fritz and even if you could see past the gook on the windshield, the inside’s all fogged up anyway. The sun’s gone down and your interior light doesn’t work, so you’re sitting there soaking with cold coffee in your lap trying to hold the flashlight with the faulty switch as you struggle to unfold the goddamned map, which is upside-down, of course, and may not even be for the right city, and you can’t see out the windshield to look for the exits, and the whole time you’re trying to drive the damned car at 65
miles an hour to keep from being rear-ended by the frenzied commuters all around you.

It’s in moments like these — moments that everyone routinely suffers through in one form or another — when we want to say, “TIME OUT!”

Having a session with me is a lot like calling Time Out from real life for a couple hours. It’s a chance for my clients to catch their breath, even though I don’t solve anybody’s problems. In fact, I don’t really even care about anyone else’s problems — shoot, I’ve got problems of my own. When I’m working with a client, however, I always try to isolate paradoxes of perception, feeling, or circumstance in that person’s life. I listen for the quiet hysteria under the surface, the invisible desperation or helplessness, the blank spots of confusion or lifelessness. Although they may look, feel, or sound the same, a profound difference exists between “problems” that represent appropriate, true challenges in someone’s life, and “problems” that represent symptoms of deadened sensitivity or lowered vitality. What I’m hunting for are “holes in the bucket,” those subtle areas in our brains and hearts where the Driver has lost contact with the Designer, like being disconnected from God.

Once isolated, the problems themselves are usually red herrings. They are a means to an end, something for us to talk about and fill the space of sharing so I can get on with the real effort of my work, which is helping the Driver get back in touch with the Designer.

By the time people come to see me as adults, they’ve already arrived at countless crossroads in their lives. They’ve had to make millions of subtle decisions about how to drive their vehicles, and every choice opens one level while closing another. The record is written in their faces, their bodies, contained in the radiance of their emotions and the semantics of their speech. But I’ve got to know how to see and how to listen, for words and feelings can be as deceptive as they are revealing.

The various astrological tools of my trade — natal charts, relationship comparisons, composite charts, transit cycles moving through time, Sabian symbols, etc. — all help me to see and listen more clearly. They guide me quickly past the surface face of personality to the interior of being. Once inside, I’m aided by these tools in the work of reconstructing neural circuitry and reawakening the heart. This is delicate, intangible surgery, and I can do it only with the cooperation of my client. Sessions with me are not passive encounters; they are fully two-way interactions.

People don’t come to see me to learn something new about themselves. They know themselves much better than I ever will, for they’ve been driving their unique human machines an entire lifetime, while I’m just helping for an hour or two, performing my diagnostic tune-up. Hell, I can’t tell clients even one single, solitary thing they don’t already know about their lives. Even if the Driver has forgotten, the Designer knows.
People come to see me because they want to remember who they are, who they intended themselves to be when the human lives they’re now working with were designed. Earthly human life is enough of a struggle on its own terms without having to live it blindfolded. It may not always be pleasant or fun, but life doesn’t have to be a nightmare of alienation from Self, a terror of uncertainty. Sure we forget ourselves constantly; that’s almost inevitable. But the tools to remember are both within and all around us, and my work with astrology is simply one of the tools available to help myself and others remember who we really are.

sex, romance, and compatibility

Back in the 1920s, certain astrologers were looking for a way to popularize their system, to market astrology for mass appeal, presumably so they could get rich in the process. They needed a way to simplify the symbolic language, to boil it down to its lowest common denominators. They also had to link their newly-available brand of simplistic astrology to issues that would be compelling to a potentially vast audience. What they created was “Sun Signs,” and the issues they hinged on were sex, romance, and the promise of an easy way to predict intimate compatibility.

Approximately 160 million Americans know their birth sign, two out of every three people in the country. That’s a lot of folks walking around categorizing themselves as one of twelve “types” of people.

This is not, however, a tirade against Sun-Signs (I’ve already done that one before). No, this is a tirade against a notion held by too many of those 160 million people, who believe — either actively or passively — that astrology purports to reveal who is romantically and sexually compatible with whom, and who is not. Are Leos “compatible” with Cancers? Are Geminis “compatible” with Librans? Will insecure Arian women be left heartbroken by roving Sagittarian men? Do powerful Scorpio women tend to dominate weak Pisces men? If you are Leo rising with a Pisces Sun conjunct Mars in the 6th, and your Venus is in Cancer in the 12th House, T-squared to an Arian Saturn in the 10th opposite Uranus in Cancer 4th, is there anyone alive with whom you’re compatible???

The Macmillan Dictionary defines the word compatible in this way: “capable of existing or functioning together in harmony; congenial.” Well, sexual attraction and romance are hardly matters of “congeniality.” So immediately there’s a semantic dilemma. Is compatibility even possible in the throes of romantic fervor or the heat of sexual fever?

We live in an increasingly complicated age, where old cultural role models and relationship expectations are falling by the wayside faster than we can find new ones with which to replace them. Forget astrology for the moment; it’s hard enough just to keep pace with social change. The whole question of intimate relatedness is incredibly complicated, and becomes more so with each passing
decade. Even the conservative resurgence of traditional values toward permanent relationships in nuclear families is mere backlash against the rising tide; it has about as much power in the long run as the little Dutch boy with his finger in the dike.

I have plied my trade long enough, talked to enough people in love, and looked at enough charts to know that astrology can reveal a great deal about the “chemical” interactions between individuals. The information from astrology is always meaningful, usually significant, and often eloquent. Astrology alone, however, is never the whole story.

I always place more intuitive emphasis on the person I’m working with than on the chart in front of me. Though most of my clients understand and accept this, and are as a result a joy to work with, a few of them would prefer it the other way round. That’s because they wish for an easy solution from outside, whether from the chart or from me, rather than face the very real risks of living, and the slow, sustained spiritual effort of finding or creating the answers from within themselves. An individual who has not come to grips with his predicaments in relating first to himself and then to others is not likely to create positive, loving, or fulfilling relationships, regardless of what any natal, comparison, or composite charts may hold.

Occasionally I’ll meet a client who’s hot to talk about a relationship, someone who wants to know everything my astrological tools can reveal about romantic involvement with another — problems, benefits, purpose, karmic background, prospects for the future, whether it’s going to last forever, the whole works. So I’ll ask how long the client has been in the relationship, and the response will be something like, “Oh, we just met four days ago.” And I think to myself, “Why do you do this to me, God? Why do you send me these Bozos?” Friends, there’s no substitute for experience, no shortcuts to real life, and in a void, astrology is reduced to groundless speculation, an empty intellectual exercise. This is not how I wish to use my tools.

An interest in intimate relationships and sexuality was what drew me into astrology in the first place, and much of my work with clients involves the issue of love. I’ve studied the system long and hard to find ways to use it in these areas, and I’ve come up with some astrological and intuitive approaches that seem to work fairly well to reveal meanings and melodramas surrounding sex, love, and the mysteries of intimate sharing with another human being. All my understanding, however, suggests that charts do not make love easier. Astrology can help to clarify the issues, but charts won’t do the work of loving for you.

*twins*

There is considerable interest in the astrology of twins. Individuals born in the same place on the same day at nearly the same time are going to have almost identical charts, at least as they would be interpreted by an astrologer. Whether
they are identical twins, fraternal twins, or complete strangers makes no
difference in terms of astrological considerations.

Are twins alike? Are their lives parallel? Astrology would give the qualified
answer of “yes.” The qualification is that while their vehicles are almost identical,
the Drivers of the vehicles are not, and thus the choices they make as they come
to the various crossroads of decision will not necessarily be the same. As a result,
their lives can gradually diverge in circumstantial or overt ways, but the patterns
of perception in the continual quest for meaning and fulfillment will be the same.

My only professional experience with twins was both humorous and
enlightening. It was a long time ago, back about 1975, when I erected the charts
for two identical-twin brothers born within eight minutes of each other. For all
intents and purposes, the charts looked the same. Certain astrological factors
were subtly different, namely the degrees of the Ascendant and Midheaven, but
in general, the charts were identical. I did readings with each of them separately.

The two sessions didn’t go well at all, but the way they didn’t was comically
revealing; each brother denied almost everything I said, protesting vehemently
that what I was telling him was true about his twin, but not about himself. What
neither twin knew was that I told them both exactly the same things.

**the apocalypse**

Finally, there’s the recurring gossip I have to put up with about once a season
concerning the time somewhere in the not-too-distant future when, supposedly,
“All The Planets Are Going To Line Up!” This presumption was most recently
offered up to the public through the media’s momentary mocking of what was
termed The Harmonic Convergence, an event presumed to have at least
profoundly dramatic, if not downright apocalyptic implications for civilization
as we know it.

What do people imagine when they think of “all the planets lining up”? My
guess is that they see the major bodies of the solar system aligned along a
perfectly straight axis, like a cosmic arrow of Biblical significance. But this image
is pure puffery, a figment of over-active imaginations. The solar system is
infinitely more complex in its movements than such simple-minded visions
suggest.

On the other hand, are any planetary patterns emerging that warrant our
interest as symbolic indicators of collective change? Well, let’s see, there is
certainly the longitudinal conjunction of the outer planets Saturn, Uranus, and
Neptune occurring in Capricorn during the early 1990s. And yes, that three-way
alignment is clearly meaningful, since it represents the first time in more than 800
years that these three bodies have come together in the zodiac. The collapse of
the Soviet Union in 1991 correlates very effectively with these symbolic
indicators, as does much of the disintegration being experienced in governmental, social, and commercial institutions all over the world.

Also there is certainly a gradual narrowing of the arc through which all the planets are moving relative to our viewpoint. Eventually times will occur at the end of this last decade of the century when all ten major bodies will be contained within about one-fifth of the zodiac.

So is the apocalypse coming? Dear friends, put your minds to rest. We may indeed be in for some hard times, but it’s because of us, not the planets, which, as I said above, are never going to “line up” the way some gullible innocents imagine.

The apocalypse has been cancelled.
On Loss and Grieving

the unreality of loss

Loss is not an illusion. Loss is a real experience, one that has not only psychological consequences, but emotional, spiritual, and biological repercussions as well. The experience of loss, of surrender, of giving up, and of the grieving processes that accompany these events are all natural, even inevitable parts of life. Like day needs night for definition in alternating phases of reality, happiness needs occasional sadness, perseverance needs surrender, and joy needs grief.

Human beings, however, are alienated from nature in this regard. We are almost curiously out of step, hoping to avoid the inevitable experience of loss. Every other species integrates loss without so much as a whimper — trees give up their leaves, plants wither as they go to seed, fields lay fallow, animals hibernate — but human beings try to avoid losses at any cost. When we fail (as we must), when we lose something we value, we struggle to understand and overcome the trauma of grieving.

What constitutes a loss? It can be almost anything: the death of a parent, a family member, or a loved one, the end of a marriage or love relationship, a theft, the ending of a job or money. But every change brings a loss: moving (loss of comfort in security), success (the loss of striving), age (loss of youth), maturity (loss of idealism). Each day we live is one day of pure potential lost to experience. And finally, we will lose even ourselves in death, as we surrender our bodies and personality identities.

Much has been written about the natural phases of death/loss/surrender. My purpose is not to restate that wisdom here. My intention is to write about signs of the zodiac. I don’t often write about zodiacal signs, since their elevation in pop astrology under the banner of Sun signs represents such an aberrant oversimplification of the human condition. I make an exception here for a reason.
The astrological symbolism that corresponds to real human experience and behavior is complex, multi-leveled, and sublime. Natal charts are patterns composed of many different symbols, each of which has multiple meanings that are, in turn, altered by the symbol’s relations within the overall matrix. In other words, astrology ain’t simple. Throughout most of our living, our experience and expression as human beings reflects this matrix of symbolic complexity. On occasion, however, inward developments or outer events exert so much pressure on our lives that we respond by simplifying the operation of our bio-machinery. During crisis, in the elevated stress of peak experience, we retreat from our normal complexity and move with the most basic energies in us. Those most basic energies are revealed astrologically by the symbols of the Sun and the Moon and their condition in our natal charts. The sign of the zodiac occupied at birth by these two astronomical “lights” reveals much about the characteristic tone of our approach to loss.

Almost everyone knows his or her Sun Sign. If you know your Moon Sign, then simply blend the two interpretations in the twelve that follow. If you don’t know your Moon Sign, have your natal chart erected by an astrologer or an astrological service that offers calculations. Should you know all your planetary sign positions, you can certainly apply these various interpretations to each level of your chart, but the fundamentals of the Sun and Moon are generally the most important indicators.

fire signs — aries, leo, sagittarius

The fire signs understand loss primarily as a challenge to create new activity and move toward new horizons. The experience of loss here is generally brief.

Aries

Individuals who operate under strongly Arian symbolism fight like hell to prevent losses. They are both courageous and somewhat driven in their resistance to surrender. When loss becomes inevitable or a fait accompli, they are hurled into momentary turbulence and hysteria. But very shortly thereafter, they pick themselves up and find a new target, a new goal, a new desire, and they’re off to the races again as if nothing had ever happened. Every kind of loss is essentially the same for Aries — a loss of vitality, a complete though temporary loss of confidence, a momentary obliteration of being. In this phase of trauma they are utterly lost, totally overwhelmed. But they can and do recreate themselves as quickly as being human will allow.

Leo
These people are virtually brilliant at pretending that loss never happens, has never happened, and will never happen. When loss does occur, the experience comes as a great shock. They may react with steady composure, in which they cringe, hurt, or even rage inside, but strive to maintain their ego-image in the public arena. Giving the impression of rising above the experience, they offer a virtuoso performance in the cool maintenance of their dignity. Or they may cascade into grand narcissism, acting like tragic heroes or heroines worthy of Shakespeare. Their pain then becomes a badge of martyrdom, the result of a plot against them by the universe. They whine, fume, and generally alienate everyone around them with their self-absorption. Certainly no one has ever before been so singled out for suffering. Whichever route they take, Leos very consciously put losses behind them as soon as their pain has subsided. They will seek out support, although they don’t usually ask for it overtly. Their worst losses involve self-esteem, pride, or social skills.

*Sagittarius*

These creatures are the enigmas of the zodiac where loss is concerned. They don’t really understand either the concept or the experience itself, since they are so attuned to maintaining their individual freedom and seeking the new. This sign has the shortest “down time” of any of the twelve, for Sagittarians are almost incredibly buoyant. They literally feel loss less than any other sign. Curiously, they tend to encounter their most poignant moments in grieving often long after the fact, during moments of quiet reflection or sudden memory triggered by an unexpected physical or emotional association. In other words, grieving is not a single-point experience, but instead is part of an overall fabric of realization. The worst grief surrounds the loss of freedom or potential for experience.

*air signs — gemini, libra, aquarius*

The air signs understand loss primarily as winds of change altering their general pattern of relatedness, stimulating their desire to understand. The true experience of loss, though variable, tends to be somewhat more than their minds can comprehend.

*Gemini*
These people react rather unpredictably to loss. Seemingly small losses can be extremely upsetting, while at other times, huge losses may barely make a wrinkle. They are more effusive with their emotions during grieving than one might presume, in part because they are so unprepared for the onslaught of unfamiliar emotion, but the tears come and go rather quickly, on and off, on and off. One moment they are falling apart, the next moment they are interested in something new, alert and alive again. Deep and prolonged grieving is truly dangerous for Gemini, since they are ill-suited to living at such great depth. They need to come back to the surface quickly or they may drown in their own feelings. The worst grieving involves loss of opportunity to learn or explore.

Libra

These individuals experience loss as a coming apart at the seams. They disintegrate without any of the self-consciousness of Leos or the intensity of Arians, into complete helplessness. However, loss brings out their delicacy and softness, and they are sometimes quite beautiful in their grieving. Librans can suffer the experience of loss rather easily or suddenly, and, like Humpty-Dumpty, lose their emotional balance and have a great fall, collapsing into upset. They tend to experience grief much more often through sympathy for others rather than out of directly personal experience in their own lives. Needing as they do a mirror to trigger their experience, they are actually grieving for their own losses when they seem to be sympathizing with the grieving of others. Their worst losses involve upsets in social interactions, and the most obvious one, the loss of a partnership.

Aquarius

These individuals are almost entirely conceptual in their approach to loss. Aquarians deny grief more than any other of the twelve types. They become philosophical, taking refuge in cool analysis of emotions they observe as if far away, divorcing themselves from any messy feelings that may lurk below their conscious minds. They consider grieving irrational, and thus incorrect. Aquarians understand the principle of loss, but not the experience. They may become angry or detached, but they will strive not to show sadness, for in their minds, sadness over personal events is the equivalent of weakness. They are more likely to permit expression of grief over collective and cultural events that have little to do with their own personal lives. The worst grief involves loss of detachment, independence, or the end of a cherished idea whose time has passed.
earth signs — taurus, virgo, capricorn

The earth signs understand loss primarily in terms of physical security and disruption of habit or expectation. Their experience of loss is restrained, but may be subtly extended over a long period of time, like making time payments.

Taurus

These people understand loss quite well. They live in fear of giving up anything they have, so they do everything in their power to avoid the experience. And Taureans are quite accomplished at this avoidance, since they know how to cling tenaciously, and hesitate to even take on what they may later have to give up. But when loss does occur, they become very solid and truly pragmatic, preferring the values of common sense to more emotional reactions. Beneath the surface, however, a grave loss may immobilize them internally for long periods, like going into a cocoon. The worst losses involve the surrender of whatever is familiar and thus comfortable.

Virgo

These individuals are constantly undergoing small, subtle losses. Almost every day. It’s as if they are pruning their worlds all the time, entering into surrender willingly and dutifully, actually creating losses rather than waiting for them. The experience is so basic to Virgoans that they have a keenly integrated sense of emotion and pragmatism surrounding grief. They are almost completely appropriate in their response to loss, doing it by the numbers. They don’t understand being truly finished with anything, so the worst grieving surrounds loss of a project, having to give up their toward perfection. Success is always a terrible loss for them.

Capricorn

These types experience loss as a challenge, as a temporary setback. Loss in any area is a signal for greater determination, more serious striving, and redoubling one’s efforts. Perseverance furthers, as the I Ching says. Like all earth signs, they anticipate loss, sensing its presence off in the distance long before it actually arrives. Capricorns expect that everything they have will be challenged, so they are well-defended from the word go. They hold off loss as long as possible by maintaining the complete pretext of normalcy. When loss finally has occurred, don’t look for any display of emotion, for Capricorns hide their grief, using their
inner tears as water power to drive the turbine of their heightened ambitions. On
the surface, they may become cold as ice, and eerily pragmatic, as if nothing ever
happened. Their worst losses involve stature, respect, or goals.

water signs — cancer, scorpio, pisces

The water signs understand loss primarily as an implosion in their emotional
world. Their experience of loss involves the deepest suffering of the four
elemental types, but also the most profound release.

Cancer

These types experience loss as an overwhelmingly personal event. Their world
implodes when something they love dies, ends, or leaves. They may or may not
always show their feelings, depending on other factors (such as how close you
are to them) but they must express their pain at some point each day during a
period of grief. They heal themselves with tears. Every loss involves a
diminishing of the self, a lessening of meaning in the world. They grieve deeply,
but with surprising strength and integrity. Cancerians never forget a loss, and
they become more cautious as they get older. But they do learn how to grieve,
and practice makes them better. The worst loss is that of emotional security, or
any grief involving the family.

Scorpio

These individuals will, like Taurus, resist loss with all their considerable
might, but often, when loss is imminent, they will coldly and completely destroy
what they are about to lose, to prevent the experience of grieving. There is good
reason for this, for when Scorpions do suffer a loss, they are drawn into a
turbulent emotional void deep within themselves. These are intensely emotional
people, although their sentimentality is often masked by their raw passion, and a
severe loss propels the emotions outward into the personality, where it often
fests into an obsession. Their grieving is single-minded and total. The worst
grief is the loss of intimacy, power, or the loss of certainty within the self.

Pisces

These are the loss leaders of the zodiac, the only people who truly understand
what it means to give up something or someone. In a way, their entire lives
revolve around grieving — for themselves, for others, and for the world. They welcome the chance to surrender, and although grieving may at times seem to drive them absolutely insane in a total disintegration of self, they always emerge cleansed and purified. During intense grief, they cannot be consoled with reason, for they are awash in an oceanic tide pool of feeling. There is no such thing as a worst loss for Pisces, for every time a leaf falls from a tree, they sigh, and experience the profound emotions of surrender as well as the longing for rebirth.
On Pluto

the blind spot

Look around you. What do you see? Your world, of course, the ordinary stuff of life. Living rooms, kitchens, closets, the inside of your car, trees, birds, green grass, snow, or concrete.

Close your eyes. Imagine that when you open them the world will have vanished, disappeared, leaving you to stare at nothing but blackness. The world isn’t gone — it’s still there, but you can’t see it. This is the ordinary experience of Plutonian reality: the sleep-walking state, what most of us “see” (or, in this case, don’t see) most of the time. But it’s not all there is.

Each of us has a blind spot in our vision, a tiny point on the retina where we cannot register sight. The biological structure of our eyes provides a broad field of vision, but there is that one tiny blind spot. Imagine what it would be like if the situation were reversed, if our large area of vision traded places with the blind spot. Our brains would then register the signals sent by the optic nerves as a “screen” of blackness, one that would contain only a single, microscopic point of light. Most of the time, our minds would scan the field but “see” nothing. Every so often, however, we’d manage to focus precisely on that one tiny point of light, to look through it, as it were, and suddenly, without warning, the outer world would light up in a rush, illumined in our inner vision. This would be an astonishing, unexpected revelation, to see the world again, but to see it concentrated through a single, intense point. This would truly be an actively Plutonian perception of reality.

Pluto’s function in our psyches is to take us out of the ordinary, beyond the mundane, into a transcendent realm of experience. Technically, the whole, magical panorama of life is always available to us. But because human beings are such habit-oriented creatures, we take life for granted, tending not to see it at all. This blindness is not merely rhetorical; it is actual — we literally do not experience reality as it is, but rather, as our minds to construct it for us. Then Pluto surges out of our unconscious, focusing us on that one spot in the lens
where all the light can come through, and we see life anew, experiencing it as if for the first time, concentrated beyond belief.

An easier metaphor, perhaps, is to imagine being color-blind, save for one tiny spot on the retina, not a “blind spot,” but a “color spot.” Most of the time, our vision would be clear, but seen by our minds only as shades of gray, like watching a black-and-white television. Once in a great while, however, we’d manage to focus through the “color spot” in the retina, and suddenly the world would bloom, bursting into radiant reds, shimmering blues, lush greens, and brilliant yellows — like exploding into Technicolor.

Pluto takes the ordinary and, by intensifying our experience, breaks it open to reveal exquisite wonders that are truly awful (“full of awe”). We are then changed for a moment, or a day, or a season. In the rarest of cases, the transformation is permanent, and we are altered forever.

_the synchronicity of meanings_

Interestingly, Pluto’s existence was first posited by mathematicians and physicists rather than by astronomers _per se_. Due to certain disturbances in the predicted movement of Neptune, scientists became convinced of the presence of another undiscovered planet in an orbit beyond that of Neptune. They could even predict the general area in which it might be found. The only problem was that they couldn’t find it. At those immense distances from the Sun, looking for a small planet was akin to looking for a needle in a haystack, only worse.

This postulation of Pluto’s existence occurred in the first decade of the 20th century, around the same time that Einstein was working on the theory of special relativity and Freud was beginning publication of his work on the theory of the unconscious. The coincidence here — the synchronicity — is worth a deeper look.

Pluto is a small planet nowhere near the size of its gargantuan neighbors, yet it is dense enough to significantly alter the orbit of Neptune. It is so far from the Sun that seen from Pluto, the Sun is only one more tiny star in a perpetual nighttime of blackness. Where in the human psyche is there a symbolic level that is invisible, where it’s always “nighttime,” yet has enough power to pull and alter the shape of ordinary life? Why, Freud’s _unconscious_, of course.

However harshly time has treated Sigmund Freud in the eyes of psychology at its current sophistication, it is beyond doubt that his creative theories were a landmark in the development of modern psychology, a stroke of genius. The same can be said in astrology of the mathematical “discovery” of Pluto; the symbolism turns traditional concepts in astrology upside down, giving them a whole new dimension, a dark underbelly that can cripple or kill, yet can also heal and transform.

Freud explored the realms of obsession and compulsion, the crippling factors of blocked and disturbed development. He peeled back the respectable veneer of Victorian morality to reveal the underbelly of libido, death fascination, and other
forms of sexual hysteria. He introduced concepts that were not merely radical for their time, but nearly unthinkable. And yet, less than a single century later, those same frameworks have been completely assimilated into the collective assumptions through which we understand life and interpret experience. What was so recently considered revolutionary, such as the notion that dreams have symbolic meaning, we now regard as quaintly anachronistic. The idea that we might better understand behavior by reference to “unconscious” motives once turned the world on its ear; now that presumption is standard, even passé.

In the individual natal chart, Pluto reveals the tone and the location of psychological complexes emanating from the unconscious, where the unassimilated contents of our lives are stored. The assumption here is that each of us goes through life-experiences we don’t or can’t understand, experiences too intense to comprehend, too traumatic to accept, even too beautiful to bear. Many such experiences occur in infancy, when our conscious minds are limited in capacity, but they keep happening throughout life. These undigested experiences are then stored in what we call the unconscious, waiting for an opportunity to surface, to be understood.

Pluto shows where you are liable to struggle with forces within you that seem beyond your conscious understanding, forces interpreted by the ego as too intense to be experienced consciously, thus fearful or negative — forces of “darkness.” But that which has a front, has a back; darkness and light are connected. Because of the symbolism of Pluto, the unconscious is no longer invisible; we can reach all the way back to the roots of our psychological problems, to cleanse and revitalize our spiritual selves, to discover who we intended to be, to leave behind the sometimes diminished selves we too often are.

At the end of the 19th century, Victorian scientists believed that we had nearly plumbed the depths of physics, and all that remained was to fill in a few missing pieces. The Newtonian universe was a well-ordered hierarchy of separate, solid bodies that moved in a cosmic dance of influence called gravity. Power flowed down from the largest to the smallest particles. This reflected the social order with its class structure, its haves and have-nots. So both physical and human power were, in a sense, pre-ordained.

In an even more tangible way than that of Freud, Einstein’s contribution to modern physics was world-shattering. His work not only put an end to the myth of Newtonian certainty, it opened up a new and mysterious universe to modern minds. On the broad shoulders of his remarkable vision have been built a civilization now grappling with life and death issues: can we control the power of the atom now that we have unleashed it? Can we use that power and still survive as a species? In the same vein, Pluto infers similar questions for the individual: Can I control the power of my unconscious if I unleash it? Can I look into my unconscious and still survive as a human personality?

After more than two decades of searching, Pluto’s existence was finally confirmed empirically in 1930. The list of traumatic changes occurring in human civilization at that period is profound: a global economic depression of unprecedented proportions, and with it the acceleration of the labor movement
in this country and others, the onset of cancer as the dominant killing disease of this century, the heralding of World War II with the rise of Nazi Germany, and the beginning of an hysterical arms race that saw no alleviation for 50 years.

shattering the atom

Not only is the very idea of atomic energy symbolically Plutonian — right down to the name “plutonium” for the radioactive isotopes — but the cultural history of atomic energy’s development is analogous also. In the 1930s, Einstein, Enrico Fermi, and others became involved in work that barely one decade later evolved into “The Manhattan Project,” code name for a secret government program aimed at utilizing the revolution in theoretical physics to develop a super-weapon, an “atomic” bomb. As with progress in all sciences, the main concerns were in creating practical applications for what had until then been only a set of mathematical formulae filling a blackboard. As usual, the motivating factor was not the greater good of humanity, but, instead, the ability to maintain power and control over others, in this instance by dealing death and destruction to one’s enemies. Physicists could have discussed the possibilities for atomic power endlessly without the culture taking note; only a threat to national security carried the clout necessary to fund actual development, however.

In an individual life, Pluto represents the transformation of personality possible when the invisible energy of the unconscious is tapped and released into the consciousness. It would be wonderful if these transformations were always motivated by a conscious, willing desire for self-improvement. Most often, however, such high-minded motives are not what initiates profound change. Normally, Pluto’s symbolic power is inadvertently released, either by accident or compulsion. This is not to say that it can never be consciously brought about through graceful and loving intent, but it does seem that this is not usually the case.

Our egos may be fragile structures, but they are dogged in clinging to our existing expectations of ordinary life, whether that status quo is positive or negative. To willingly plunge into the unknown, especially through some dimly-felt longing for “spiritual evolution,” while not at all unheard of, remains rare. The unknown of the unconscious is full of assumed dangers, and even those who speak glowingly of personality transformation often balk at the real prospect of such acts. It’s one thing to talk about transformation, another thing entirely to actually do it.

And yet, it’s safe to say that beyond the surface of personality, inward toward the center of the essence, in the heart of hearts, every single human being longs fervently for true enlightenment. We want to be released from our bondage, freed from our attachments. We want to solve the mystery of suffering. However submerged the wish may be, in whatever twisted form it emerges at the surface, this desire is both fundamental and immensely powerful as a motivating factor in human life. The child may bully his companions in a spate of possessiveness — “This is mine!” — yet the same child can mature into an adult who routinely
shares what he has with others, without hesitation, sometimes undergoing heroic self-sacrifice in the process.

**shattering the self**

Our egos, while absolutely necessary for living on the earth, are sometimes like a bullying, possessive child, concerned only for the status, security, and comfort of *numero uno*, and concerned in ways often in direct contradiction to the true spiritual welfare of the self.

How often have you felt neurotically self-destructive? For instance, how often have you eaten compulsively, not for support of your body, but rather to stuff some emotion with which you cannot cope? How often has some personal frustration caused you to lash out at a loved one without real cause? How often has your conscience registered clearly that a certain act was wrong, but you couldn’t seem to stop yourself from doing it anyway? These and countless other small perversities are examples of the ego running away with the self, out of control, blindly maintaining the negative habits of an unfortunate status quo.

In such cases — which is to say, most of the time in our lives — the energy of Pluto is not easily released by “pure” motivations. Instead, some accident of life triggers the release, hurtling us into a transformative process in spite of ourselves. Often the accident is not simply a chance occurrence, but instead the subtle result of our own patterns of disrespectful self-abuse. Our marriages may break up as a result of long-standing pressures; we may be passed over for promotions at work since we are not expressing our best selves; we may suffer serious disease after a long period of physical or psychological neglect.

Initially, such events are experienced as dreadful shocks coming from outside the self. We may feel ourselves made victim by cruel fates, or worse, by an uncaring and senselessly random universe. But soon enough, we all turn inward to examine the frightening possibility that we have brought these turns upon ourselves. Often there is more than a grain of truth in such feelings. Sometimes the event itself is unimportant, but because we are ripe for the release of transformative energy from the unconscious, it strikes us as momentous. Whatever the trigger, we are usually traumatized at the beginning of the process. The fabric of our reality is rended asunder, and the hole opened by that ripping appears immense and foreboding. Surely it will swallow us up, obliterating not only the comfort of our lives, but the very meaning of our lives as well.

**a theoretical dilemma**

In the early stages of the Manhattan Project, at a point where the discussion of atomic weapons was still largely theoretical, there were two schools of thought. All the physicists knew that the technical problems would eventually be solved; making the actual bomb was only a matter of money, time, and effort. But considerable debate ensued as to the wisdom of moving forward with the
project, not merely because of the moral-humanitarian impulses — these were a continual sore point throughout the entire project — but instead, due to a scientific question concerning the extent of the explosive power.

One theoretical view predicted that when a nuclear device was finally built and detonated, the result would be a very large explosion indeed, but nothing more, simply an oversized firecracker — impressive certainly, but no cause for alarm. However, another view held a more frightening prediction: Owing to the incredible “oxygen hunger” that the pressure of the explosion would create, detonating an atomic bomb might set off what was termed an “oxygen chain reaction.” If this proved to be the case, then pressing the button to explode the bomb would be the last act ever performed by a human being, for the entire atmosphere of the earth would be instantly consumed in a fiery apocalypse. Poof! No more human beings.

The debate was resolved quickly. After re-checking the theoretical formulae, it was accepted among the physicists that an oxygen chain could not be created by the relatively small global effect of a nuclear bomb, so the issue became simply an anecdotal footnote in the history of the Manhattan Project. Nevertheless, it remains a potent illustration rife with innuendo and paradox.

In dealing with the Plutonian urges buried deep within our personal psyches, a parallel concern arises. We approach wholesale transformations from the unconscious as if we were those atomic physicists, wondering beforehand if we will release simply a larger quantity of power that will then be available for our personal use, or if, instead, we will somehow set off an “oxygen chain reaction” in our psyches, one that will consume our entire lives in a painful apocalypse of the soul. This question is very real for us: Once an inevitable transformation is underway, the more we resist, the more pain we feel. While that discomfort may be at least partially the result of a self-fulfilling prophecy — we believe change will be painful, so it is — the pain we feel is nonetheless very real. Resistance intensifies the suffering of change.

Those who are pessimistically inclined toward spiritual skepticism will counsel us to remain unseduced by claims for the beauty of a transformed life. They will argue that releasing transpersonal energy is always dangerous, that life is simply difficult, and that we are better off dealing with the devils we know than the devils we don’t.

But even if the utopia of being “born again” is only a fiction of human longing, it remains obvious that as the pace of cultural change accelerates, as our lifestyles increase in stress and intensity, so does the necessity for periodic cleansing. A fresh coat of paint makes the house look better, but eventually, the build-up of coat after coat makes it necessary to strip away all the old layers and get down to bare wood before any additional painting. This is renovation, restoration, and it must periodically happen to people as well as houses. Individuals must occasionally purge their pasts to eradicate outmoded habits of living, to refresh themselves into a renewed sense of the here-and-now. Pluto’s position in the natal chart reveals where, how, and often when this cleansing can most effectively take place.
Those who are optimistic about psychological transformation, either by inherent temperament or adopted philosophy, will encourage us to take advantage of every opportunity, to move ahead at all times, to actively seek out all possibilities for rebirth and renewal. They will argue that the intensity of Plutonian changes is not harmful, that “you’ll feel much better after you’ve gotten all those built-up layers of bad old ego out of your system.” They will propagandize for moving forward where angels fear to tread. These eternal optimists are like the physicists of the 1930s who, having proven that the oxygen chain reaction was unlikely, concluded therefore that the development of the bomb was “safe.”

**pandora’s box**

Did the creators of the atomic bomb and the supporters of atomic energy fully comprehend what they were releasing on the human race? Did they understand the long-range implications of radioactivity, of the 50,000 year half-life that could permanently alter the environment, threatening the very evolution of our young species? Did they envision the dangers of nuclear piracy or the spiraling costs of nuclear technology? Did they understand about the problem of nuclear waste disposal? More to the point, did they account for human fallibility in dealing with such powerful energies, since it is clear that the energy source itself is not the problem, but our carelessness in understanding its dangers? Obviously they did not. In the same way, individuals sometimes walk headlong into dense jungles of chaotic personal change, all the while whistling in the dark. We must be judiciously careful about when, where, and with whom we release the immense power of unconscious transformative energy. Our egos can stand only so much assault from within. They can and sometimes do suffer permanently disability, and that is a tragedy. We need our egos intact to live well here on the earth.

The one thing that can be said with certainty about nuclear power is this: More than any other single factor in the history of human race, the discovery and development of atomic energy has forced us to recognize that we are all related, that the earth is finally a single place where we are all together, for “The Bomb” touches and unites us all. Unleashing the power of the atom has affected our minds, drawing the world into readiness for a heightened sense of unity. The question still unresolved is whether we will transcend the destructive use of the nuclear discovery, maturing beyond our childish tendencies toward political bickering, racial hatred, and economic greed to evolve toward a truly peaceful sense of international cooperation, or whether we will be unable to complete the transformative process we’ve entered into as a species, foolishly blowing ourselves off the face of the earth in an orgasmic release of sheer, raw power. So far, the votes are not yet counted, the polls still open; but we’re running out of time.

An old yogic law encourages the Hindu adept to strive diligently toward the development of powers (called “siddhis”), but then admonishes him *not to use them* once he has mastered their creation. This may seem like absurd advice, but it’s really very cogent. The law is a reminder to work hard at discovering the
creative secrets of the universe, but not to inadvertently create any new karma. The same advice applies to an individual’s Plutonian levels: Strive to contact the transformative power buried within your unconscious, but once you have done so, be damned careful about releasing it.

In astrology, Uranus offers a first mental awakening to the possibility of a power greater than that of the Sun through lightning raids that crack our Saturnian limits. Neptune then opens the heart to the longing for perfect and total cosmic reunion through images and intuitions that dissolve Saturnian boundaries. But only with Pluto do we glimpse the actual nature and real impact of Galactic power, through which our former individuality may be utterly obliterated in profound transformation toward a higher sense of purpose we only dimly sense and may never fully understand.

We all might as well have been aboard the Enola Gay on its fateful mission of turning Hiroshima to dust in an instant; we all might as well have been living on Three Mile Island before the near-meltdown. We all might as well be strapped to the table passing through the MRI doughnut as nuclear medicine scans for tumors in the deepest recesses of our brains.

for the future

Pluto is peculiarly a symbol of 20th-century humanity, revealing both the glorious possibilities and the awesome risks implied in the rush toward transformation. This past century has been largely Plutonian in nature, a time in which human beings reached critical mass in our headlong pursuit of power, with profound ramifications at the individual, social, and spiritual levels of life.

For individuals, the past hundred years have revealed that more of us than we ever imagined are subject to the dark, twisted energies of obsession and compulsion. Incest, violence, and addiction have proven almost routine rather than rare. The need to heal ourselves as individuals, couples, and families has never been more apparent.

For society, this century has demonstrated both the glorious results of cooperative effort toward a shared goal (the American space program of the 1960s that put men on the moon), as well as the tragic results of placing immense power in the hands of unenlightened human beings and governments (two world wars and various political purges that murdered 100 million people).

Spiritually, the nuclear nightmares of the 20th century have shown us that we are all related, that the earth is, finally, a single place where we are together in the same fragile boat. In the 21st century, so soon to be upon us, the questions we’ll face are likely to concern not power itself — for power has become a given — but, instead, how to use the awesome power to which we now have access. So, as we struggle to bootstrap our species out of its long adolescence and into ways of living on this planet that reflect greater maturity, we would do well to pay attention to Pluto and whatever may lie beyond.
On Coincidence

A Day in the Life

On the final day of a 1992 vacation, anticipating the ten-hour drive home, I whipped out my computer-generated personal transit guide and noticed that Mercury would square my natal Pluto at precisely 9:29 p.m. that evening. This gave me a certain pause, especially since Mercury and Pluto are angular and squared in my natal chart. Added to that was the one-year conjunction of transiting Pluto over my natal Mercury and MC, both at 21° Scorpio, with the third and final pass being exact that very week. The shorter cycle might well act as a trigger to provoke the longer transit, which could in turn activate the natal square’s implications. Having grappled with a severe speech impediment in the first half of my life, and then later, after I could talk, having seen the impact of more than 10,000 sessions with clients, I knew that the natal Mercury-Pluto square carried significant whomp in my life.

I’d been well aware throughout the year of the ongoing “psychic surgery” (Pluto) affecting my mentality (Mercury). Many issues involving my career (MC), and more to the point, many changes in thought, perceptions, and strategies around my niche in the world (Mercury conjunct MC) had been cooking. That was an obvious psychological dynamic. Now, however, the symbols took a different slant in my mind — less psychological and more physical. I was about to embark on a 550-mile drive on what was arguably the most powerful single Mercury-Pluto day of my whole life. Uff da!

I considered that waiting another day to return home might be a wise choice. But I needed to get back because I had sessions scheduled. Should a one-day transit, however potent it might be, cause me go to the considerable trouble of changing my plans?

The raw symbolism was a bit daunting: movement, especially vehicular motion (Mercury) had a high-energy connection (square and conjunction) to the possibility of explosion or eruption from sources beyond my conscious control.
(Pluto). I could easily imagine quite a few unpleasant scenarios that might take shape around this symbolism. The most obvious potential was trouble due to a lapse in my attention — running off the highway after falling asleep at the wheel or, God forbid, being in a wreck with another vehicle that I might not even see. Even if I were totally attentive and blameless, however, I could still envision a flat tire at high speed, perhaps. With my natal Mercury ruling the 5th and 8th Houses, should I worry that the conscious and intentional risk (5th) of driving on a day where I knew the factors to be provocative might result in my death (8th)? And given the 10th House emphasis of both transits, confrontation with authority was another consideration. I might be flagged by a hidden state trooper using radar and ticketed for speeding. I could even imagine giving the police officer some lip in a moment of compulsive frustration and spending the night in jail. Yikes! My mind conjured up a thousand distasteful ends.

**astrological portents**

I am ordinarily not the kind of astrologer who won’t make a move without consulting an ephemeris, nor am I imprinted on the traditional but dubious astrological morality of “good” versus “bad” days for a certain activity. While I have known astrologers who are committed pessimists concerning Moon phases, eclipses, and Mars or Saturn transits, I have always felt rigidly judgmental approaches to be tiresome at best and paranoid at worst.

Attempts at astrological control of circumstances can backfire all too easily. Because astrology is a system of symbols, the combination of those symbols produces near-infinite possibilities as we move from the abstract into the literal. The problem here is simple: Where can we go to hide from our own charts? If we conclude that a particular time is ripe for accident, on the basis, say, of transiting Mars opposite natal Neptune, should we stay locked in our houses to avoid possible danger? We might still slip in the bathtub and break our necks.

Astrological charts give no advice about what we should or should not do, how we should or should not be. Charts are silent about such strategies. That overlay comes from us, from all-too-human rather than cosmic sources. Through their linkage of symbols, charts express simply what IS in the resonance of a certain time/space matrix. They do not advise, they do not encourage, they do not shame — they reveal only what IS in the flow of being. Nor does astrology reveal the particular way a certain IS-ness will manifest into (or out of) our personal reality.

Yes, we can hook up the symbols into technical linkages of transiting and natal planetary meanings, aspect phases, zodiacal sign modifiers, along with occupied and ruled House categories of circumstance. But guessing which of the myriad possibilities might be the one event that will emerge is tantamount to finding the proverbial needle in the haystack. Clients occasionally ask me what a certain aspect means in their charts. My standard first response is to say: “Well,
do you have three or four days to hear all the meanings?” Astrological symbols are universal; Aries, Neptune, or a sesquiquadrate each resonate with a certain basic feeling that never changes. Interpretations in astrology, however, are invariably context-sensitive; the manifestations of the symbols are multi-leveled, changing dramatically from one situation to the next, one time to another, and between different levels of interest or perception.

I’m reminded of a story from earlier in my life, way back in the 1970s. An acquaintance of mine had spent years in the formal study of metaphysics, channeling, and the development of “psychic powers.” She was into every aspect of new age spirituality: chanting, telepathy, pyramids, past-life regression, prosperity imaging, etc. Home again after a long cross-country drive, she related with some gusto to me how tiring it had been for her to telepathically “fog the minds” of all the highway police along the way, making her car invisible to them and their radar (or so she claimed), in order that she could drive 85 miles an hour and save time getting back. She seemed quite pleased with herself. I countered that she might have been better off using the wisdom of her spiritual disciplines to foster patience in herself, so that she could happily drive within the speed limit, making it unnecessary to control others, whether telepathically or any other way.

Too often, astrologers’ attempts to divine the best and worst times to accomplish or avoid a particular experience strike me as similar to my acquaintance’s efforts to make herself invisible to traffic cops just so she could exceed the speed limit.

I do not suggest that we blithely ignore our charts. We all make judgments about what to do, when to do it, and how it might best be done. Making such choices is inevitable, natural, and appropriate. And astrology is a brilliant addition to that process. Astrology, however, is not the issue in all this. The real issue is the state of mind of the person using astrology.

If we believe that astrology can help to foster a deeper understanding of experience, we are correct. Astrology offers a way to unify otherwise separate levels of our perception into a unified field of awareness. It helps us better appreciate the mystery of life in all its wonder, paradox, and irony.

If, however, we believe that astrology’s main application is the protection of our egos, we are not merely incorrect, we are deluded. Our egos want to control everything. They are often defensive, fearful, even hysterical in their resistance to necessary change and growth. When we use astrology to promote an experience for which we are unprepared or insufficiently mature, or to avoid an event our egos regard as unpleasant, we prostitute the system. More to the point, we set ourselves up for serious disillusionment, for life has a way of pulling the rug out from under even the most staunchly resistant human ego. Like the woman in the O’Henry short story, “The Monkey’s Paw,” who brought her dead son back to life with magic, only to discover that he was living but decomposed, we are unable to control all the factors involved in manifesting what our egos so desperately desire. While we may initially seem to get what we want, the end result is almost
always a humiliating pratfall. Our best-laid plans backfire while the Gods chuckle at our foolishness.

Again, I’m not suggesting that we ignore the tools at our disposal. By all means, schedule elective surgeries when the Moon is not full; move more slowly and deliberately in intimacy when transiting Saturn squares Venus; expect delays or misunderstandings when Mercury is retrograde; take time off during Void-of-Course Moons. Certainly be aware when Jupiter conjuncts your Sun of new opportunities for enlarged self-expression. And yes, factor in the significant aspects between your own and another person’s chart when considering a business or personal relationship.

On the other hand, if you need emergency surgery and the Moon happens to be full, don’t wait — have the surgery. Assuming that love will fail when Saturn transits Venus is a self-fulfilling prophecy. Don’t passively waste time when Mercury is retrograde or the Moon is Void — stay awake to what’s happening. Remember that Jupiter transits do bring buoyancy, but can just as easily signal excess or arrogance. And for heaven’s sake, don’t burn up all your intimate energy worrying about whether a beloved’s chart is “compatible” with your own.

Finally, don’t presume that a certain combination of symbols means what you read in a textbook or hear from some hot-shot astrologer at a conference. Instead, file away the insight as a “possible” meaning, then let your own experience in real life gradually confirm or deny that particular interpretive slant. Use astrology as fully as you like, but in the proper spirit — to enhance understanding with your soul rather than controlling with your ego.

My admonitions here may appear on the surface to be moral judgments. Ultimately, however, my advice is not moral at all, but purely pragmatic. In the long run, I’m convinced that we’ll get further faster, with more of what we truly want, if we transcend the endless prodding of our childish, petulant egos.

what a long, strange trip it’s been

I did choose to make the ten-hour drive home on the day of the Mercury-Pluto transit. In balance, my need to get back outweighed my concerns about the symbolic pitfalls, although, in fairness, I admonished myself to be extra-careful while driving. At the time, I felt I had hit the razor’s edge between the needs of my soul and the desires of my ego.

Everything went fine at first. Then the rain started. It rained for hours, then turned to freezing rain. Then night fell and hard sleet reduced visibility to nearly zero. I thought to myself, “Not everybody on this highway can have a Mercury-Pluto transit” — my lame version of whistling in the dark.

About two hours from home the highway construction began — restricted to a single lane of traffic whizzing through pelting sleet past mile after mile of those
damn orange barrels. After eight hours of difficult driving, this was nerve-wracking. My strategy of taking the interstate rather than back roads — so as to be safer, you understand — well, suddenly this looked less like a smart soul move and more like a bonehead ego play. In trying to “negotiate” with the transit (read: get around it), I had inadvertently stepped in it.

The Mercury-Pluto transit was rapidly approaching its 9:29 p.m. partile. The drive had been hellish, but with only 20 miles to go, surely I was home free.

Then I entered a stretch of highway where the northbound lanes were completely closed. Traffic headed north had to detour onto the southbound lanes, where road crews had lined up temporary, four-foot high concrete dividers for two miles. Now it was single-lane driving against oncoming traffic — still with freezing rain making the darkness nightmarish.

Up ahead about 500 yards, I noticed a strange glow, and then the oncoming traffic just stopped. No more cars zipping past in the lane five feet away. At 300 yards, the glow was revealed to be fire. A big fire. At 150 yards, I could see what had happened: A large truck had skidded on the icy surface and lost control, plowing into the temporary dividers, then flipping over as it burst into flames.

Traffic in my lane slowed — 40 miles an hour, 30, then 20. I was barely 100 feet away from the accident. Motorists were pulling off onto the shoulder and milling around the scene, although the flames kept them at bay. At 50 feet away, I saw a figure scramble out from under the burning wreck. Then, just as my Saab crawled precisely alongside the overturned truck, a car up ahead of me stopped.

There I was, stuck, with nowhere to go. Cars idling on my bumpers both in front and behind. On the shoulder to my right was the parked car of a motorist who had pulled off to help; I couldn’t have gotten out of my car on the passenger side even if I’d wanted to. And to the left, barely ten feet away, was the blazing inferno.

Time stood still. Seconds became hours. As I sat in my car, trapped, I felt the heat of the fire through my closed window. Then suddenly, without warning, the gas tank in the burning truck exploded. A huge fireball erupted in my direction, literally rolling over my Saab, enclosing me in a solid wall of flame. Wowee Zowee!

But nothing happened. The fireball erupted and vanished in about three seconds. My car did not catch fire. Up ahead, traffic again began to move, and I slowly inched away from the wreck. To say that I was relieved would be profound understatement, since I was scared to death. All told, I had probably been stuck alongside the truck for only about one minute, but it had seemed like forever.

As traffic resumed speed, I glanced at the clock. It was 9:31 p.m., only two minutes after the transit’s exact partile. Barely 20 minutes later, I was home safe.
aftermath

Now, I hesitate to read too much into this experience. Everything that happened could have been mere coincidence rather than “cosmic” synchronicity. But either way, the timing is compelling: Why did I happen to arrive on the scene within seconds after the accident occurred? Why did the traffic stop just as my car was directly alongside the burning truck? And why did the truck’s gas tank explode in that single minute? Why did the fireball not ignite my car, nor even leave scorch marks? What would have happened had I remained on vacation an extra day?

Since the astrological timing was so precise, should I assume the event to represent a “telegram from the Gods?” If so, then how am I to interpret that message? This was, after all, not my accident, but someone else’s. I was merely a bystander in the right place at the right time. Should I consider myself warned and give up driving forever? Is this some weird foreshadowing? Maybe the whole experience was just a random close call with no meaning at all. Who knows?

Astrology does not reveal ultimate meanings. My chart indicated merely that certain symbolic patterns would come together in a particular way, at a precise moment in time. And the experience I had corresponded well to the symbolic matrix of factors. That’s all I truly know. Finally, everything else is speculation.

Perhaps the whole thing was a ruse — a red herring — just a stimulus to motivate me to write this article, which you have now read. That would translate as professional communication (Mercury conjunct MC) to produce provocative impact (natal and transit squares) on a collective public (Pluto in the 7th).

As always with astrology, the possibilities for meaning are endless, and up to us.
stability and change

Stability and Change are two principles that form a basic human paradox. Each experience is necessary and demands its complementary opposite; stability (being) has no meaning without change (becoming), and vice versa. We must ground and soar, often at the same time; our serenity depends on the balance.

Of all the many forms of stability, the one most difficult to live without is not physical security, not emotional relationships, but instead the very way we think about ourselves and our lives. To be secure, we need to have good inner languages.

inner languages

Each of us is involved in the day-to-day process of organizing our lives — events, behaviors, thoughts, feelings, and even more intangible subtleties — into meaningful patterns. Stability is gained through the use of different languages, which are, in essence, symbolic interpretive structures. We literally make sense of our lives through our inner languages, placing meaning where there was none.

Spoken languages constitute only the tiniest fraction of these processes. What can be said in words is an absolute poverty compared to the richness of the languages we use silently in ongoing dialogues with ourselves.

As we rocket toward the end of the 20th century, many of our former inner languages are proving ill-suited to the challenge of providing stability. They may have worked once, but now they are mere anachronisms, artifacts from an earlier age. We cling to the old ways even as they fail, but finally we are forced to cast them aside in favor of other, more experimental languages.
enter metaphysics

Metaphysics is a language of concepts, a way of seeing, structuring, and comprehending reality, just like politics or economics. It’s not a singular language, but is instead a collection of subdialects from various philosophical regions. In its traditional form, metaphysics is an inner language whose structures include psychic and intuitive phenomena, such as telepathy or channeling; analysis of the “subtle bodies” that make up physicality, such as chakras and energy meridians; reincarnation, in all its various forms; and the existence of intangible, non-human “entities” who interpenetrate our world — nature spirits, guides, and the like.

The cultural institutions of science and religion have long preached that metaphysics is a dangerous path. While their resistance has failed to stem the underground interest in metaphysics, fear of ostracism has been sufficient to maintain a surface taboo; there is no serious discussion in newspapers or popular magazines, movies use metaphysics purely for shock value or comic relief, and television offers only the most superficial treatment. There is a real question as to whether or not this resistance is changing in any substantive way, but what is clear is that the forms of denial are indeed shifting.

storming the bastille

Many people who for decades publicly pooh-poohed the idea of past lives now confess to long-standing but previously secret beliefs about having lived before. Individuals who formerly wouldn’t have allowed themselves to be caught dead in any discussion of alternate realities now speak openly about out-of-body experiences or the color of auras. Intellectuals whose previous philosophy was studied cynicism, suburbanites whose sophistication was limited to daytime soaps, and urban denizens whose only faith was once found at the bottom of a bottle now sit together in 12-step groups — not merely Alcoholics Anonymous, but groups with such complicated titles as Co-dependents of Sexual Addicts — discussing the necessity of contacting one’s “Higher Power.” Psychiatrists get readings from psychics; athletes meditate; accountants have astrologers.

The phenomenon of conversion is not limited solely to individuals. Metaphysics is also making visible inroads into previously impregnable fortresses of conservatism, the institutional worlds of lab-coat medicine and button-down boardrooms.
what, me worry?

Since I’m a professional astrologer and metaphysician, someone who makes his living by providing an alternative to traditional counseling, one might presume that I’m overjoyed to see this. After all, I’ve been out here manning this outpost for a long time, perfecting my skills far from the security of cultural center. In any renegade profession, one puts up with absurd prejudices; you’re never sure whether it’s safe to admit what you do on a credit application.

So in part, I am delighted about it. I’ve learned some things you can’t get by playing it safe, and I’d like to feel that I can contribute whatever wisdom I’ve gleaned and be recognized for it. But I do admit to some doubts about the consequences of metaphysical languages coming into more popular use.

lowest common denominator

For one thing, there are very real dangers in taking a specialized way of seeing and opening it to a mass audience. Once the “secret” is out, its meaning can too easily become diluted, reduced to little more than a superficial symbol.

Consider Christianity. The inner language offered by Jesus Christ was nothing short of profound. But some of the most heinous crimes in history have been perpetrated by individuals and groups who rationalized their actions by reference to Christianity. Virtually every kind of travesty has been committed in His name, by people supposedly structuring their lives through His teachings. If this is an example of the results of popular acceptance, I’d just as soon see metaphysics remain outlawed.

temporary insanity

Do you recall how difficult it was when you first began learning to ride a bike? No matter what you did, you fell off. No matter how hard you concentrated, how intently you listened to the instructions, how much you wanted to ride that bicycle, you still fell off. In short, you were at war with yourself. The very effort of concentration to learn prevented your body from being in the state necessary to ride, that of relaxed balance.

Learning metaphysics is much the same. When we’re starting out, first encountering the grammar from the any of the various “dialects,” we work to learn so intently that relaxed balance is impossible to achieve. We’ll make mistakes in using language itself, like a foreigner speaking pigeon-English; or we’ll get the grammar right, with the thoughts and concepts in correct order, but then misinterpret the true emotional meanings the language offers. Baking a cake
from a mix is not the same as being a good cook, and mere thinking is not understanding.

Now, there’s nothing inherently dangerous about this; it’s part of every human growth process. We start out not getting it, and later on we get it. First there is no mountain, then there is. It’s part of the magic of learning and the mystery of growing up. But specifics make this situation worth examining.

**powerful times**

We are living through a time where more power is available than ever before, and where our interdependence is more pronounced. Access to such power has never existed in the history of this civilization. Previously, we could screw things up, but never could we blow the whole game for everybody. Now we can. These last decades of the twentieth century are truly a time of “awe-full” confrontation with power.

I could be referring to nuclear energy, atomic weapons, or toxic waste, but I’m not — except as those are particularly frightening symbols of the impending transformation. I could also be referring to something like literal terrorism, with its hijackings and pipe bombings. I could be talking about how any angry Bozo who loses his mind can get his grubby hands on an Uzi and knock off twenty innocent bystanders in thirty seconds. But I’m not focusing on those isolated dangers; they’re already well documented in the violent images of mass media.

What I am talking about is the delicate condition of the individual human psyche, about the psychological effects of subtle insanity or intangible violence within every one of us. It’s not that people are crazier now than in past times. Hardly. A certain percentage of every generation goes crazy, either quietly or noisily, and the percentages have stayed roughly the same since the dawn of civilization. They go up and down with the flow of events, and occasionally an entire people lose their mind together (witness Germany in the 1930s), but even then, it is isolated into pocket anarchy. No, the percentages in the bell curve don’t worry me.

But the sheer numbers do give me pause. There are simply more of us living now than ever before, almost five billion of us, and thus a significantly larger number of crazy people are walking around. This is important because we are more vulnerable at another level of human paradox.

**alone versus together**

To use a bit of metaphysical jargon, I could assert that as spiritual beings we don’t come to this planet to be totally separate from others, nor do we come here simply to be with them. We come into this place and these bodies, at least in part,
to have both experiences, often simultaneously, and we want to resolve the paradox by understanding it, transcending it, and, finally, living through its irony with grace and aplomb.

Aloneness is an integral part of the mission we took on at the Big Bang: to pursue individual divinity, to become Gods, for the purpose of providing divine perspective. At this level, we are totally responsible for our experience.

Togetherness is a beacon illuminating the pathway back home to Cosmic Central, our return to an undifferentiated state of Absolute Consciousness in final reunion with Ultimate Divinity. At this level, sharing is crucial, the only safety there is.

The form of this paradox has changed. As recently as a century ago, we lived primarily in small towns. We knew our neighbors very well, and what happened to them affected us directly. If someone went nuts, we felt it as a challenge to our own sanity. However, we didn’t always know what happened in the next town or the next neighborhood, and even when we did, our feeling about it was somewhat detached. We experienced the troubles of those we didn’t know at a distant remove from ourselves. If someone went crazy there, it had no effect on our lives.

Now we live in huge cities, but we are strangely isolated. Odds are we don’t have any more than a passing relationship with the people next door. However, we’ve witnessed the beginnings of Brain Earth, where television is simply the tangible manifestation of a more subtle amplification of our intuitive receptivity. What happens to our neighbors still affects us, but now something happening 10,000 miles away also has equally strong effect, intangible though it may be. It registers in our psyches. And because human beings are still more sensitive to fear than to joy, we react more strongly to negativity. Thus, the psychic stress on each of us is more intense, for if a single person loses it anywhere on the globe, we’re much more likely to feel it than ever before in recorded history.

**power and pressure**

Some languages are inherently more powerful than others, and metaphysics is one of the most powerful languages around. Also, an outlawed language will “de-pressurize” explosively when it’s finally released.

Teach someone computer programming, and nothing very dramatic happens. The language of computers is collectively powerful, but it usually has little personal impact. Teach that same person metaphysics, the inner grammar of reincarnation, multiple realities, invisible entities, telepathy, visualization, chakras, etc., and a tremendous amount of power is very suddenly unleashed from the unconscious. The person is much more likely to fly right off the handle and go whacko, at least for awhile, until the new language assimilates and comprehension matures.
spiritual materialism

The shock manifests as spiritual materialism, the tendency to misinterpret symbolic information as literal. This is the "Walt Disney School of Metaphysics," where psychic and intuitive development have no higher purpose than bending spoons, becoming rich and famous, or finding the perfect lover; where subtle phenomena are always interpreted as material (and therefore frightening) rather than as emotional (and therefore quite humorous); where science fiction becomes reality: aliens are invading Philadelphia, Enlightened Masters from the Andromeda galaxy are sending personal messages to specific individuals, and Congress sinks billions of dollars into “Star Wars” defense systems.

The person who succumbs to spiritual materialism won’t realize that the “Inner Levels” are a state of being, but will rather believe them to be real places, as if they were suburbs of Cleveland. He won’t consider that reincarnation might be primarily a way of bringing otherwise buried feelings to the surface; instead, he’ll assume that reincarnation is objectively true. He’ll lose focus on reality and float off into Occult La La Land. In other words, he’ll lose perspective in his rush toward the comfort of ultimate meanings.

Each of us has our own vulnerabilities to spiritual materialism, and we suffer the respective results, from mild delusion to severe psychic distortion. The language of metaphysics is so fast and powerful it can blow your speakers out if you’re not careful.

what’s to be done?

The New Age is often thought of as a time of peace, harmony, and our evolution into a truer humanity. This is, after all, the dawning of the Age of Aquarius, is it not? But in the precession of the equinoxes, each great epoch is more than 2,000 years long. The promised land of Aquarian peace and brotherhood may not be right around the corner. Much of the propaganda about the New Age is little more than sentimentalized echoes from the death throes of the Piscean period.

It is not merely melodramatic doom-saying to suggest that we are in a fight for our lives. The war for our sanity is real. In these times of too much change, when traditional core stabilities prove ineffectual and we undertake extreme measures to discover new inner languages, our sense of togetherness is endangered. We may fall prey to alienation, the dark side of individuality.

As metaphysical languages gain broader cultural acceptance, the veterans need to help the rookies. Many people will succumb to the temporary experience of chaotic alienation and loss of self, but they stand a much better chance of
pulling through with sane support for their natural resilience and adaptability. We’re smarter than we know, but we need all the support we can get to weather the shock of change and awaken from the habit of stupidity. Otherwise, the human species doesn’t stand a snowball’s chance in hell of surviving much longer.

We must also accept the inevitability of a high attrition rate in this war. The casualty lists of failed human lives will be long and sad. These battles of the soul will have psychological effects as real as any warfare. What was called shell shock in World War I, battle fatigue in World War II, and post-traumatic stress syndrome in Vietnam already have their equivalents in the metaphysical struggle for human sanity.

At this stage in human development, we are both witnesses to and participants in the inevitable transition from one stage of being-realization to another. This is the end of our childhood as a species. Whether we will emerge out of our long, clouded adolescence into the clear light of mature adulthood is still undecided.

We have a clear choice: Either we become secure by remembering how to be alone and together, or we can kiss this beautiful planet good-bye.
On Love and Power

metaphysical history

How does the human species grow? How do we deal with the profound crises in evolution that now confront us? How do we navigate a safe course through the adolescent excesses and shortsightedness of our condition? Never before in recorded history have we had such immense negative impact on our environments as we do now. Although the earth will no doubt survive us, the delicate balance of elements that make up our life-supporting environment has been radically altered in a mere two hundred years, to the point that our future is now in doubt. The alarming fact is that we stand on the brink of self-destruction in any of a multitude of ways.

Occultists tell us we have been at this juncture before, in Atlantis. They hold that we had developed extraordinary powers, in forms entirely foreign to modern man. These powers, it seems, were precocious; we had not yet matured as a species, and our abuse of power triggered a global cataclysm in the explosive release of too much earth energy too quickly. The human life-form was very nearly obliterated; the few survivors formed the separate nuclei of what have become the modern races of mankind. In the occult scenario, our redevelopment has led us back to the very same crisis we experienced during the height of the Atlantean turmoil, although the forms of power we have discovered are fundamentally different from those of the previous epoch.

Whether or not any of this is objectively true remains moot. The body of evidence to support such a theory appears sketchy at best, but that doesn’t really matter. Proving or disproving the existence of Atlantis is of very little importance in the overall scheme of things.

Atlantis is a myth, a stark morality play. The story attempts to address the problems in the human psyche surrounding love and power. The failure of traditional occultism, as well as much religious and philosophical dogma, is the
tendency to see life as a battle between forces of good and forces of evil. Such clear-cut distinctions are simplistic; they miss the point. The appropriate uses of love and power are not moral questions at all, but pragmatic ones.

**love versus power**

If I love someone (or something), I see in that person (or object) the essence of divinity. I see God through my beloved. I see the absolute perfection of life, and I see it now, without the need for change. Love is the recognition of the presence of divinity. It matters little whether the love I feel is a wishful romantic projection, an urgent chemical passion, or a coolly considered appreciation. Whether I am moved by a beautiful sunset, a brilliant idea, or the face of my beloved, love is the experience of divinity in life, God made manifest on the earth. Love is the experience of perfection, and, therefore, love is acceptance—acceptance of what is.

Power, on the other hand, is the ability to manipulate and alter any environment. When I digest my lunch, I break down the food I’ve eaten into more basic elements that my body can assimilate. That’s power. When I decorate my house, I reshape my living environment in ways that are more pleasing to me. That’s also power. We seek power when life is not yet perfect, and we use power to move our environments toward perfection. Power is the antidote to imperfection. Power is change.

So love and power are equivalent to acceptance and change.

**extending the equations**

Other equations also apply. At the human level, love conquers the illusion of time, and power conquers the illusion of space. Viewed from the opposite perspective, love is the illusion of conquering time, and power is the illusion of conquering space.

Love takes us beyond gradual perfection and limited perception, to infinity, back to the experience of Unity, even as we continue to flow through time in our human and earthly selves. That’s one reason why it’s such an exquisite experience, for in love, we are both in time and out of time simultaneously, poignantly aware of the flow even as we transcend its limits.

Power has the same relation to space that love has to time. The development and projection of power allows us to alter our relation to every other object. We pull some things closer; we push others further away. If we have power, we can transcend the limits of separation in space, even as we are aware of our movement through it. Thus the awesome impact of power.
Experiencing our whole selves demands both full acceptance and complete change. Achieving spiritual re-union requires transcendence of both time and space. To return to Unity, we need both love and power.

understanding the balance

For human beings, love and power are always intertwined. Acceptance and change are always paired. One without the other is incomplete.

*Love without power always results in suffering.* Love can and invariably does reveal to the experiencer the timeless perfection at the end of the universe. But since we are human (with the distinctly human tendency to project love onto an object of otherness outside the self), if there is no power, then we are impotent to decrease the space between lover and beloved.

Imagine that I love you. I see divinity through you and feel the longing for re-union. But if I have no power, I cannot alter our separateness by decreasing the space between us. I remain trapped in a painful contradiction: feeling the memory of union, but alienated. Without power, I am unable to move into union, to demonstrate it, to manifest the reality of it. Such love involves unspeakable suffering.

Love transcends time, but love without power increases the perceived space between lover and beloved, the seeming distance between the reality and the ideal.

*Power without love always results in chaos.* Power allows us to alter any environment, but love provides us with the sense of perfection that guides the direction of power. Without love, we don’t know what to change anything into; we don’t know what anything means. So power without love produces the destruction of meaning, the descent into hellish non-sense.

Imagine trying to repair a car, to improve its performance or tune it up, without any understanding of the design of the machinery. We may have all the right tools to do the work — all the necessary power — but we don’t know anything about the engine. We lift the hood and begin hammering, pulling out wires, turning screws and tightening bolts, all at random. The inevitable result will be severe damage to our vehicle, and agonizing consternation within the self, a combination of impotence and rage. Attempting to change ourselves or our world without the wisdom of love always produces harm.

Power transcends space, but power without love increases the time required for perfection to come to pass.

Love and power work together in harmony. Power allows love to become fulfilled in reality; love guides power toward effective and satisfying use. Be open to love, and be willing to develop power, but don’t use your power if your
love isn’t wise enough to guide it, and wait to love if you don’t possess the power to make it real.

**collective implications**

As a species, we have sufficient love to return to Unity, but for thousands of years we had so little power that the basic imbalances in the human existence were suffering and pain. Finally, in the 19th and 20th centuries, we discovered the keys to enough power to transform our world in ways we can barely imagine and are only beginning to comprehend. Having lusted for power for so long, the past two centuries saw a headlong rush into power, and we flipped over from one imbalance to the other. Now we suffer from the experience of lost meaning and increasing chaos (power without love).

To insure that our civilization will not disintegrate into chaos, explode into destruction, or sink into madness, we need a renewed transformation of love to guide the power we have unleashed. We need to learn — *finally* — that love does not rightly involve suffering, and that power need not be chaotic.

Suffering and chaos are part of life; they come with the territory of being human. Nothing we do will eradicate them from the scene. But by linking love and power, we can enhance the possibility and the pace of our maturity. We can, at the very least, learn to protect us from ourselves.
On Love and Money

universal love

Love takes many forms. However, in human experience, all forms of love can be understood in one of two ways. Love is either universal or personal in nature.

Universal love is the experience of infinite divinity, love that comes from the ultimate source, from Life Itself, existing within everything. The experience of universal love has no boundaries, no specificity. It radiates from everything toward everything else, and represents the awareness in both mind and heart that there is a single source underlying all manifestation. Called epiphany in Catholicism and satori in Zen Buddhism, it can be uplifting, beautiful, gentle, and terrifying — often all at once.

The J. D. Salinger short story entitled “Teddy” is about a child who achieves Enlightened Realization. At one point in the story, when asked about the first moment of his spiritual awakening, he recounts that at the age of three, while pouring himself a glass of milk, it dawned on him that it was like “pouring God out of God into God.” This is the essence of universal love. It doesn’t belong to anyone, nor is it for anyone in particular. On the contrary, universal love is for everyone, belonging to no one. This is one explanation for why the universe was initially created: to let God experience Love.

personal love

Personal love is the experience of finite divinity. This is love that comes from within the self, created out of the individual’s wish to connect with other incarnated beings. It is always focused, always specific, taken from the substance of an individual’s body or psyche and radiated toward another being in the form of profound affirmation and joyful nourishment. Although personal love can be
shared equally by lover and beloved, it’s felt most poignantly first by the lover, by the person transmitting it. Energy normally used for bodily or psychic functions — such as operating the liver or keeping the aura strong — is transformed, converted into love by the wish to touch the special divinity of another being. In the transformation, we release ourselves from the dense gravity of physicality.

Giving personal love involves sacrifice, for every time it is offered, a little bodily or psychic substance is used. The only way to replenish the lost resource is by receiving similar love from another being. Personal love can be considered to be received only when we’re aware that our bodies or psyches are being replenished.

God created the universe, and in so doing made bodies possible. Universal love is designed to provide a sense of spiritual security, since entrapment in bodies creates the illusion of alienation. It reminds us that our souls are safe even though we may seem separate and disconnected from the source. But bodies and the personalities that accompany them are too dense to be easily affected by subtle effects of universal love. Bodies need the substance of other bodies for nurturing and reassurance, and that’s where personal love enters the picture.

We can thank God for our existence, but we should thank other beings for our nourishment, as they send us the essence of their bodily or psychic energy through their care. It’s not necessary that you literally be with another being to give or receive personal love. Like universal love, it transcends time and space. That’s part of the magic of all love; it can be delivered directly, through touch, but it can also be sent long-distance, “through the mail.” But unlike universal love, personal love must be sent from one being to another, like a person-to- person phone call.

What we call romantic love is often not love at all, neither universal nor personal. Frequently, it’s an illusion with no nourishment for giver or receiver, and too often it represents feeding off another rather than giving anything. Even when it’s a valid expression of personal love, it forms but a small part of total replenishing.

**the spirituality of money**

Many of us believe that God has nothing to do with money, that one is spiritual and the other merely mundane. But it’s not true. In reality, God has everything to do with money. Money is what human culture invented to make universal love more accessible. It’s how we represent in tangible form God’s love for us. Money is the symbol of infinite wealth or bounty; it is the ordinary human translation of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Look at a dollar bill sometime. Really look at it. Right on the front of the bill it says: THIS NOTE IS LEGAL TENDER FOR ALL DEBTS, PUBLIC AND PRIVATE. Legal tender
means a legitimate offering; debt means an obligation to fill up a hole. So the phrase literally means, “This piece of paper symbolizes a certain quantity of universal love that can be used as a medium of exchange anytime you lack personal love.”

Now turn it over and look at the back. Right in the middle is the phrase, IN GOD WE TRUST, literally, a statement of confidence in universal love. On the left side is a pyramid with an eye — the Great Seal. What’s that doing there? The founding fathers were all Freemasons, one of the oldest “occult lodges” in western civilization. They went to considerable pains to insure that money would have metaphysical significance, and it’s right there on the dollar. The eye on top of the pyramid indicates the upreach of physicality toward the spiritual. The Latin words NOVUS ORDO SECLORUM below the pyramid translate as “a new order of things,” while the words ANNUIT COEPTIS above the pyramid mean “God has favored our undertakings” — again, an indication of the universal love that money symbolizes.

intimate commerce

Everything transmitted and received from one being to another is finally love. No matter what form it takes, whether it’s a thought, an emotion, or a touch, the essence is love. Even hatred is love — especially hatred, in fact. More mundanely, a new toaster oven or washer/dryer combo is as much love as any Shakespearean sonnet. If I give you new shoes, I’m giving you love. If you sell me a Porsche, you’re increasing my bounty of love. We don’t often stop to think of it that way, but it’s true.

We invented the concept of business to merge personal and universal love into one earthly structure. For instance, if you receive something for nothing, then it’s a form of universal love. It’s free, no cost, gratis — the essence of God’s love for us all. However, if I give you something I created, then that’s a measure of personal love, for you now have the product of my labor. It’s a sacrifice, however willing. You now “embody” the value, and I have given it up.

Business started out as personal love, since barter and trade are the essence of the working system of personal love. I make something, give it to you, and you replenish me by giving back something you’ve made. I’m a trapper, you’re a weaver. I give you food and skins in return for blankets and socks — a mutual exchange of personal love.

But what if I don’t need blankets and socks? What if I need a well dug? If you can’t dig wells, then I don’t get the replenishment I need. Personal love is valid only when it satisfies a need. It’s like Vitamin C; it’s nourishing only when you lack it. If you already have enough, it just flushes through the system unused. You can’t store it for future times of need.
money as love

What if, instead, we use money as the vehicle for our barter, our exchange of love? I give my meat and skins to someone, and I receive money in return. I take that money and give it to someone else for digging my well. Not only do we both get what we need, but others beyond our interaction are enabled to have needs fulfilled. The cycle goes on and on.

In other words, I give away personal love created by my own efforts, while I receive the particular form of it I need for replenishment. And the universal love that was used as the medium for the exchange continues to go on making more fulfillment possible for other people. It’s a connecting device.

Money weaved personal and universal love together, creating a business system that worked on both levels simultaneously. This was so exciting that it didn’t take people long to figure out that they could expand the universal level.

They began brokering goods and services rather than making them, so soon we had a merchant class of wholesalers, distributors, and retailers, all passing on the same goods and services (personal love created largely by someone else), and charging a profit in dollars at each level. This increased the amount of universal love available without an equal increase of the effort and sacrifice involved in creating personal love.

In the last two centuries, we gradually discovered mass production, which is, in fact, little more than a way to multiply the quantity of available goods and services by using less personal effort (translation: we found a way to increase the distribution of the limited amount of personal love available in the world by using our creative energies more efficiently).

A factory-manufactured ceramic will never be as personal in its loving content as a hand-thrown ceramic. But we make up the difference by adding more universal love. When potter is commissioned by a specific individual, the personal love in the exchange is total. On the other hand, the thousands of identical pots made in molds at a factory have but a small amount of personal love in them, but they’re absolutely filled with universal love. They’re for everyone. Anyone God loves can have one (translation: whoever has money — the symbol of universal love — can buy one).

Finally, business got so savvy that it created markets for the buying and selling of money itself. Banking, the stock exchange, the futures markets, etc. — these are examples of buying and selling money as a product. No longer is there any personal love in the exchange. This amounts to using universal love (money) to buy and sell more universal love (money), and create a profit in the deal in the form of still more universal love (money). Sheer brilliance. A little solipsistic, perhaps, but nonetheless quite extraordinary.

People who are very confident that God loves them (translation: people who are wealthy in dollars) usually take their universal love (money) and convert it back
into personal love (by acquiring Picasso originals, one-of-a-kind antiques, or hand-tooled Lamborghini sports cars).

Business has realized that universal love is easier to produce than personal love. As a result, fewer and fewer products are made to order by hand. Technology is rapidly removing personal love from the marketplace, which has considerable benefits.

If I wrote this book by hand and mailed it to each reader, the cost to me in bodily and psychic energy would be immense. Very few potential readers could afford the book. As it is, my writing remains personal. All the rest — printing, binding, distribution, retail sales — is universal.

Look around your house. Most of your possessions wouldn’t be available if you had to make them yourself or get someone to make them for you. Some of the things you possess would be impossible to make at any price if you had to create just one from scratch, and much of the rest would be so expensive that you couldn’t afford it. Even those of us who are moderately poor by cultural standards live in almost unbelievable bounty — the bounty of universal love, created by its symbol, money, and fostered through its agent, business.

flies in the ointment

But there are problems. Even an abundance of universal love is no substitute for personal love.

Look what’s happened to agriculture during the 20th century. Traditional farming was a discipline of personal love. Tilling the soil with one’s hands, aided by horses or oxen, was entirely personal. The crops produced by such intense labor contained the perfect balance of universal and personal love. Then machinery replaced hands-on labor. Agri-business corporations replaced the family farm. We found ways to harvest bigger crops with less labor. We learned to coax giant fruits and vegetables from plants innately designed to produce small ones. We transformed cattle, pigs, and chickens from barnyard animals into gargantuan meat machines. We manufactured food in factories rather than cook it in kitchens. Much of the personal love in food was supplanted by universal love.

Higher yields mean more for everyone, yes? Unfortunately, no. In taking personal love out of food, we’ve sacrificed not only good taste of hand-tilled earth, but basic nutrition as well. Universal love does not nurture bodies. So even as we stuff ourselves, cravings continue. We bloat, but we starve.

The most basic purpose of business is to expand our access to universal love, and in so doing, to facilitate the experience of personal love. This is the true spirituality of economics.
The main problem with business is that it too often becomes enamored with universal love to the utter exclusion of personal love: The bottom line is always measured in dollars. Business ends up being a medium with no message, a highly ritualized form without an equivalently high content.

**the real bottom line**

They say that money can’t buy love, but that misses the point: Money IS love — universal love — the infinite love God has for every one of us.

Those of us struggling with negative attitudes toward money too often fail to realize that our resentment, envy, or disdain reveal, at their root, a deeper and more disturbing belief: *that God loves others, but not us.* We would do well to examine that belief very closely, for the suffering that lack of money brings is not only a cause, but a result. On the other hand, those of us attuned solely to the acquisition of money and the universal love it symbolizes need to remind ourselves that *no amount of wealth can provide the satisfactions of personal love.* Without it, there is no nourishment, no intimacy, and no human warmth.

So we need to affirm both universal and personal love, since together they symbolize abundance here on the earth.
On Cycles

what are cycles?

Cycles are recurring periods of time in which certain events repeat at the same intervals or in the same sequence. These events are called stages or phases, and the relation of each phase to the others in the cycle forms a characteristic pattern. So cycles are patterns unfolding in time. The growth of a plant from seed to flower is such a time-shaped pattern, as is the development of a crystal. So far as we know, all life in nature manifests through the invisible structure of cycles. And for all our feigned superiority over the dominion of earthly life, human experience is no exception.

Human beings are pattern-sensitive animals. Our brains give us the capacity to consciously perceive many of the apparently infinite rhythms that shape our lives. We cannot yet transcend cycles, but we can often see them, and our future as a species may depend on our success in developing more accurate and subtle means to recognize the existence of important cycles and predict their implications.

Cycles are everywhere in human experience, within our awareness, below it, and beyond it as well. Some inward cycles are obvious. Our lives revolve around waking and sleeping patterns, and similar cycles of eating, digesting, and eliminating. These can change if necessary, and they may be disrupted during or after a crisis, but generally we return to the same life-long rhythms. Other inward cycles are not nearly so apparent. Healing from an injury progresses according to natural rhythms that are invisible to most of us.

Certain external cycles are easy to notice. The ebb and flow of day and night are nearly impossible to miss. How many times might one hear, “Honey, I’m off to play a round of golf!” at 2:00 a.m.? Not very often, and for the obvious reason that it’s dark outside. People don’t usually make the mistake of confusing daytime and nighttime. Longer cycles, such as seasonal change, are capable of being
perceived by an individual, but a vanishing point exists past which we do not experience the rhythm. The freezing and melting cycles of glaciers as the earth’s mean temperatures rise and fall are far too slow to be noticed in direct experience. We need other, synthetic lenses, such as those of science or mythology, to realize their existence and impact.

Behavioral routines are almost always cyclic in nature. The linkage of individual behaviors into learned patterns is called “chaining behaviors.” Driving an automobile is a learned routine. Change from a manual to an automatic transmission, and watch how many hundreds of times you reach for the stick shift. Remodel your kitchen, and notice how often you find yourself mistakenly opening the door of the new broom closet, because that’s where the refrigerator used to be. Reverse the underwear and socks in your chest of drawers, and watch yourself grab for one when you want the other. The pull of an old habit is nearly impossible to resist. We nearly always catch ourselves only after the behavioral routine has kicked in. Learning is relatively easy; “unlearning” is difficult, especially with behavioral or emotional habits, and takes a long time to achieve. Imprints die hard.

Our environments overflow with predictable cycles. When you’re driving a car and approach an intersection where the traffic light has just turned yellow, you base your next behaviors on the expectation that the signal will very shortly turn red. You may speed up to make it through the intersection or slow down to avoid running an imminent red light, but in either case, you know the light is going to turn red, not green. The cycle is green to yellow to red — always in the same order, and that knowledge is part of our imprints around driving. We may not actually think about it consciously, but much of what constitutes common sense involves the natural awareness of cyclic manifestation.

**patterning**

Taken out of the time dimension and considered from a static point of view, a cycle is a pattern, a specific arrangement of elements into a definite form.

Mother Nature seemingly loves patterns. All life on earth has evolved around them; even the phrase “life forms” indicates the importance of patterning. To reiterate, one of the qualities that distinguishes human beings from other species on this planet is our ability to consciously recognize patterns in our environments and our inner experience. Like all life, we move with cyclic patterns, but unlike most other earthly organisms, we have the ability to recognize their existence and analyze their meanings and implications. Beyond that, we can create them. We are literally pattern-making beings.

We love to find patterns, to move through them, to resonate with them. Remember American Bandstand? “Well, Dick, I give it an 88; it’s got a good beat, and you can dance to it.” That good beat and danceability are not only primary
reasons behind rock and roll’s success, they are fundamental elements of the foundation of human life.

When, as sometimes happens, we cannot manage our existing patterns, then we try to make up new ones, for we cannot live without patterning. The chaos of pure chance is antithetical to human consciousness. We love order, even sometimes to the point of deadening repetition. We love security, even to the point of imprisonment.

At times we make up patterns out of whole cloth, in a semiconscious need for order, comfort, or security. Decorating a bedroom is an example of creating a pattern to suit ourselves. But not all the patterns we create are so innocuous. We may build castles in the sky, grounded in little more than a wish to escape from the terror of the unknown, from the frightening lack of control real life allows us. We often take refuge from reality in private opium dens, sinking into illusion and self-deception.

At other times, facing an insoluble dead end or other block to fulfillment, we create patterns that are just as illusory, but as if by magic they lift us to a new realm, a fresh perspective, allowing us to move on with our living.

What distinguishes the two styles of fantasy is difficult to understand and even harder to explain in simple, formulaic terms. Our experience of patterns and cycles may augment our vision of reality — the hologram we carry inside to maintain our relation to life — or it may limit that vision, making us blind to much of what is occurring inside and around us. Patterns can both enhance and destroy.

But no matter how desultory our orientation toward cyclic patterning may be, we persevere in the effort to understand, respond, and create. Repetition is part of our animal nature. It is built into the very fabric of earthly life, coded into our DNA. The incessant demands of our nervous systems propel us with the rhythms of each breath to look for meaning everywhere.

*enter astrology*

Astrology is a discipline that looks for human meaning in the patterns formed out of the movement of celestial bodies. Astrologers presume that parallels or correlations exist between patterns discovered at one level of life (the macro) and patterns occurring at another level (the micro). *As above, so below* is a cornerstone of astrological thinking.

Especially as it has been renewed and further developed in the 20th century, astrology has two essential dimensions: *out of time*, and *in time*.

The easiest example of the *out of time* dimension is the field of natal astrology, the study of birth charts as a method for revealing the particular predispositions likely to unfold through any individual life. This includes the tendency to
interpret reality through specific and often paradoxical lenses of evaluation and expectation.

A natal or birth chart is like a photograph of the heavens taken at the exact moment of a person’s birth, from the perspective of the birthplace. It is flat, two-dimensional, and static, a “slice out of time,” in that it doesn’t change as the person grows older. We each get a single natal chart. That’s it for life. The interpretation of that birth chart is based on the patterning formed out of the matrix of relationships that exist between specific symbols.

The *in time* dimension of astrology includes moving cycles that are dynamic rather than static. These cycles always involve at least two different symbolic factors whose relationship evolves and changes over time, as does the interpretation of the relationship’s symbolic meaning.

Most people begin the study of astrology with the *out of time* dimension of natal astrology. Students spend a great deal of energy learning about the different pieces of natal astrology — planets, signs, houses, and aspects — and how they all fit together. Then after some time, often years, they gradually come around to understanding what moving cycles are. That astrology is generally taught this way is unfortunate, because it’s backwards. The cart is placed before the horse.

The interpretation of those apparently static patterns in a natal chart is actually based on the more fundamental symbolism of moving cycles, a fact that many students and even some professional astrologers overlook. This essay is designed to help people better understand how to think about charts as evolving structures.

Needless to say, I can’t convey my deepest understanding. I don’t have words for much of what I have learned, and what I do have words for — the words you’re going to get — leave out a great deal: all the situations, examples, and exceptions that experience has taught me. But I hope you’ll take away from this essay a sense of what the structure of cyclic reality is and how to go about comprehending it.

**point of view and other considerations**

Much of the terminology in this essay (or almost any astrological writing about cycles) will be specific to the jargon of astrology. We may speak of the Sun moving around the heavens, or the Moon’s cycle around Saturn. For some people, this causes confusion. The Moon doesn’t go around Saturn, does it? Isn’t the Sun the center of the solar system, so how can it move around the heavens?

Yes, astrologers *do* understand that the sun is the center of the solar system. We know it doesn’t really revolve around the earth. At least it doesn’t from the perspective of an observer viewing from outside the solar system. And there’s
the catch, what is termed in motion picture scripts “POV.” That acronym stands for point of view, and it’s a crucial concept.

What is “real” becomes a question of perspective. Motion in the heavens is relative, depending on whether you want to put it into a Newtonian framework or an Einsteinian framework. In Newton’s universe, which is a universe of causes and effects, the sun is indeed the center of the solar system, so it is technically incorrect to speak of the Sun as “rising” when it appears to come up over the horizon at dawn. But in an Einsteinian universe, which is a conception of greater subtlety than the Newtonian, meaning is judged from the observer’s viewpoint, and that’s how astrology works.

One of my pet theories is that astrology rebirthed itself in the 20th century because Einstein and his quantum physics gang made it attractive again. The radical discoveries and new conceptions of early-20th century physics made the viewpoint of astrology relevant. When people lived in a Ptolemaic universe and the Catholic Church was persecuting Galileo, astrology had a rough time. But now that we live more and more in the awareness of Einsteinian reality, astrology is meaningful once again, especially because it is a discipline uniquely suited to the investigation of individual life, whether in terms of basic patterns or moving cycles.

I think of astrology as being about relationships, because everything in astrology is related to something else. Nothing stands alone in astrology, so the uniqueness I derive from it is always a uniqueness in relation to something else — the collective, or Mother Nature, or specific other human beings. And if you don’t get a sense of uniqueness from astrology, then you probably ought to give it up, because it’s going to drive you mad. It’ll make you crazy as a hatter. There are many pitfalls to this particular discipline, a lot of sand traps and water hazards along the course. It’s hard enough to hit the ball straight down the astrological fairway in this culture, given the sort of crazy golf course we’ve set up. It’s like par 185, basically, because there’s so much misconception and misunderstanding about what astrology is, what it’s for, and how it works.

Early in this century, some astrologers were interested in spreading the influence of astrology, presumably to make their careers more lucrative. So they “invented” sun signs. The infamous disco come-on, “Hey baby, what’s your sign?” — was not handed down from the Greeks and Romans. It does not come from the Babylonians in antiquity. Victorians did not use it as they went pub-hopping in the 19th century. No, Sun signs were invented by modern astrologers, and their aggressive marketing turned out to be a pretty slick ploy. Now two-thirds of the people in this country know what their Sun sign is.

Of course, many millions of those people don’t have even the vaguest understanding of what the Sun means in the overall system of natal astrology. They think all there is to astrology is twelve signs, or twelve types of people. And curiously, a lot of astrologers act that way too, although they should know better. They want to succeed and make a living as astrologers (which is no easy task in this society), so they write the garbage in the newspaper columns and on grocery
store racks. That’s the way the world is. But it’s a shame, because that agreement has led to an extraordinarily naive misunderstanding about what the discipline of astrology is and how that discipline works.

In fact, if you take only the most basic pieces of astrology generally used in western culture — ten major bodies in the heavens, twelve signs of the zodiac, twelve houses of the horoscope, and eight major aspects — the different factor combinations are very nearly infinite. Unlike something like bio-rhythms, astrology is not a tinker-toy.

There’s plenty of room in this discipline for uniqueness at a relative level. If you’re a twin born five minutes apart from your sibling, then your chart’s going to look visually the same to the untrained eye. But it’s not, because nobody can be born at the same time in the same space you were. And your orientation, relative to the rest of the universe, as humans interpret it, is unique; it’s special to you.

**moving points and fixed points**

Every cycle in astrology involves a comparison between two symbolic points located along a reference circle. The two symbols in the cycle will fall into one of three categories.

The first category is cycles created by two moving symbolic points. One application here is to compare by circular arc the positions of two actual bodies in the solar system as they move through our perceptual heavens at any given time. The monthly 29-day cycle of the moon around the sun is such a cycle. At the beginning of that cycle, the Sun and Moon occupy the same longitudinal position in the zodiac. Day by day, the Moon moves progressively further in front of the Sun, until the two bodies are opposite at the halfway point of the cycle, at about two weeks. In the final two weeks of the cycle, the Moon fulfills the circuit, drawing ever closer to the Sun, until the two bodies once again achieve longitudinal alignment in conjunction. Any two bodies in the solar system can be compared in this way, and all the cycles lengths are different.

The second category involves the relationship between two static bodies. This is the basis of aspect analysis in natal charts, or comparisons of significant positions between two charts in synastry. A birth chart shows the positions of major bodies in our solar system and other points of symbolic significance as they were at the precise moment of birth, viewed from a certain location on the earth. These symbols are “fixed” in the chart — they’re permanently located in a specific orientation. An astrologer may analyze the relationship between any two of the fixed symbols in the natal chart by measuring the circular arc between the two — point A being so many degrees away from point B. Because the chart is static, however, the cyclic nature of the relationship is often obscured. Since both positions are fixed, the relationship doesn’t change over time. It’s the same this year as it will be next year. As a result, many astrologers don’t think of these
relationships in terms of cycles. They could, and probably should, but many don’t.

The third category is the relationship between one moving point and one fixed point. We compare in real time the actual position of a body (or significant point) moving through the heavens with one of the fixed points of meaning in an individual’s natal chart. This is the system I use in my professional work.

So the three cycle categories involve two points that are moving/moving, fixed/fixed, or moving/fixed.

Even the most basic presumptions about astrological positions involve the concept of circular arc between two points. When someone says that he is “a Cancer,” what he really means is that at the moment of his birth, the Sun (a moving point) was between one-quarter and one-third of the heavens ahead of its position at the vernal equinox (a reference point, which is defined as the beginning of the tropical zodiac, or 0° of the sign Aries). Almost no one thinks it about it that way, but that’s what’s actually being described by sun signs. When the Sun is moving through the section of the heavens we call Cancer, it means that Mother Nature’s yearly growth cycle has completed one-quarter of its process. For a person born when the Sun is in Cancer, his most basic ways of approaching, understanding, and interpreting reality will reflect the meaning of the one-quarter point in the natural, earthly cycle of northern hemisphere seasonal change.

**phases of the cycle**

Who among us does not know the months of the year in their consecutive order? Everyone knows that June follows May, that January is the middle of winter, and that August is the hottest month of summer. Fewer people can immediately list opposite months — January/July, March/September, May/November. We learn the order of the months, but not the complete matrix of relationships between them. Cultural education pretends that time is a linear flow, that we need only know what follows what to understand cycles. But the implications of time are not merely linear. Events do not just follow one another like marching soldiers; they are not linked only like falling dominoes. Events unfolding in time are connected in both linear and non-linear fashion. What happens on Tuesday is certainly the natural extension of what occurred on Monday, but Tuesday’s events are also linked to what is waiting to happen on the following Saturday.

In addition to understanding the relationship of any cycle’s phases, we need to understand the meanings of each phase. It is one thing to know that May precedes June; it is quite another thing to understand meanings of May and June, and to know that May’s meaning will inevitably be followed by June’s meaning, not merely in the progress of the seasons, but in a myriad of life’s unfoldings.
In astrology, we study the geometric relationships between the various phases of any cycle, to reveal the panorama of their non-causal linkage; we also explore the meanings of each phase to understand their application to a wide range of life-experiences. Relationship and meanings are inextricably linked. Like the old philosophical riddle — Which came first, the chicken or the egg? — each value is dependent on the other. Relatedness requires meaning just as meaning demands relatedness. Each creates the other.

**the eight phases**

Fixed cycles in natal astrology, like the months of the year, are based on a twelve-fold division of the cycle. The whole is divided in half, then halved again into quarters, then each quarter is tri-sected to form the twelve signs or houses. In moving cycles, however, we use an eight-fold breakdown. The initial divisions are the same: The whole cycle is first halved, then quartered. But the last division is different — the quarters are bi-sected or halved again, rather than being tri-sected as with the signs and houses.

These eight phases have the following names:

1. New
2. Crescent
3. First Quarter
4. Gibbous
5. Full
6. Disseminating
7. Last Quarter
8. Balsamic

Learning the eight phases and their critical points of passage — called *transits* — is the fundamental requirement in mastering cycles.

**phase one: NEW**

Imagine that there is a cycle in your chart (or more correctly, in your life) that has to do with creating a home for yourself. Let’s say it involves an imaginary fixed point in your natal chart that symbolizes home-owning. The moving point we’ll use is Saturn, because Saturn lends itself well to issues surrounding literal construction. As a result, this will be a 29-year cycle that will unfold in eight
phases of 3½ years each. Such an imaginary cycle is a metaphor to describe the processes through which all cycles unfold, and while it cannot cover every possibility, it works well.

Let’s assume we have a friend named Jack, who lives in a nice little rented flat in an apartment building. He’s lived in apartment since he left his parents’ home. He understands apartment life. It’s as if he had been born in a foreign country, came to America, and just got an apartment, because that’s what one does. Owning his own home is simply not part of Jack’s experience.

One morning Jack gets up as always, has breakfast, and catches the bus to go to work. He’s sitting on the bus driving across town, and for no apparent reason at all, Jack has a mystical experience, an inner event of transformation. He’s sitting there as the bus drives down the street, looking at all the houses, and it hits him — suddenly, from nowhere, completely out of the blue, from left field — that all those houses belong to the people who live in them. They own them. These people may even have had their homes custom-designed, or better yet, built the houses themselves. Jack is sitting there on the bus thinking this, seeing it for the first time — not exactly like seeing God, but having a new and powerful realization. What he doesn’t yet know and cannot possibly understand is that this realization will not be simply another fact filed away in the musty library corridors of his synaptic patterns. What Jack doesn’t know is that this little seed, this peculiar realization, will take root and grow, and that, in so doing, it will eventually change his entire life.

This point is the beginning of a cycle for him, the first moment in our imaginary cycle of House Creation — designing, building, owning, and, most importantly, living in your own home. Major astrological cycles often begin this way. It’s as if the cycles come from nowhere, sneaky like, and just quietly say, “Hello.” There’s no precedent, no background, no preparation. New grids of perception appear spontaneously within our psyches. Nothing circumstantial really happens to cause them; they simply appear as a perceptual shift emerging from deep levels within the psyche, like having been color-blind and then suddenly seeing colors, although the first moments are not usually that dramatic. Time must pass before we realize what’s going on.

From then on, every day as Jack rides the bus to work, he has this new thought again, about people owning their own homes. As the days go by, he becomes more and more interested in the houses he observes on his twice-daily bus trips. Gradually, the thought charges his emotions, evoking ever stronger feelings. Within a matter of weeks, it evolves from a realization into a revelation.

And when Jack acknowledges this feeling, this new fact — that people own their own homes — everything else subtly changes perspective. Certainly the idea of owning one’s own home is not a radical thought in itself. That thought just never meant anything to Jack before. It had no effect on his life and his choices. The idea was somehow out of his realm, not applicable to his personal life. But now it is infused with power. The fact that it’s 8:35 in the morning and
he’s sitting on a bus and has to be at work by 9:00 doesn’t matter. He’s awash in the revelation that, my God, people own their own homes.

The beginning of every astrological cycle often shares these features: a small new perception or idea, a short period of intensification, an ensuing revelation, and then everything else shifts perspective.

Consider a slightly different framework for understanding what’s happening. When Don Juan talks to Carlos Castenada about “stopping the world,” he’s speaking of a conscious technique. But perhaps there are many moments of automatically stopping the world built into every single life. These are moments when the world naturally stops, and we change. In those special instants, we’re not participating any longer in the normal flow of events. We’re separated from ordinary reality, not in an imprisoned or neurotic way, but in the sense that we’ve been mentally and emotionally lifted out of time. The beginning of any cycle is the natural time for that to happen inside us.

The complexity of the actual processes is difficult to convey in a simple metaphor. Theses processes are complex because we’re complex. For most important cycles, the seed idea is not a single thought or realization. More likely, a matrix of small perceptions in different situations occurs on a number of diverse but connected levels of our life. How many there are and how long they take to reach critical mass depend on the particular cycle and the individual in question.

In astrological charts and moving cycle transits, this is the point at which the moving body occupies the same zodiacal space “out there” in the heavens that is represented by the fixed body in the birth chart. So when Moving Point A meets Fixed Point B, we get a conjunction. And that alignment kicks off the New phase, the first of the eight phases in any complete cycle.

Conjunctions vary from cycle to cycle in both length and complexity. In a Moon cycle, which is 28½ days long, the conjunction occurs once, and is effective for only about two to four hours. In an 84-year Uranus cycle, there are often three distinct periods of conjunction that occur (direct, retrograde, and direct again), spread over a nine- to twelve-month “gestation” period.

Once underway, the New phase lasts until the body in the heavens, the moving point, is one-eighth of the circle beyond the fixed point. In geometry, the New phase lasts from 0° of arc (conjunction) between the moving and fixed Points until 45° of arc (semi-square).

The New phase brings a confusing clarity — confusing because the experience is original and unknown, with no grid for understanding, yet clear because the experience feels inherently real. The conjunction embodies various realizations: first, we realize that something exists in the world which we have not formerly embraced; second, we realize that this something is indeed possible, that it is part of the world; and third, we realizing how driven we are to experience whatever we’ve so recently become aware of. Basically, we find ourselves emotionally
involved with what we’re not but must become. The New phase involves a primary, new, emotional alignment.

In our metaphor, Jack discovers a powerful desire to pay close attention to houses. He subscribes to *Architectural Digest, Metropolitan Home,* and *Good Housekeeping’s Ideas for Kitchens and Bathrooms.* His apartment gradually fills up with this stuff. He begins noticing houses whenever he’s about in the world and differentiating one style from another: Cape Cod-style, Southern colonial, split-foyer, California ranch-style, English Tudor. Jack is galvanizing emotionally, imprinting on the diverse manifestations of his new sensitivity. When he goes to visit friends who live in houses rather than apartments, he inquires about their homes. Do they own them? Did they build them?

Jack is in the initial stages of fusing together elements of his new perceptions into images of what he might later want to create. He’s making choices through value judgments: “I like Cape Cod, but God, I hate Southern Colonial!” Making those value judgments is a crucial part of New phase experience. Times will occur later in the cycle when objective detachment is appropriate, but this period in the New phase is not one of them. Don’t restrict the natural process of emotional choices. Don’t say to yourself, “Oh, I should wait; I should just collect all the data and not judge.” No, no, no. Go ahead and let your emotions — which are already programmed in advance on unconscious levels — tell you what you like and what you don’t, what you love and what you fear. Listen to your feelings in the New phase of any cycle. It’s not like you have to do anything about those feelings yet, because the New phase isn’t technically a time of doing. Productive activity comes later in the cycle. This phase is a time of being, of “hanging out” with whatever the cycle brings up from inside.

Many people become possessed during the New phase of a significant cycle in their lives. Urgency and obsession take over. They feel they must go out and get the whole thing accomplished all at once. Whatever it is, they quickly come to believe that they can’t live without it, that their “old” reality is completely bogus, and that they’ll surely die if they cannot immediately experience complete fulfillment with this new image of themselves and their worlds. And while that urgent feeling is something that almost all of us encounter in many of our cycles, it’s a severe pitfall. Giving in to our urgency causes us to run smack into brick walls — walls that don’t move, don’t give at all. And we end up in the psychic hospital with the surgeons saying, “You jerk, you were going 80 miles an hour in a school zone. No wonder you hit the wall.”

Now, I’m not saying that we need patience, because patience isn’t necessary (nor is it generally available) in the New phase. If we force ourselves to be patient, what we often end up doing is inadvertently putting the brakes on the inner, emotional processes, and that can screw up the whole cycle. So forget patience. What we do need is to focus on feeling rather than doing, by putting emphasis on emotions rather than actions. Be with whatever’s growing in our awareness; simply feel it all the time it wants to be felt.

Of course, that’s much easier said than done.
In traditional astrological transits, there are ten different cycle lengths, since the period of each cycle is determined by the speed of the moving point. At one end are Moon cycles, which are roughly 28 days long. Each phase of a Moon cycle is approximately $3\frac{1}{2}$ days in duration. So the New phase of a particular Moon cycle whizzes right by. Blink, and you’ll miss it, in a manner of speaking. In such short cycles, it isn’t a terribly big deal to sit and feel what’s happening, because the feeling emerges over a short period. Right about the time we’re beginning to tire of the pressure of a certain feeling, we’re yanked into the next phase of the cycle, and the process changes.

At the other end of the transit scale are Pluto cycles. These average 250 years in length, and because Pluto’s orbit is eccentric and its apparent speed through the heavens varies widely over time, the phases of its cycles can be as long as 50 years or as short as 20. The length varies, depending on the particular year we’re born in a given century. But regardless, no one ever lives long enough to make it through even a single complete Pluto cycle. In the late-20th century, Pluto is moving through the fastest part of its perceptual orbit around the sun, and its apparent speed is maximized. So someone born in the mid-20th century may, if his or her life is nice and long, make it through perhaps half of a given Pluto cycle.

But even at that, Plutonian cycles can be difficult to stay in touch with. With a single phase lasting for two decades, it might be a significant part of one’s life’s work just to feel the urgent emotions of that New phase without ever actually doing anything with what is felt. If we lived to be only thirty years old, our entire lives could be spent learning about a certain emotion — defining it, recognizing its inner shape, and coming into awareness of its importance — without ever seeing the fulfillment of the imagery in any tangible form. That situation presents its own unique problems, since we would no doubt see other people move through different phases of the same cycle, and they might be doing and fulfilling in real life the very things we most longed to do.

Whatever the cycle, and whatever the demands it makes upon our psyches, the main impulse of the New phase is to recognize in oneself and in external reality the emerging presence of fresh and fertile levels of life. Be receptive to this new data, be active in collecting it, and thinking about it as you feel it. Get centered on the information. Go to where the information is, or bring it to you. But don’t do anything with it. Just take it in. Just hang out with it. Just be here and now, and feel.

**chronological versus psychological time**

To truly understand cyclic reality, we must introduce distinctions between chronological time and psychological time in each of the cycle’s phases. As far as I know, this concept has not been written about in any other book; while many
astrologers understand the idea, apparently no one has thought to describe it in
detail. Relative is worth discussing here.

Each of the eight phases has a psychological time frame that is perhaps very
different from its actual, objective, chronological length. The New phase is
special — and unusual — because it doesn’t carry any sense of psychological
time. It’s “out-of-time.” And when we’re moving through the New phase of any
cycle, it’s as if the clock isn’t moving at all.

Since the New phase has no psychological time content, it may seem
instantaneous or it may seem to take forever, depending on how our
temperaments are constructed, how the rest of our lives are going, and how we
are able to integrate what’s happening in the New phase cycle into everything
else about ourselves.

Once we get toward the end of the New phase and close to the beginning of
the next phase, then the clock begins to move, and each of the other phases to
follow will have a definite time frame. But remember — the New phase is
timeless. We may suffer being driven absolutely mad with impatience, seemingly
held down by invisible weights, to the point where there’s apparently no motion,
no movement, no learning, no growing. Total blockage. Obsession without any
possibility of release. And yet, we might just as easily feel that we’re being
overwhelmed by events, perceptions, and feelings occurring at an unbelievable
pace, like life is happening to us at light speed — incomprehensible,
unfathomable, and impossible to keep up with. In the New phase of a given
cycle, these two opposing grids of experience can swing back and forth from one
to the other.

In fairness, since I am painting a rather extreme picture of New phase
potentials, let me say without hesitation that there is a middle ground. Every
New phase, no matter how long or short, carries with it the possibility of positive
experience, periods of delight in new feelings. These can be moments of pleasant
flow or revelry in the involvement with a recently discovered (or re-discovered)
emotion.

Imagine the first meeting with someone who will later become a significant
person in our lives. There is the initial encounter, that first glance, the shock of
awareness that this person is someone. We probably don’t know what that means
yet, and the effect that’s left by the encounter may be upsetting or confusing or
seductive in a way we’ve never felt. That’s the intensity of New phase
experience. We may not even recognize anything special about the person while
we’re with him or her. But something about this person impresses our
consciousness.

After first meeting but before the establishment of a real relationship lies a
period of emotional formation. We live with the initial stimulation growing out
of that first encounter for awhile. Not only do the early impressions not fade
later, but they take root, grow, and flower in new emotion. Either way —
whether the first impressions are strong and striking, or if the impact is subtle
and gathers momentum — we enter a process of exploring where this person might fit into our lives and imagining how our lives may change as a result. We try plugging this new, mysterious person into all our pre-existing grids. Hauling out our fantasies, we privately taste the various roles he or she might come to represent in an actual relationship.

It’s as if we’ve had an invisible hole in our reality, and now this person has come along to help us fill it. We’re suddenly aware of that hole we never saw before and, equally, of how awful an emptiness it is. We ask ourselves, “How could I have lived for so long without seeing something so basic lacking in my life?” Simultaneously, we feel excited at the possibility of filling that hole with fresh experience.

Technically, the new person in question may have little to do with this process. He or she may be a quite innocent bystander. We have opened, as in the old spiritual saying, “When the student is ready, the Teacher appears.” The New phase means that we’re ready for something — something original — and whatever appears is the Teacher, or, more precisely, the Teaching.

**phase two: CRESCENT**

Toward the end of the New phase, we’ll feel a subtle change, that is, if we’re on track and paying attention. In the faster-moving cycles, this shift feels a little like prickly heat, an itch to get up and go to work. This represents the transition out of the first phase and into the second, from New to Crescent. Mathematically, the transition is indicated by the moving point reaching a position in the heavens relative to the background grid of fixed stars 45° (or one-eighth of the circle) ahead of the fixed point.

Crescent is the second of the eight phases. Especially near the beginning of this phase, a major reorientation occurs. The emotional intensity of the New phase has been completed, and so begins to fade. As it does, a realization dawns that fulfillment may not be as easy or as immediate as we had hoped. Pragmatic perspectives take root. The movement toward doing begins with real preparation.

Jack has been living with his new awareness for some time now. He’s felt the urgency of his emotions and created value systems for determining what he likes and doesn’t like. He’s developed a magnetic center for all desires, needs, and dreams that surround the idea of having his own home, even to the point of wanting to build the house himself. Now, as Jack tires of the emotional enthusiasm of the New phase, he wants to get on with it, to see something happen. In that transition from passion toward productivity, he begins to understand that his “wish list” is going to take work — a lot of work.

It’s one thing to drool over the homes in *Architectural Digest*; it’s quite another to be able to pay for them. Even if you find a nice house on a much more modest
scale, can you come up with the down payment and the good credit required to secure a mortgage? Yes, passive solar is a wonderful design, but where do you get the components? Sure, oak floors are terrific, but have you ever installed one? What’s involved in pouring a concrete foundation? How do you build a roof truss? Can you cut a mortise and tenon joint? How do you tape and spackle drywall?

Slowly, Jack realizes that he’s just whistling Dixie. He’s been pipe-dreaming. At least that’s how it feels to him now. That’s not how it felt during the New phase, and in reality that’s not how it was. He wasn’t merely dreaming; he was emotionally centering. But as he enters the Crescent phase, the call to emotional centering is replaced by need to get down to business by dealing with reality as it is, not as Jack wishes it to be. Basically, what Jack begins to see is that he doesn’t have two things he’ll need if he’s to build his dream house. First, he doesn’t have the necessary resources — that translates in the metaphor as money; on a more universal level it means value, specifically, personal value. Second, even if he had the money, he doesn’t have the necessary skills. He has no real knowledge, no experience.

So Jack goes to work. Oh, he already has a regular job, you understand, and he pays his rent, and he goes on vacation for two weeks every August. So it’s not like he’s been loafing around as a low-life bum. He has a life, and he works to support that life. But the kind of working we’re speaking of here requires a restructuring of the status quo. Jack sacrifices some of his free time and gets an evening job. He starts going to the library on weekends to study books on carpentry and house design. He cuts back on his normal expenditures — he doesn’t really need a new car, and he can live without a second VCR. He starts putting money in a savings account and investing in short-term CDs.

In other words, Jack begins to restructure his time and his existing resources to bring his life into alignment with his new value system. He initiates the efforts necessary to gain the knowledge and experience he needs to make his desires come true. Jack sacrifices some of what was formerly important in favor of what has newly attained importance.

If we were using a business metaphor, then the Crescent phase would represent a period of major capitalization, the hard work of setting up the business. Acquisition of land, construction of buildings, design of machinery, getting computer systems on-line for accounting and billing, hiring workers, setting up a sales network, etc.

By the time we enter the Crescent phase of any particular cycle, a complete vision of what we want has been seeded inside us. The seed has already sent its first shoots upward through the soil of our being, to reach the light. This vision need not be entirely conscious to be effective, but at least certain facets of it should have been thrust into our awareness by the sustained pressure of repetitive feeling. In the same way that a river can gradually wear away rocks on the shore and eventually carve out a gorge as awesome as the Grand Canyon, the “waves of emotion” in the New phase carve out a place in our consciousness for
whatever is evolving inside us. Upon entering the Crescent phase, we have developed a passion. We’re aware of it, even if we fail to understand all its ultimate forms or ramifications, and now we have to bust our tails in order to acquire the skills and resources necessary to make it possible.

What is the psychological time frame of experience in the Crescent phase? Jack has already been through the New phase of our house-building cycle. On some days Jack felt that the emotional beginning hadn’t taken any time at all, and on other days he felt it to be endless. Now he enters the Crescent phase, which has a definite “stretch.” Crescent feels about 40 years long. The cycle was effortless before, filled by the feeling of “taking him.” That’s how most New phases feel, as if something’s happening to us. More likely, it’s happening out of us, but events are so magnified and mysterious in their significance that we can only interpret the experience as coming from beyond ourselves. In the Crescent phase, mystery and passion are replaced by the pragmatic experience of coping with everything. Each day feels crammed full with effort, with the work of moving boulders.

Have you ever cleared a field in preparation for farming? First you have to cut any trees — not just cut them down, but literally cut them up — into pieces small enough to be hauled away. Then you must remove the stumps, and that, as any farmer will tell you, is no picnic. Following stump removal, you’ve got saplings, bushes, and scrub brush to deal with. And finally, rocks — thousands and thousands of rocks — which have to be dug up and hauled away. From pebbles to boulders. After all that sweat, you have what appears to be a perfectly good field, but the soil may be infertile, and even if not, the ground is caked and hard. So you start breaking the earth with your plow, working it like a baker works dough. Then you plant a tillage crop, not for harvest, but to be plowed under at the end of the growing season. You may repeat that process two or three more years to enrich the soil. All this, and not a single grain or vegetable for harvest.

When Jack gets home from his regular job, he takes a shower, changes his clothes, and heads off to his second job. And when he comes home from his second job, he eats, takes a nap, and goes to his third job. By the end of the evening, Jack’s exhausted. When he calculates the money he made that day, how much of it he’ll have to spend to live versus how much he can put away for his dream house, he faces instant depression. Jack’s emotions are set: “I know what I want now. I want my house.” But his psyche is nearly overwhelmed by the immensity of effort and the work that lies ahead.

All the inertia of his past pulls at him. Every doubt he has ever felt about his ability and his worthiness surfaces inside, attacking him psychologically. Does he bitch and groan? No. Oh, he may gripe internally at times, because he’s constantly tired, but he’s learning so much in a steady day-to-day way that he doesn’t really have time or energy to bitch and moan. There’s too much to do.

We all carry many personal doubts about our competence and our ability to grow or change or create or accomplish. And this is very much the looming shadow of the Crescent phase.
Three significant levels of doubt must be checked out, three barometers that let us know this second phase is happening. I call these doubts demons, because they feel mythical in their power to hold us down and hold us back. The first doubts are the demons from childhood that involve our parents. As infants and children, most of us were sometimes reinforced, often inadvertently, to believe ourselves incompetent, without the talent or goodness or moxie to succeed in life. Any negative imprints we carry from early authorities — from our literal parents, from teachers, from TV, etc. — will surface in the Crescent phase. And we must confront those old fears.

The second level of doubt involves literal history. As we look back on our lives — not just our childhoods, but our whole lives — there are many times we’ve stumbled. In the Crescent phase, these previous real-life failures all come home to roost, like holding a party in your dishonor.

Third are “karmic issues” — the fear that we’re destined to fail, whatever our literal history. These are neurotically narcissistic beliefs that God hates us, that we’re the only ones standing in a hole while everyone else is up on even ground. Such shame has no relation to any real experience, no connection to literal successes or failures. It’s original sin, basic metaphysical doubt.

A given person may tend to struggle with one of these more than the other two. And the natural symbolism of any particular cycle may call forth one more than the others. But in one Crescent phase or another, most of us do get the chance to see all these wretched inner demons.

If we characteristically lean toward metaphysical doubts, a certain astrological cycle may quite unexpectedly bring up the issues of childhood and parenting. This can be very disconcerting. We may have thought that our parents always loved and praised us, and, in general, raised us very well. Our problem, so we assumed, was that we were innately unworthy or bad. Then suddenly we’re smashed in the face with hard evidence that our parents were occasionally rejecting or often unsupportive or even downright abusive. Such a shift in perspective can be very enlightening.

On the other hand, we might have spent a lifetime privately accusing our parents of not having wanted or loved us, blaming them in our inner monologues for all our troubles. Then, because a given cycle’s Crescent phase happens to bring up our karmic demons in a way that shows us our own metaphysical doubts, we may discover in the clear light of day that our parents loved us more than we knew, in spite of their real or imagined failings. That, too, can be an astonishing revelation.

The issue here is not who’s to blame — whether we aim that finger of judgment at ourselves, our parents, or God — but rather how to defeat the inner demons, whatever their origins. The difficulty of the Crescent phase is that we can’t deal with our doubts directly; it’s all work in the salt mines, a slow proving of self, very indirect. Fears come up to challenge the emotional center we’ve built around our vision. There is a passion — I want this, I’m going to develop that, I
will create this, I must evolve into that — and the feelings are powerful and deep, deep enough to wake the demons in our unconscious that have been quietly sucking away at our life-energy. And then the doubts come up like a thousand little Chihuahuas, yapping at our heels, distracting us constantly. They can’t really kill us, but they can sure as hell trip us up. Our vision is like a baby that can’t do anything for itself. It depends on us for protection and nourishment. The vision can’t fight off attacking Chihuahuas, so we have to. But we are busy just keeping them at bay since it takes all our time to develop the resources and skills necessary to evolve the vision, to give it food. Direct confrontations do not normally occur; the process is more a gradual wearing down of our demons’ ability to hurt us by our increasing strength and fitness, which we achieve through consistent exercise.

Jack tries to say to himself, “I’m going to build the house today. Screw these doubts. Screw these fears. Forget that my parents never had enough money to own their home. Just because I’m their kid shouldn’t mean that I can’t have it either.” But Jack can’t go out and get a house to prove that he can have one. He simply doesn’t have enough money yet. So Jack lives with his doubts. He goes to those three jobs and earns the money that will become the outward confirmation of his inner worth. And he watches his savings slowly grow.

Jack says to himself, “I can go to work today even though I’m tired and beat up from my battles with inner demons. I can because my vision is pushing me. My vision is worth the effort.” In the Crescent phase, our vision is worth more than we are. We must raise our worth to meet it. We do it via the School of Hard Knocks, by flexing our muscles — gaining experience and acquiring skills.

Jack is frustrated and embarrassed at not having sufficient resources to turn his dream project into reality, so he fights his shame by settling for a working plan. He hires an architect, paying a little at a time while the house blueprints slowly come together.

In the Crescent phase we can focus on how terrible things are, or we can buckle down and do the hard work of building the foundation. Other people tend to see us in a better light than we see ourselves: “God, she’s getting up and actually doing the work. We can see how hard it is, but she’s doing it anyway.”

A wonderful Crescent aid is what I call “dental non-memory.” If you’ve ever had a tooth drilled without novocaine, you know how unbelievably painful it can be. And yet ten minutes after the tooth is filled, the pain is gone. I don’t mean just gone in the literal sense; I mean GONE, like it never happened. So even while we remember defeats and failures and losses in the Crescent phase, we don’t remember the agony. We have to deal only with the concept of failure. And that’s lucky for us.

Our friend Jack works hard in the Crescent, developing skills and acquiring raw materials, and about one-third the way through the phase, from the aspect called the sextile (at exactly 60°, where the moving point is one-sixth of the circle ahead of the fixed point), something begins to happen. It’s a subtle change, but
Jack begins to get into the flow, the rhythm of the work. He finds his pace, and learning of new skills accelerates, as well as un-learning old shame. Others notice this before Jack will, but it does happen, and it counts for a lot. Jack is getting stronger. His jobs don’t tire him like they did at the beginning of the phase. His doubts don’t cause him as much anguish.

So early in the Crescent phase, from 45° to 60°, there’s often great difficulty. But from 60° on, a solid foundation is emerging. And in our metaphor, that foundation is literal.

Jack has now saved enough money to buy a plot of land. It’s unlikely that he has enough to buy the ground outright, but he has enough to leverage a mortgage, and his higher income is sufficient to support the payments. So he acquires the site where he will eventually build his house. Sure, he’s still living in his old apartment, but he can actually visit his new plot, he can stand on the ground where his home will someday be. Yes, it’s just an empty lot in the city, riddled with broken bottles, old tin cans and other garbage, but it’s his lot. And that means something to him. It’s tangible. It’s real. In psychological terms, this means finding the level in one’s personality that is fertile enough to provide the eventual fruits of the cycle.

Jack hires a surveyor who lays out the boundaries of his property and his soon-to-be-poured foundation. Stakes appear with little flags on them. Jack connects the stakes with string, and he can see the conceptual outline of his house. He proudly erects a sign saying, “To be Erected on this Site: Jack’s Future Home.” He does this not for others, but for himself. The sign is not so much a public announcement as a reinforcement to his personal commitment. His dream is shifting more and more toward objective reality.

He takes the final blueprints to a contractor, who in turn begins subcontracting the work. Jack is now finding the people and institutions necessary to supply him with what he needs to create the structure of his vision. He’s beginning to learn the language of the marketplace — real politique, as French intellectuals might say. His contractor hires a man with a bulldozer and backhoe to dig out the site for the foundation. A huge hole appears. Then the masonry workers show up with iron rods, wooden forms, and a big cement mixer to prepare and pour the concrete foundation.

Here it is, almost at the end of the 40 years (measured in psychological as opposed to literal time), and Jack has survived. If he has not fully vanquished his inner demons, he’s at least fought them to a stalemate, and he’s smoothed out his own process, slowly gaining confidence in his ability to support the project and acquire the skills. At this point Jack actually gives himself the luxury of getting excited for the first time since the New phase ended and Crescent began.

But wait. Just as the foundation is ready to be poured, the rain starts. Earth turns to mud, the workmen shake their heads and go home. Jack is crestfallen, so close and yet so far. Of course, there’s always rain during the Crescent phase. Rain, or hail, or locusts, or drought, or something to get in the
way of real physical progress. Murphy’s Law applies in this phase: *Anything That Can Go Wrong, Will.* And Murphy’s Corollary applies, too: *At the Worst Possible Time.* Excitement in this phase is simply not permitted. It is always squashed before it can grow, nipped in the bud.

But eventually, after numerous false starts, the forms are laid, reinforcing rods placed, cement poured, and the foundation sets up and hardens into a true support for his house-to-come. Wonderful? Well, sort of. Almost.

At the end of the Crescent phase, Jack is suffering a new kind of warp. He has a well-entrenched emotional passion, a feeling-image of sitting in a nice, warm house with a fire burning in the fireplace, relaxing in his easy chair with his dog at his feet, sipping a bourbon and branch water. That’s his image, at home in his castle. *His* castle. But what Jack actually has is a big roll of blue paper with white lines on it that, strangely enough, doesn’t look like a house at all. But his architect says, “Trust me. It’s your house.” In addition, Jack has a piece of land with a big hole in the ground. This also does not look like a house to Jack. But his contractor says, “Trust me. It’s your house.”

The end of the Crescent phase always presents this psychological conflict. You’re beginning to develop real worth that can be applied to your new vision, and it feels good, but as it’s occurring, you’re also discovering that the evolving forms for the eventual life-structure are very confusing. You don’t exactly know how to decipher these abstractions. They simply don’t appear to have any obvious relationship to what your dream is about. But even so, there are many forces in the universe saying, “Hey, trust us.” So the last challenge of the Crescent phase is trust.

**phase three: FIRST QUARTER**

Jack finally comes to the end of the Crescent phase. In the lot where his house is to be built, he now has a hole in the ground with iron rods sticking out of slabs of concrete. Getting this far has taken a long time, because the New phase is infinite, and the Crescent is slow. Technically, it’s been only seven years since he had the original spark of realization: “My God, people own these houses.” In the cycle, he has reached the third phase out of eight, called First Quarter. The moving point is now 90° (or one-quarter of the circle) ahead of the fixed point. And everything is about to shift dramatically.

The First Quarter is the most exciting of all eight phases to experience, because it confers the most accelerated sense of psychological time. The New phase is “out of time,” even though in Saturn cycles it will take 3½ years. The Crescent phase is slow as molasses, like one-tenth speed slow-mo on a VCR — about 40 years psychologically. In the First Quarter, however, time accelerates. Those 3½ chronological years feel like 3½ *days* psychologically.
The most relevant symbol in our metaphor for describing the First Quarter is *The Framing Crew*. Why? Because a framing crew represents the most urgent phase of visible change in the construction of a standard house.

Consider the project from an observer’s standpoint: I am Joe Average, and my driving route to work every day takes me past Jack’s lot. I drive by for years seeing nothing but a vacant lot with an old, faded “For Sale” sign on it. It had been there just like that as long as I could remember, decades perhaps. Long ago, a neighborhood grocery store had occupied the site, but it burned down in the 1960s, and after the rubble had settled, the lot remained vacant. Someone bought it in the 1975 for commercial development, but the deal fell through, since the lot wasn’t exactly a prime piece of real estate in the economic climate of those times. Since then, it’s been vacant. Until one day, I drive by and, out of the corner of my eye, see a new red “Sold” notice pasted over the faded old sign. The notice remains for three months. I ponder who might have bought the property. Then the sign vanishes. I drive by for another two months and wonder what’s happened. One day on my way home from work I notice that the lot’s being bulldozed, cleared of garbage and underbrush. About three weeks later, I see little stakes with red flags sticking up out of the ground. Another month goes by before I notice a sign saying, “To be Erected on this Site: Jack’s Future Home.” I think to myself, “Great, someone’s finally doing something with this neighborhood eyesore.” But, alas, five more months pass, and the sign starts to weather. I forget all about it, and my curiosity about the lot recedes into the background of my daily drive. But one morning I see earth movers and dump trucks sitting on the lot, and sure enough, a couple days later there’s a big hole in the ground. I begin wondering again about Jack and his imaginary house. Another week goes by. It rains, and the hole becomes a giant mud puddle, so two more weeks pass while it dries out. I see cement mixers as I pass one morning, but it rains again, and at my evening drive-by, they’re gone, with nothing changed. A week later I see them again, but this time they’re still there in the evening. In fact, they work for a whole week, building forms, pouring cement, shaping the foundation. My interest starts to peak. I slow down sometimes to get a better view. One day I even stop and watch the cement workers assembling wooden forms and pouring a new wall. Finally the foundation is finished, the cement trucks have left, and activity stops again. A week goes by. Two. Three. I lose interest.

Now all this has taken a helluva long time. I wonder, “Will they ever build anything on that lot?”

One fine morning as I drive to work, I notice a big flatbed truck sitting on the lot. On the bed are stacked 2 x 4s, 4 x 4s, and 2 x 8s — dimension lumber. Sitting around drinking their morning coffee are a bunch of guys, about ten of them. They wear dirty jeans and work shirts, and they’ve got those leather belts with the nail pouches and hammers slung from them. The scene reminds me of cowboy movies about cattle drives. Gunslingers with hammers and nail guns rather than six-shooters. But these guys aren’t cowboys; they’re rough carpenters — the framing crew.
I think to myself, “Hmm, I guess they’re really going to build a house there after all. About time they got to it.” I make it to work as usual, put in my eight hours, and as I drive home, I approach the vacant lot with the foundation and wonder if there’ll be any visible change. I turn the last corner, and wham! The vacant lot is gone. Vanished. I pull over, stop the car, and take a good long look. Damn! The lot’s not gone — there’s a building there! After all those years, all that seemingly endless time where so little happened, the transition from empty lot to literal house took only one short day.

If you’ve ever watched a house being built, you know what I’m talking about here. Framing crews are amazing, especially if they’re putting up what is politely called in the building trades a “stick house,” meaning a house built with regular, standard framing techniques. Those suckers on the framing crew don’t waste any time. One day there’s just a foundation, and the next day — Bod-a-bing, bod-a-boom! — there’s a house. To be sure, it’s not a real “house” yet; no one could live in it. The building may little more than a skeletal structure of beams and trusses, perhaps with plywood sheathing, and bare openings where the windows and doors will eventually go.

But even so, it’s recognizable as the shape of a house. Where there was nothing before, suddenly there’s something, the outline of a building, shooting up from the ground as if by magic, defying gravity. It’s amazing.

The First Quarter phase is kicked off by the moving point being $90^\circ$ of arc (one-quarter of the circle) in front of the fixed point, forming an aspect called the waxing square. Upon reaching this point in the natural evolution of the cycle, we are finished dealing with inner psychology. We’ve laid as much foundation as we can. Now, quite suddenly, we must deal with external reality. We must commence to build the actual structure for whatever the cycle concerns. We’ve got to make its meaning tangible in our lives as part of our circumstances. So the keynote to the whole First Quarter phase, as well as its primary challenge, is to stop preparing internally and push externally. Push like hell.

In the Crescent phase, we dealt with demons, with our internal monsters. We could borrow a phrase from the 1956 science-fiction film Forbidden Planet and call them “Monsters from the Id” — all the doubts and fears about inadequacy that are part of being human. We grappled with the effects of neuro-psychological programming, and gradually we exorcised our doubts and fears, the inner voices that block us from productive, fulfilling activity. So when we exorcised our demons, where did they go? Why, into the physical environment. They stopped attacking us internally, from within, and retreated into the next battleground we would face — external reality. They gave up their intangibility as psychological vulnerabilities and re-surfaced in the outer environment as real physical obstacles.

Entering the First Quarter, we must deal effectively with real-world situations and circumstantial crises. But rather than approaching subtly, indirectly, as we did in the Crescent phase, now we must confront our blocks directly. Rather than
passively building a foundation, we must aggressively take new territory. In the First Quarter, the rule is conquer or die.

In our metaphor, Jack confronts gravity. Previously, he’s worked with gravity — digging a hole for the foundation. Now he works against it. The framing crew has to put the house up, quite literally, and Mr. Gravity says, “Oh no, that’s not how it works in this world — I’m not gonna let you do that.” So the framing carpenters use 20d nails — big mothers about three inches long — to secure the posts and beams in the structure, to hold the studs together and keep the house standing, to defeat the force of gravity. And they have to pound those nails in by force.

Inner doubts may not entirely vanish, but they become irrelevant. The demands of real life take over in a series of confrontations with literal forces that attempt to block manifestation of our vision. Some of these forces are completely natural, some are social, some are interpersonal. The challenge here is to prove your mettle to an uncaring outside world, to convince the external environment that you’re someone with whom to be reckoned, someone who won’t be turned aside.

By virtue of an unexpected confrontation with a city building inspector, Jack may run into obscure city codes that prohibit single-family dwellings on his lot, necessitating endless meetings with the zoning commission. He may have to deal with unsympathetic bureaucrats, clerks, and others who wield a shocking amount of power in the good-old-boy network. One of his subcontractors might be caught up in a city-wide strike, bringing construction to a dead halt while his hard-earned money drains away. Specialized building materials may prove unavailable from lumberyards, even though they continually promise next-day delivery. A workman might be injured on the job, raising the specter of a lawsuit or an expensive out-of-court settlement.

This is not the Murphy’s Law reality of the Crescent phase. The problems that arise are not unbelievable to anyone with experience in such matters. On the contrary, they’re predictable and nearly inevitable, but that doesn’t make them any easier for Jack, or for anyone going through the First Quarter of a significant life-cycle. And unlike the doubts of the Crescent phase, these problems cannot be solved by ignoring them. We must find real-life solutions, for these are blunt obstacles in our path.

Depending on the particular cycle, the problems we face require various strategies and techniques. Sometimes confidence or bravado will see us through. At other times, tact and diplomacy work more successfully. As long as our original vision remains undamaged, compromises will be necessary to promote and sustain productivity. We are trying to give our inner passion an external outlet, and the first forms we consider may not work in the real world of actual situations. So we change our blueprints as necessary to suit existing circumstances. The Crescent phase required us to hang in there; in First Quarter we are challenged to be flexible, to give up certain ideas of how our vision will manifest in favor of more workable ways. If recessed track lighting in every room
is too expensive, perhaps Jack can make do with incandescent wall sconces in certain rooms.

Sheer force is frequently called for. Sometimes we just have to bull our way through by pushing relentlessly. So the First Quarter phase is “the little engine that could.” Another well-suited First Quarter image is the 1950s pop music hit, “High Hopes”… “Oops, there goes another rubber tree plant.”

A flurry of activity assaults us in the First Quarter. We feel we have too much to do, and precious little time in which to do it. Usually, that feeling is correct. What was before a grind-it-out, day-by-day rat race suddenly becomes an astonishingly urgent schedule. There is a sense of holding off impending doom, rather like a farmer might face at the onset of a summer locust plague. “Holy cow, if we don’t get them bugs away from the wheat now, the whole crop will be destroyed. Get the smoke pots quick!” This is the early summer point in the cycle, when gardeners must protect vulnerable young plants from environmental harm — insects, animals, and especially weeds. The time for fertilizing the soil and planting the seeds (New phase) is past, as is the steady, slow work of watering to insure that the seeds will germinate and take root (Crescent). Now we have to be out there in the garden, on our hands and knees, doing whatever back-breaking labor is required to keep the weeds from crowding out the young plants and the predators from killing them off before they get a chance to flower.

Time accelerates. Mickey’s hands begin spinning wildly around the dial as time is foreshortened. Once the decision to act is made, it’s like having stepped on a rollercoaster. As Jackie Gleason used to say, “And away we go!” A curious thing about the First Quarter phase is that, generally, courage is no problem. Of course, that’s a tricky statement to make because different people react so differently to the challenges of living. But presuming that the first two phases of the cycle have been experienced in their proper perspectives, then courage is no problem. After a long period of preparation that is largely internal and intangible, flexing our pragmatic muscles and dealing with real-life problems can be a profound relief.

Two-thirds of the way through First Quarter, the sense of urgency wanes. At the beginning of the phase, the waxing square (90°) pushed everything into a frenzy. As the moving symbol approaches 120° in front of the fixed symbol, the waxing trine takes over. Rough edges smooth out. Inertia is overcome; momentum is achieved. Circumstantial problems are still encountered, but — if our experience has been at least modestly successful — we are confident of our ability to solve them. We’ve learned how to deal with external reality. We know when to compromise and make adjustments; we know when to stick to our guns and bull through. The palpable excitement and accelerated sense of time that exploded at the beginning of the phase are now integrated. As a result, our perception of time slows back toward normal, not because we are actually slowing down, but rather because we accustomed to the quicker pace of life. Cruising along the autobahn, we can move mountains. Whatever problems we
encounter, we are seeing our vision take shape. Our dream is actually coming true.

**phase four: GIBBOUS**

At the end of the First Quarter phase, Jack has won, if not all, at least some of his major battles. He’s worked out solutions with the contractor and subcontractors; he’s managed to convince the Zoning Commission to let him build his house; the City inspectors have been paid off [pardon my cynicism]. All the myriad problems that came up have been addressed, confronted, and conquered. Or at least they have been dealt with well enough to allow the construction of the house to proceed roughly on schedule.

Through these challenges, Jack has changed, too. His experience has grown immeasurably, and with it his confidence. His life is moving — fast. He’s grown almost blasé about the accelerated pace of everything. What was once exciting — that first day of construction, external walls going up, roof trusses, plywood sheathing to enclose the structure, initial placement of windows, etc. — is now standard. Each was a landmark for Jack in its time, a source of great excitement. But now all the major framing work is done.

If we were to drive by Jack’s lot now, we would see what appears, for all intents and purposes, to be — drum roll, please — a house. It looks like a real, honest-to-goodness house. But what it is in truth is a “movie house.” It’s just like a house on a movie set. Yes, it has four walls and siding and windows and doors and a roof and shingles and a chimney and everything. But it’s still a shell. Oh, there are floors inside, unfinished sub-flooring, mere plywood sheets nailed down. And there are inner walls of a sort, but they’re mainly 2 x 4 studs and 2 x 8 headers. We can walk from one room to another without worrying about where the doorway is.

This marks the beginning of the fourth of eight phases, called Gibbous. The Gibbous phase begins when the moving symbol is 135° (three-eighths of the circle) in front of the fixed symbol, an aspect known in astrology as the *waxing sesquiquadrate*. This phase will last until the two points are exactly opposite.

Time is shifting again. Like every other phase in this 29-year cycle, Gibbous is chronologically about 3½ years long. But psychologically, this is the longest of the first four phases. In fact, it’s the longest of any of the eight phases. New is infinite yet instantaneous, Crescent is 40 years, First Quarter is 3 days, and Gibbous is 250 years — at least. Time slows down... to... a... snail’s... pace.

First Quarter is: Throw everything in the blender and hit the switch. Past Grind, past Puree, all the way to Kill. Or, shove it in the microwave and turn the power to 15,000 watts, set it for three seconds, and hit START! The Gibbous phase is: Carefully measure the ingredients — exactly — and be sure to wash the measuring spoons immediately after. Now, being certain that you don’t bruise
the delicate batter — which will ruin the cake — take your wooden spoon and beat it gently by hand. 27,000 strokes. Exactly. Count them as you do them. Every single one. Stay focused and do not lose track of the count.

Here, once again, is our friend Jack. He still lives in the same apartment he started out in. He still rides the bus to work five days a week. He’s long ago quit his second job because he every precious moment of his spare time is taken up working on his house — evenings, weekends, holidays. His contractor and subcontractors have left; their work is finished. Jack is now on his own, with one apartment, one incomplete house, and a seemingly infinite number of unfinished details.

This is the time of fine carpentry, the finish work. Jack is honing his house, polishing it, putting on the trimmings, making it perfect. This work will never be finished. Every job becomes magnified. Each individual baluster on the stairway must be cut, trimmed, rough sanded, nailed in place, fine sanded, tacked to remove the sawdust, tung oiled once, rough sanded again very lightly, oiled again, finish sanded, then finally hand polished. Every single baluster, and there are eleven of them. Jack’s world narrows down to a baluster, one every four days, if he’s lucky.

In the first third of the Gibbous phase, we are conscious of our work, and conscious of the reasons for it. We are perfecting the structure that will allow manifestation in real life of our vision. When the moving symbol arrives at 150° in front of the fixed symbol, however, the cycle reaches what is called the waxing inconjunct. This is probably the most misunderstood major aspect in astrology. In a natal chart, a waxing inconjunct indicates two symbols which operate as if they were separate and unrelated, even though the expression of each has a clear impact on the other. The challenge of the aspect in a natal chart is to see the connectedness, to remember that these two symbols are related. The pitfall of the aspect is that we spend most of our time acting as if they were not. We end up looking (and, all too often, being) stupefied, not understanding how our best intentions could lead us so far astray.

In a moving cycle, what tends to occur from the waxing inconjunct through the remainder of the Gibbous phase is this: The grand emotions of our original vision first fade into history, then sink from conscious memory, then disappear entirely into the recesses of the unconscious. The preparation of laying a good, solid foundation is long forgotten. The excitement of seeing the structure in reality for the first time has lost its luster. We become totally involved with perfecting our structure, with making it right. We become creatures of habit, like worker ants, concerned only with the painstaking eradication of every flaw, with the completion of every level of the structure. The phrase workaholic acquires true meaning.

Jack has forgotten his original, passionate vision of sitting in an easy chair, with a fire in the fireplace, sipping a bourbon and water, being comfortable and cozy in his house. The vision is gone; it has no more reality to him. He has used up all his passion. It’s been sublimated into the day-in and day-out effort of
making the dream real. Oh, the vision still alive inside him — somewhere — but he’s no longer consciously in touch with it. Jack is thinking something like this: “Hell, the cabinet doors didn’t come on the freight yesterday, and today I got a phone message from the company saying they’ve been discontinued, so I can build my own doors, which will require going to three lumber yards to find the oak hardwood, and cutting and sanding and finishing, or I can go out shopping again for the nine-thousandth time and try to order similar doors from another distributor, which will require matching the ones I’ve already installed, but in either case it’ll put back working on the sink and tile backsplash for another two weeks…”

Poor Jack. He is so organized, so obsessed with schedules and strategies, so determined to get it right, so competent at juggling a thousand pieces of information at once, that he’s driven himself mad. Whacko. It’s a very quiet madness, with no outward signs, except perhaps weariness. No one else would think him insane; in fact, most people who observe him believe that he’s never been better. He’s so stable, so hard-working, so competent. But inside, he’s nuts.

A relevant image for the Gibbous phase in our metaphor is “drywall, spackle, and tape.” These are materials used in finishing walls. Anyone who’s ever dealt with houses, especially anyone who’s ever built a house or added a room or dealt with remodeling knows that drywall is one of the most God-awful jobs in the world. Drywalling takes an unbelievable amount of time, it’s very tiresome, and you have to get it just right or the walls will look like crap forever.

It’s not bad enough that cutting drywall and putting it up is a difficult job. Once it’s up, you’ve got to spackle and tape every joint, every nail, every flaw. After a little practice, most people can learn the technique almost well enough. However, mastering it is damn near impossible. You can never feather those edges perfectly. You go through a whole room with trowel and mud in hand, and you tough it out and get it finished about 3:00 in the morning. You fall in bed and get up the next day thinking, “God, I did so well with that, it was so good.” But you walk in the room, and of course the spackle has shrunk as it dried, leaving depressions and little holes and pockmarks. So you sand it anyway, because that’s what you have to do, and you sand and sand and sand until your arms fall off. Ceilings are the worst, but it’s all terrible. And spackle dust fills your whole house, no matter how hard you try to prevent it. Then you grab your trowel and lug in that 25-pound tub of joint compound, and you go through the whole process again. And again.

The only way to survive such an ordeal is to go no-mind. You just slowly ease into a mental and emotional framework where it’s all process. You become a machine: “John Henry was a steel-drivin’ man.” This bears minor similarity to the Crescent phase, except there the work was mainly internal, and you had the vision to motivate you. Here, the work is entirely external, and the motivation is sheer perseverance.

What was once grand vision is now dutiful project. What was once passionate emotion is now measured, careful effort.
Curiously, Gibbous is a very artistic phase. We are now working within the actual structure of what we wanted to create from the cycle, and we’re thinking of it like an artist would think of a painting-in-progress. The effort of making things plumb has already been addressed in the Crescent and First Quarter phases. What we’re doing now is cosmetic touch-ups. If we measured wrong and things didn’t get quite plumb before, or if the foundation settled a little since the framing began, then we have to touch it up in such a way that it looks like it’s plumb. Since actual perfection is impossible, we’re creating the illusion of perfection. We’re putting on the finishing touches before the public unveiling, although we have no sense at the time that there will ever be a public unveiling.

Consider other examples: You’re getting married to the man of your dreams. You’ve already met him, dated him, fallen in love, been through a whirlwind courtship, gotten engaged — all the stuff that happens in the first three phases. Now you’re getting ready for the big date: formal wedding in a fancy church, reception with 200 people at the country club, the whole shot. Are you excited? No. Why? Because there are a million details to be constantly taken care of: “No, no, we don’t want anchovies on the hors d’oeuvres.” You’ve forgotten what’s really important. Getting married means nothing. You can’t see the forest for the trees.

An even less tangible example: Let’s say that you aren’t in a relationship, that you merely have a dream of a relationship. There’s even a Gibbous phase to that experience. You have a blind date set up with someone whom your friend assures you is a dreamboat, a hunk, a buf chick, whatever. You want it to be hot, you want to have a wonderful time, you really want this person to turn out to be The One, even though you’ve never met. So you’re sitting in your room all afternoon, hour after hour, thinking — “What shall I wear? How shall I act?” Get it? You’re really not in touch with how wonderful it might be to meet this person. You’ve lost touch with that, and instead you’re focused entirely on preventing something from screwing it up. You’re considering every possible flaw that could come up in the evening, and trying to head each one off well in advance.

These examples may leave the mistaken impression that we feel horrid anxiety during the Gibbous phase. Actually, the stress is mainly below the threshold of consciousness. The whole point is that we don’t feel the stress. We don’t feel much of anything. We just do the necessary work to achieve the illusion of perfection on our project. It’s turned into a pet, and we take care of it. The project owns us now; we are its servant.

At the beginning of the cycle in the New phase, we were shocked into realizing that a new identity was possible for us. During the Crescent phase, we dealt with the inertia of our old identity and prepared the ground for our new one. At the First Quarter, we moved aggressively to establish this new structure, to plant it in reality, and in so doing showing the world that we have what it takes to move forward. In the Gibbous phase, we marshal all the remaining strength from our old identity to support and perfect the newly-built structure. We are in limbo. Who we were is fading away, but fading so subtly that we hardly notice; the vision of who we wanted to be is lost in the constant effort; and who we
are about to become is not yet clear to us. We forget so much that we can focus only on the tasks at hand. Lacking any coherent sense of identity, we become our work, because the work remains meaningful, even if we are not.

At the end of the Gibbous phase, the situation for our friend Jack is that he’s still living in his rented apartment. He’s been there since the project first started back in the New phase. Now he has this other house, the one that he’s building. It’s his “project.” He goes to his regular jobs to earn a living, then he works on his house in the rest of his time — nights, weekends, holidays. And at this point, he’s completely forgotten that this project is intended to be his home. It’s merely endless effort, ongoing work that he can’t conceive of ever ending. As the Gibbous phase grinds to a close, Jack is a worker ant.

phase five: FULL

The Full phase of the cycle begins when the moving symbol reaches the point exactly opposite the fixed symbol, at precisely 180°. The waxing half of the cycle, where we counted up from 0° to 180°, has ended; now we begin the waning hemisphere, where we count down from 180° back toward 0°.

The Full phase begins with a series of jolts — three of them. We are shocked out of the dutiful routines involved in Gibbous’ striving for perfection.

Jack’s project has already taken forever (New phase), plus 40 years (Crescent), plus 3½ days (First Quarter), plus 100 more years (Gibbous). In fact, so much psychological time has passed that Jack’s all but forgotten his original intention: to build a home for himself. The vibrant immediacy of that drive gradually eroded in the seemingly endless work, until finally all memory of his initial motivation vanished. The boulder of singular passion was worn down, crumbled into the billion sand grains of measured duty.

One day, after returning home from the office but before changing clothes to go work on his “project,” Jack finds a notice in the mail. His landlord is writing to notify Jack that the lease on his rental apartment is about to expire, and that Jack will have to vacate. Back at the First Quarter phase transition, Jack proudly announced to his landlord that he was building a house, and that it would be finished at a certain time. Jack has long since forgotten the ebullient statement, but his landlord remembered. Jack’s apartment has been rented to someone else. So this letter is, in effect, an eviction notice.

That’s Shock #1 for everyone moving into the Full phase of any astrological cycle — that circumstances have suddenly become unworkable, and, further, that we have no resources, no options for dealing with this unpredictable and seemingly unjust crisis.

Jack’s immediate and automatic reaction is: “But I have nowhere to go! Where will I live? How will I continue working on my project if I have to go to all the trouble and expense and time of moving to a new apartment?” But even as he sits in his funk,
blocked, hopeless, a realization begins to dawn inside, haltingly at first, almost impossible to hang onto, but slowly gathering momentum. He remembers the nature of his project. Why, it’s not merely a building, it’s a house. It’s his house! That’s what he’s been constructing all these years! That was the point of the whole venture, not merely to build the house, but to live in it! And suddenly his original intention floods back into his consciousness. He recalls the initial moments of desire when he was driving to work looking at all those houses that people lived in and owned. He remembers that he wanted his own house, custom-designed, built by himself. He remembers his dream of living in a wonderful home. His HOME. Of course!

This is Shock #2 of the Full phase — the memory of the beginning of the cycle, 180° opposite, now polarized into renewed awareness. This renewed awareness is the essence of the opposition aspect in astrology, the mirror-image effect of polarity. By seeing black, we remember white. By experiencing the feminine, we remember the masculine. By encountering the night, we appreciate the day. As the Full phase locks in, our circumstances reflect back into the emotional pressure of our original desires at the New phase — what we wanted, what we chose, what we began to plan for.

Quite naturally, given the diversity of human experience and awareness, not every person in every cycle has a complete or conscious memory of their beginnings. These first two shocks take shape over a wide range of differing human interpretations. The “Ah Ha!” phenomenon ranges from total, precise, and poignant memory, in great detail, with specific moments in experience relived in crystalline clarity, through the more general reactions of vague recollection and spotty recall, remembering the tone of the beginning without consciously drawing back any of the specific experiences, all the way to the other extreme — where nothing is recalled, where we struggle with these seemingly new and foreign challenges bereft of the benefits of memory. Astrology is frequently helpful in the process of Full phase polarized memory, for astrological techniques pinpoint precisely when the cycle began, from the exact period of the initial planetary conjunction that marked the gestation of the cycle, through the end of the New phase at 45°. This allows us the luxury of precise dates for our search through the memory banks.

If Saturn opposes the Sun in our charts, we can think back to the period of the Saturn-Sun conjunction roughly 15 years earlier: What were we doing? What issues were important to us? What circumstantial challenges did we face? What decisions did we make? More importantly, who were we? — in the emotional rhythms of our living, in the personal mythology of our beliefs? The correlations that emerge from such historical searches are not invariably obvious; we may remember precious little, and what we do remember may be clouded by the conceit of ego-continuity, our tendency to assume that we have always been the same as we are now. Over the ten months of a typical Saturn-Sun opposition, however, profound insights can emerge from the gradual re-assembly of moments long past. In much the same way that recognizing the overall picture of a jigsaw puzzle does not demand every single piece to be in place for us to
recognize the whole, so the significance of our past can be recalled without every re-conceiving every experience. Remembering only a particular moment or just a couple of events may trigger a much broader recollection of patterns that will then self-trigger. Since meaning is fundamentally an outcome of interlocking neural patterns, the whole of memory does not require the sum of its parts. But then, human perception of reality is itself a simulation — literally the synthetic hologram of patterned neural firing — and memory is merely a replaying of the movie.

So Jack has been through the first two shocks of the Full phase. He has received his eviction notice from his apartment, and that unpleasant jolt provokes the realization that his project is, after all, a house. Now he cascades into the third shock. “Wait,” he cries, “I can’t move into my house, not NOW. It’s not ready. My house isn’t FINISHED!”

What do you mean, Jack? You’ve already had forever plus 40 years plus 3½ days plus 100 more years. How can your house not be finished? The answer to that question is simple. Anyone who’s ever built a house knows the cosmic rule: Houses are NEVER finished. Still, the point comes in every evolving structure, set of circumstances, or inner development where we have to stop preparing to live and start living. What has been “in the becoming” must shift into full and active “being.” Our wish for perfection is only imaginary, an abstract ideal we use to hold off for a while the messier demands of real life. Eventually, we run out of time. Life is not finally a rehearsal.

Shock #3 of the Full phase of every astrological cycle is the realization that we have no more time to prepare. No more practice. No more perfecting. Whatever we’ve been developing, whatever we’ve been painstakingly erecting into reality now must be fully embraced. No longer can we consider ourselves involved in a project. Now we must shift gears, toward understanding how to use what we built.

We wanted something. So we set out to build a vehicle that would allow us to create, acquire, share, learn, or understand in reality what we so wanted in interior passion. Now, at the Full phase, we have the structure to achieve what we wanted, or we have at least as much of that structure as our fundamental passion (New), careful preparation (Crescent), hard work (First Quarter), and patient perfection (Gibbous) could provide.

All this occurs in the first 15° following exact opposition. By that point, any of a number of events will have occurred, but measured along a scale, two extremes are possible. We may have defiantly refused to give up our project, insisting that it — and we — are not ready. In that case, we willfully continue to work on our project, but rather than achieving greater perfection, a subtle disintegration begins to undermine all our efforts. We find ourselves effectively homeless, working on a structure that is gradually and inevitably coming apart at the seams. At the other extreme, we may have gracefully accepted our eviction notice, realized with joy that our project is actually the house we wanted, and
moved in to begin setting up a real life. In that more positive scenario, we are on track, moving toward greater fulfillment.

The remaining two-thirds of the Full phase are taken up with establishment of new rhythms in social living. Having reached the crest of our ascent, we stop moving up vertically and start moving out horizontally to secure our territory. This outward movement represents an announcement to the world: by inviting people into our house for a visit, they know that we have occupied our new home. We use the our completed structure to receive others. We become gracious hosts. This last development tends to crystallize around the time of the *waning inconjunct*, the aspect formed when the moving symbol is 150° behind the fixed symbol.

To recap, the first meaning of the Full phase in any cycle is to discover the use, or *rediscover* the use of the structure we’ve spent so much energy to build. Remember our original intentions. “Re-member” it, or take its parts and pieces and reassemble them back into wholeness. The second challenge is to find our natural relationship to what we created. It’s now a finished structure, and we have to discover a way to fit our day to day life into the structure, a way that’s comfortable for us. Then the final challenge of the Full phase is to activate the structure as our new vehicle for relating to the world. Mastering the Full phase is a three-step dance: 1) remember the use of the structure, 2) find a comfortable fit with it, and 3) relate to others through it.

The psychological chronology of the Full phase is fairly literal. That is to say, its duration in objective time is about the same as we feel it to be in our subjective experience. With Saturn cycles, that’s about 43 months.

Looking back over the five phases we’ve covered thus far, notice that the phases of the cycle tend to vary with an alternating rhythm in our experience of their time duration. We kick off the cycle with the New phase, which feels timeless, and then each succeeding phase alternates in length: longer, then shorter, then longer again. The Crescent phase feels immensely long and slow, First Quarter is accelerated and urgent, Gibbous slows and stretches out again, then the Full phase shortens back to objective duration. This alternation tends to continue throughout the remaining phases, although the waning phases of the cycle are less pronounced in their time-shifting than are those of the waxing hemicycle.

So Jack has now faced the three challenges of the Full phase. In at least partial fashion, he has remembered the reason he built his house — to be his home; he has found a comfortable fit with it — by moving into his house and making it home; and he has begun to use it as a primary vehicle to relate to others — by becoming a gracious host. Jack may have felt more or less willing for his awareness to be altered in each of the three challenges, but willing or not, he has gone through the changes. His life is now significantly different from whatever it was during the waxing half of the cycle. And as the change sinks in, he moves out of the Full phase and into the Disseminating phase.
phase six: DISSEMINATING

The first half of the cycle — the waxing hemisphere — is largely consumed by the effort to birth something out of ourselves, to take abstract possibilities and convert them to actual realities. The waning half of the cycle concerns the use of the structure in real life, as well as the realization of the meanings that surround what we created.

In the waxing half, something divine wants to come through us, and we work with that divine spark to meld it to our own personalities and life-circumstances. God emerges through us so that we may become, at least in part, divine. What we actually create may fall far short of divinity; human beings are expert at finding seemingly endless ways of falling from grace. But still, the original spark is divine, even if what we do with it is not.

Through the first four phases, we gradually make a space in reality for expression of the new possibility. At the midway point of the cycle in the Full phase, we remember the nature and purpose of what we constructed in (and carved out of) reality, what we built — brick by brick. From that point on, we move from creation into use, from concern over shaping substance toward concern for the meaning of what has been shaped.

Consider the potter. In a very real way, a potter can understand what her hands have molded out of clay only after the piece emerges from final firing in the kiln. While working the material on the wheel — mud and water, hands and movement — the potter may have a vision, a plan based on experience and creativity, but she cannot know whether that vision will be realized in the finished piece. Too many variables exist: composition of the clay, amount of water, heat of the kiln in first firing, components of the glaze, heat in second firing, etc. However precise her intention, the piece will inevitably acquire a life of its own. So three elements co-exist, a trinity that involves God, a human being, and the mystery of the thing itself, in this example, a clay pot. For the ultimate revelation of meaning, each element must harmonize to the others.

Were astrological cycles equivalent to making pottery, the New phase would represent the original idea for a piece and the upwelling of emotion in the desire to make it. The Crescent phase would represent collection of necessary materials and preparation of the artisan’s space. First Quarter would then be the whirlwind experience of shaping the pot and moving on to the first firing. The Gibbous phase would represent preparation and application of the glaze, and the patience to endure the second firing before seeing the result. Taking the glazed pot out of the kiln would occur in the first instant of the Full phase, with its shocks of recognition and renewed memory. At that point, the act of creation is finished; now the pot takes on its own life. The remaining bulk of the Full phase is concerned with finding harmonious uses for the pot, finding a place for it in the environment.
By the Disseminating phase, we are well into the waning hemicycle. Our creation is structurally complete and at least partially functional, so our attention shifts rapidly from building to using. Gradually at first but increasingly as time marches on, we find ourselves converting the efforts of raw experience into something less tangible, less obvious, more sublime. This transition — from relatively concrete concerns to more abstract considerations — brings with it new possibilities in the unexpected benefits of maturity.

This sixth phase begins when the moving body is 135° behind the fixed body, and carries the basic meaning of converting physical experience into mental and emotional understanding. This understanding is to be shared with others — "disseminated" or distributed throughout our social environment. Although every phase in the cycle has its theoretical demands, the Disseminating phase is probably the closest we’ll get to a vacation from the many difficulties of life. Perhaps a better term would be sabbatical, a temporary respite for the purpose of recovery. In most people’s real experience of astrological transit phases, the Disseminating phase offers the greatest likelihood of satisfaction, in large part because in this part of the cycle we reach the opportunity to recover from the negative repercussions of past mistakes.

Where consciousness is concerned, human beings presume to sit atop the evolutionary heap. Dolphins and whales are clearly light-years ahead of us in grace, but if we consider only raw brain power and the driving will to develop it — no matter how imbalanced that development — humans excel. And yet, humans tend to be severely limited in self-understanding, often to the point of psychic disfigurement. Too often, we are not merely less than we should be, we are something else entirely, like a monstrous mutation, without perspective or empathy, caring for nothing beyond our most immediate ego-drives. All the marvelous machinery of our bodies is then made subservient to endless rationalization and dogma. Our inability to relate harmoniously to members of our own and other species is literally caused by the tragic lack of balanced self-awareness.

We are frequently unconscious of the onset of important developments in our lives, not merely as indicated by astrological cycles, but also by more mundane events of obvious importance. Nor are we often aware of the long-term implications — good or bad — that may emerge from modest beginnings. We move through the waxing phases of our cycles in a somnambulistic state of habit, moving forward because time propels us, but all the while seeing only a rear-view mirror rendition of life, a crude hologram of the past rather than the authentic here-and-now cascading into myriad possible futures.

We may be emotionally galvanized by the New phase, but we might just as easily be traumatized by unexpected developments we neither understand nor embrace. In the Crescent phase, we may work on grounding our emotions in a stable foundation, but we might just as readily suffer psychological depression following repeated attacks from inner demons. The First Quarter phase should bring energized activity in forward movement, but it sometimes provokes
crushing resistance from the environment. The patient duty and self-discipline of
the Gibbous phase can also be experienced as stultifying boredom. In the Full
phase, we may awaken into awareness of our evolving structure, or we might
end up blinded by the light and overwhelmed by new social responsibilities. At
any point during the first five phases, we may suffer lapses of awareness or
failures of courage that can limit development, expression, or fulfillment of the
entire cycle. After all, this is the story of individual human life; our potential
almost always exceeds our realization.

The reward of the Disseminating phase is that no matter how screwed up the
cycle has become — whether by our own fears and failings or by circumstances
utterly beyond our control — we can still transform our experience and the
meaning of the cycle from negative to positive.

If our experience has been positive, if we have moved through the previous
five phases of the cycle awake and willing, with sufficient luck, then
Disseminating represents the time when we distill our experience into
understanding and share that understanding with others to help them along
their unique paths. We do this even as we continue to enjoy the fruits of our own
efforts. Taking the opportunity to enhance our fulfillment, we thus
broaden the benefits of the cycle.

If, on the other hand, the cycle has been a complete disaster, an utter
nightmare to this point, we can still salvage significant goodness in the
Disseminating phase. Even when direct experience is negative or unfulfilled, the
knowledge of that experience can be immensely positive. By turning even our
sorry experience into a teaching, we offer others the possibility of better
navigating life’s narrow straits and coral reefs. Such help feels good to give. But
beyond any benefit to others and the good feelings that come through that
offering, the abstraction of experience into learning gives us a new perspective
on our own experience. We may not be able to turn back the hands of time, but
we can retrieve much of what was lost in new humility and renewed dignity.

Whatever the value of past experience, the Disseminating phase represents the
period in the cycle where we maximize our social relatedness, in terms of the
cycle’s essential meaning. In this time, we can truly use the structure as a vehicle
of connection to the world.

The psychological time-frame of the Disseminating phase is roughly twice that
of its objective counterpart. In a Saturn cycle, these $3\frac{1}{2}$ years often feel like seven,
although many factors may modify that equation. We are relaxing, sloughing off
the accumulated stresses of the previous five phases. As we relax, time slowly
stretches out like a contented cat napping on the sill of a sunny window, arching
to receive every last measure of the warmth.

The elasticity of duration is not linear. Both happiness and sadness may cause
our sense of time to expand or contract. There is a relationship between our
emotional states and our experience of chronology, but it is not simple. Faster
does not always mean better, and slower does not always mean worse. Times of
suffering may compress into intense but short-lived focus, and periods of contentment may extend languorously, as is the case here.

Jack moved into his house during the Full phase. He adjusted to the change in lifestyle and acclimated himself to his new surroundings, gradually becoming comfortable. This is, in fact, his house, and he lives here. Jack’s house is home base, the secure structure from which he moves out into the world, and also the vehicle through which he invites the world to relate to him.

When friends visit — whether for an out-of-town stay, a formal dinner party, or merely to stop by — Jack’s new and now secure position is that of gracious host. As the Full phase gave way to Disseminating, he outgrew the oversensitivity that comes with any new social exposure. Jack stopped being nervous about what his friends would think when they came over. This is not merely a rental apartment; this is his home, literally, the house that Jack built. His image in the eyes of others is altered by their knowledge that he made this home, that it represents his vision of himself. The reflection fuses for Jack a new identity; he bonds with his home and all the experiences that went into making it. Naturally, the house becomes a primary topic of conversation:

“What a nice home you have, Jack!”

“Thanks, Fred. It is nice, isn’t it? Took a helluva long time to build, though. Jeez, you should have been here when we were pouring the foundation and it rained for two weeks straight. The mud was awful.”

Every part of the house has its story in Jack’s experience. And whether that experience was flowing or blocked, whether Jack had a good time or bad in making his original vision into a concrete reality, now he gets to tell his story: “Yeah, we originally planned on parquet flooring in the kitchen, but it turned out to be so expensive that we went with slate tile. It was a bitch to put in, but it’s beautiful and much easier to clean.”

Even mistakes can now be made positive: “Well, see, we wanted a passive solar greenhouse extending off the living room — you know, save on heat and have a nice space for plants — but we screwed up on the calculations of how much floor mass we’d need for heat storage, and then the angle of the solar collector windows turned out to be a little off for this climate. We forgot to factor in how many days of sun we get per year and should have angled the windows differently. So the upshot is that the living room heats up like a son of a bitch. Eventually we plan to put fans in the ductwork to distribute the heat, but what with the twins’ dental bills, well, right now we just have to live with it. If you ever want a solar greenhouse, Fred, come and talk to me first; I know everything that can go wrong…”

As he relates this architectural horror story to his friend, Jack may yet be somewhat upset, since he’s still experiencing the repercussions of his errors in very real discomfort, but he’s taking advantage of the opportunity to transform his negative experience into positive sharing. Though he messed up, he now has relatively authoritative knowledge on what not to do in this particular area. That knowledge can elevate his social position in the community. In other words,
whatever we experience can be worthwhile, as long as we learn from the experience and are willing to share what we learn.

Obviously, not every experience can or will be converted into a pragmatic teaching of benefit to others — how many of Jack’s friends will want to build a solar greenhouse? The specific forms and dimensions of our experience may be largely personal, emerging as they do out of our individual personalities and unique circumstances, but even the most idiosyncratic experience reveals general principles and relatively universal lessons. Everyone suffers from failures of character and errors in decision. We all fall into traps of self-delusion. Hardly anyone shoots par on the golf course of life.

Learning to accept our limitations and live with our mistakes is a critical part of growing up; a basic message of the Disseminating phase is to relax, let ourselves be, and share with others the honest stories of who we are, what we’ve learned, and how we’ve grown.

phase seven: LAST QUARTER

Jack has now lived in his house for quite awhile. All in all, he’s had a pretty good time. Of course, when he first decided to build the house, he was single. He could envision the possibility of a family, but he had neither the foresight nor the resources to plan on it. Now, decades later, he’s married with children. Jack wakes up one day and stumbles toward the bathroom, which he can’t get into because his twelve year-old daughter is putting on her makeup before going off to school. Jack stands at the door, calculating how long he can hold his bladder and thinks to himself, seemingly for the millionth time, “Why didn’t I build this house with two bathrooms?”

Heading down to the kitchen, he’s confronted by the spectacle of his twin eight year-old boys “making breakfast,” in other words, destroying the kitchen. Dismayed but too tired to protest, he wanders down to the basement study — what was once to be his tool room but was converted for lack of other space — where he discovers the family dog curled up in his easy chair and the papers from his wife’s current real estate project strewn all over the desk.

This has happened many times before, but previously Jack always shrugged it off, telling himself that of course his daughter would monopolize the bathroom and that we need the second income from his wife’s job. In other words, while being a small aggravation, this has never really bothered him before. It was simply part of the family circus. But today is different. Today it bugs Jack. As he strolls into the basement utility room to privately relieve himself in the laundry sink (something he’s done on more mornings than he will admit), suddenly — without warning — a shocking new awareness hits Jack squarely in the face: “My God,” he realizes, “this house is way too small for my life. We can’t keep living here. We’re going to have to move somewhere else.” Welcome to the Last Quarter, Jack.
At the three-quarter point in the cycle, when the moving symbol is 90° behind the fixed symbol, we enter the Last Quarter phase. Halfway back around the cycle, we encountered the first 90° relationship of the cycle — the waxing square — at the First Quarter transition. Then we were catapulted forward to transform what had formerly been only internal plans and emotional foundations into a concrete reality. We hunkered down and got to work building our structure. Time accelerated, and we were swept up in the momentum of dealing with external challenges. Now we move into the waning square, and we are stopped dead in our tracks. The concrete evolution of the First Quarter has turned back on itself, like a dragon eating its own tail, to become a mental revolution at the Last Quarter.

Up until now, whatever cycle we were moving through might as well have been infinite, at least in our experience of it. As with our own lives, where we maintain the illusion that death comes only for others and never for us, we tend to believe that our cycles will go on forever. While it is true that some astrological cycles in our charts are longer than our lifespans, all astrological cycles have a beginning, a middle, and an end point. And the transition into the Last Quarter phase of any cycle is the moment in time when we are jolted into awareness that this too shall pass.

This point would be the equivalent in farming to the beginning of winter. A crop was planted in the spring, tended through the summer, harvested in fall. During autumn, temperatures slowly dropped and hours of daylight gradually decreased as we got the crop in from the fields and either taken to market or stored in our silos. At the winter solstice, the farmer’s involvement with his crop is finished. Now cold and dark is upon the land. But this time is not passive, not merely a “lying fallow.” Work will certainly continue during the winter season: animals must be fed and housed in secure quarters, fences must be mended, machinery repaired, etc. All the things that were ignored during the growing season await our attention. Winter is a time of repair.

It will sound a bit absurd when we first pose the questions, but consider: Why repair anything? Why not let things go? The crop is in, farming is finished for the year. So why make repairs? The answer is obvious: Because working machinery and secure fences will again be needed next spring. Winter activity is a transition to prepare for next year’s crop. Throughout the winter, the farmer will prepare for the new planting season to come when warmth returns and we re-enter a new cycle of renewal and growth.

The waning square that introduces the Last Quarter phase does not merely tell us that what we thought would be forever isn’t going to be. Certainly that jolt represents the first realization, but it is quickly followed by an equally shocking awareness: that what will follow the inevitable ending will be, necessarily, a new beginning. Even though we can’t currently foresee from where we stand precisely when the ending will be, nor how we will get through it in one piece, we are already starting to entertain the possibility of something more that lies beyond the horizon.
When Jack realizes that he has outgrown his house, he doesn’t rush right out to build or buy a new one. He doesn’t march out to the front yard in his bathrobe and plant a FOR SALE sign on the lawn. He does neither of these things for a number of different reasons.

First off, his realization that the house is terminally too small for his current life comes as a bolt from the blue, like an electric shock, a radical new thought that pummels Jack’s emotions into instant numbness. He can no more act on his new awareness than he can sprout wings and fly.

Many moments in life contain this kind of sneak preview, when we are catapulted for an instant into an inevitable future that was never consciously considered or only dimly felt. Often these prescient experiences occur because of time alone, such as mid-way through our senior year in high school or college when we suddenly see that our school days will come to an end. Other times such moments occur because we have gradually assembled, out of a myriad of small decisions, a big choice we hadn’t been aware of heading toward, such as the first time we realize that we are going to marry a particular person (or that an existing marriage is coming to an end). Those are incredible instants when we are whisked ahead in time, seeing with perfect clarity what is going to happen. These are not symbolic foreshadowings, nor are they metaphorical. We are actually there — in the future — seeing the present as if it were already long past.

Those incredible future time-shifts rarely sustain themselves. Instead, they leave ghost images on our consciousness, like reverse pickpockets who plant something on us rather than taking something from us. Quickly, we are back in the normal here-and-now, in the flow of ordinary habits, feelings, and event-rhythms, shaking our heads a bit to clear our thoughts from what must surely have been momentary brain damage.

Another reason that Jack doesn’t immediately act on his realization involves attachment. Although Jack’s been hassling with the single bathroom problem since he was first married and his wife moved into the house, his grumbling was always before little more than idle bitching, merely a way of coping with an inconvenience. His frustration never made the leap across the logic chasm in his mind. Why not? Because this was his home. Be it ever so humble… Kansas may not have been all that wonderful for Dorothy and Toto, but they couldn’t wait to return from Oz. …there’s no place like home.

In a very real sense, Jack’s house is more than a home; it is part of his self-image, an extension in external reality of his internal identity. So also do astrological cycles and the experiences we create or endure in moving through their various phases become part of our personal mythology. To some extent, we are our experiences. Stated more precisely, we are the living embodiment and the distilled essence of what has happened to us and out of us. That record is certainly limited — selective, subjective, and probably warped — but no one ever claimed that our self-images were or could be “scientifically” accurate.
Astrological cycles are, in themselves, essentially neutral. The symbols of astrology are neither inherently good nor bad. Our real experience of any particular cycle, however, is likely to be filled with positive or negative value, and, given life’s paradoxical complexity, probably a blend of the two.

Most people who have followed the path of astrology with even moderate seriousness will attest that certain cycles in their lives were disastrous, or at least unhappy. We might presume that the onset of the Last Quarter would be a godsend of relief for cycles in which our experience has been largely negative or unfulfilled. Curiously, that is not the case. Realizing that we must begin letting go of the results of a cycle that was painful or difficult is not one iota easier than letting go of one associated with goodness and bounty.

The very nature of the human nervous system, with its patterned, interconnected networks of neural firing, makes letting go extremely difficult. We imprint on and grow attached to all the various rhythms and images of our lives, both good and bad — in our bodies, feelings, thoughts, behaviors, etc. Why should this be so? Because in repetition there is pleasure.

Learning has never been a significant problem in human experience. Un-learning, on the other hand, is and always has been a continual, ever-present nightmare, a torturous puzzle that we have yet to crack and are only beginning to address. And yet, in this world we must eventually give up everything, even who we are. We must surrender all that we hold dear, in part because we eventually exhaust the vitality and meanings of what we hold, in part because we need to make space for new experiences, and in part because everything we are and everything we have is finally just on loan from God — and must eventually be returned.

The beginning of the Last Quarter phase of the cycle is the point where we realize that change, surrender, and death are all inevitable, at least insofar as a particular cycle or pattern of experience is concerned. And it’s a bitch. So Jack’s first reaction to his own realization is utter horror, followed by denial: “I can’t leave this house. It was my dream. I built it with my own sweat. My children were born here. I LOVE this house — single bathroom, over-heated greenhouse, and all.”

As the Last Quarter phase progresses, however, we move from initial shock and resistance to gradually consider the uprooting, and ultimately to embrace it. We slowly understand that meaning has been exhausted, that we are endlessly repeating the same patterns, that we have become both imprisoned and bored within the cycle. And with those understandings come the excitement of breaking out, breaking away, breaking through — the possibility of freedom.

“But wait a minute,” Jack says to himself, “the twins will eventually need their own bedrooms, and I sure would like to try building a greenhouse space that works, and the roof is going to need replacing soon. And you know, the traffic is getting awfully heavy around here. I wonder what it would be like to live further out in the country, or maybe even overseas. Yeah, I always did want to spend some time living in Spain. Maybe a houseboat on a river. Hmm…”
Jack will probably continue to live in his house for a good while to come. The Last Quarter phase is not about physically leaving behind old structures; it is about undergoing mental and emotional detachment from the old meanings. As Jack slowly realizes how tired he has become of the old house, he begins to see other possibilities. The urge for freedom arises, first as a whispering voice from some far distant inward space, then grows steadily upward into his consciousness, increasing in volume and intensity until the urge for freedom becomes a roaring, desperate scream. He must have adventure, excitement, and new stimulation.

By the time the moving symbol reaches the waning sextile aspect at 60° behind the fixed symbol, a wondrous irony emerges: No longer invested in the forms and meanings of the old cycle, we have turned our attention completely to an unknown future, yet we continue to live through and use the existing structure, bankrupt though it may be. This is roughly the equivalent of living with a nickname your parents called you in childhood; they continue to refer to you with the nickname long after you have outgrown it. Initially, you may resent their habit. Eventually, however, you outgrow not only your nickname, but your reactive sensitivity to it. Accepting that your parents will continue to call you Bumper or Princess or Cath-Cath, you relax and let them do so, answering to the pet name even though your inner identity has left it far behind in the dust. You’re living simultaneously in a dead past and an unborn future.

The psychological time-frame of the Last Quarter phase is about half that of objective time. Whereas Disseminating was roughly twice as long psychologically as objectively, moving therefore half as fast, Last Quarter seems to go by twice as fast as normal. Our experiments with possible future identities move by quickly. Beyond mere speed, however, is a sense of acceleration. This phase speeds up as it goes along, largely because our resistance wears out. Near the beginning of the Last Quarter, attachment keeps pulling us back, slowing us down. Near the end of the phase, our resistance is utterly gone, and our wills are hurtling us forward toward the unknown. Our sense of perspective on the fading cycle increases, almost to the vanishing point. Before long, we arrive at the Balsamic phase.

**phase eight: BALSAMIC**

When the moving symbol arrives at a position in the cycle 45° behind the fixed symbol, the Balsamic phase begins. This is the final act in the eight-fold drama of the complete cycle. The beginning of the odd numbered phases — New (1), First Quarter (3), Full (5), and Last Quarter (7) — all represent major aspects in astrology (conjunction, square, and opposition), so their onset is announced with major crises in consciousness or circumstance. The even-numbered phases — Crescent (2), Gibbous (4), and Disseminating (6), and now Balsamic (8) — are associated with minor aspects (semi-square and sesquiquadrate), so they enter like
lambs rather than lions. They creep up on us more subtly, catching us unaware, and we are usually well into these phases before we fully understand what’s happening.

This is especially true of Balsamic, so much so that throughout the entire duration of the phase we may never fully realize that it’s happening. What can this mean? How can we move through an entire phase and not recognize it? Because the experience of the Balsamic phase involves *dreaming*.

Balsamic process presents two contradictory directions: inward and outward. Inwardly we dissolve. Outwardly we immolate. One is liquid, the other fire. One is all-embracing, the other all-destroying. At the Last Quarter phase, we *molted*, shedding old attachments, wriggling out of old skins. We shocked ourselves into chaos so that we would awaken into freedom. In the Balsamic phase, we *compost*. We dis-integrate ourselves and our former world.

Inwardly, we dream of new forms for old urges. Floating through the fertile waters of the unconscious, we search through the database of unlimited possibilities, choosing nothing but collecting everything. We are concerned more with visions than with realities, for reality as it exists seems flawed, used up, and worn out. Some people are balsamic-type personalities (especially those born at the end of a soli-lunar cycle, within two days of the next new moon). Such individuals live in an as-yet-unrealized future. This is their great offering as human beings, to reveal to themselves and others the wonders of what might become. It is also their handicap, to live perpetually in a limbo of possibility rather than actuality, to be always slightly ahead of themselves, and thus psychologically askew — out of place, and lost in time.

Outwardly, however, Balsamic types may express a darker, more destructive side, in the energy of Shiva. Drawn inexorably to the uncharted field of new possibilities, they loathe existing forms and structures. They feel that the status quo is not worth saving. Whatever has been and still is must be destroyed, since it has value only as fertilizer. Not all astrological cycles move into this fanaticism during the Balsamic period, but it will occasionally occur for most of us.

By the time we reach the Balsamic phase, the old cycle is exhausted, and we may well be exhausted along with it. We need to rest, to knit up the raveled sleeve of care by returning to the deep, unconscious wellsprings of all life. We need a new vision, a vision from the future, so we enter the cocoon, where we sleep the sleep of dreams and imagine ourselves renewed and refreshed.

Meanwhile, in everyday life, we deal with the crumbling ruins of our old structure. Too far gone to save, threadbare and coming apart at the seams, we finally decide to get on the inevitable process of de-construction.

Since the beginning of the Disseminating phase, Jack’s awareness of what was wrong with his house has grown. He knows now many of the basic design flaws of the home he built (*i.e.*, the greenhouse-living room problem). He has seen the effects of lower-quality materials he used because of limited financial resources (*the fake paneling that he never liked in the study*). He’s lived with the results of his
own and others’ incompetent workmanship (the creaky stairs that couldn’t be fixed). Unforeseen changes in both his needs and circumstances have emerged to stick out like sore thumbs (the single bathroom dilemma). Choices that were made based on the fashion of the day now seem outdated or absurd (the avocado green stove and refrigerator). And even where his house was initially perfect, where it once fulfilled his highest hopes, he sees the entropic effects of time to gradually use things up and wear them out (the beautiful bay windows that now won’t open properly, the driveway concrete that is cracked and crumbling).

Jack attempted to keep his house well-maintained over the years: fresh coats of paint inside and out, new roof shingles, landscaping in the yard, remodeling the rough basement into a finished work area for himself and his wife, security doors with heavier locks, etc. But layers of paint eventually build up, and after three layers of shingles the roof must be torn off and replaced. Finally, Jack has maintained, renewed, and renovated this old house as much as he can stand.

Another person might choose to move away, but Jack decides to stay where he is. He likes the town and the location of his house. He decides to move his family into temporary quarters in a rented condo. He could add on, but that solution is too piecemeal and would result in a crazy-quilt home. That choice would produce no satisfaction. Instead, after thinking on the problem long and hard, he decides to tear down the old house and build anew on the same lot.

Jack doesn’t simply torch his house and watch it blaze to the ground — like Nero watching Rome burn — nor does he rent a wrecking ball and bulldoze the remains into the hole of the basement. Instead, he takes the house apart, piece by piece. Carefully. A certain amount of wholesale demolition may eventually occur — knocking down walls or other large sections of the superstructure — but only after more gentle dismantling. Built-in appliances are removed, windows and doors are detached, large sections of flooring are taken up, etc. Even after the superstructure has been knocked apart, nails can be pulled from what are otherwise perfectly good 2 x 4s or 2 x 6s. Everything is examined for possible salvage.

In the perception of time, Balsamic brings us full circle, back to the infinity of the New Phase. We do sense duration and movement at the end of the cycle, but our experience of them is not linear. Time folds back on itself, an endless exercise in organic origami. Immersed in our dreaming, the flat plane of duration is transformed into a swan, then a flower, then a many-sided mandala. We leap back and forth throughout the cycle, remembering different moments of effort or ease, disappointment or joy. Time is a jumble with no destination, no points of departure or arrival.

In farming, the Balsamic phase corresponds to the period of late winter — early February through mid-March. Nature is at her most phantasmagorical here, blasting us with freezing winds and icy snowstorms one week, then suddenly melting the snow with soaring temperatures and balmy sunshine the next. The weather is a kaleidoscope of fragments from every other season, thrown together in seeming chaos. Immune systems suffer confusion, and colds or flu run
rampant. But even such illnesses are part of the Balsamic process of purification by fire, as we detoxify the accumulated stresses of the year gone by.

Nearing the end of a particular astrological cycle, we are faced with many decisions. If we followed the awakening realizations of the waning hemicycle, we know where we went right, where we went wrong, and we have our hypotheses about why. We may not comprehend everything — in real life, our understanding is likely to be limited, if for no other reason than the sheer number of different astrological cycles unfolding simultaneously — but we can know much about the history and experience of a particular cycle in our lives, especially when we put our minds to it.

If the overall cycle was positive for us, which is to say, fulfilling in experience and true to our spiritual intentions, we may choose to "remodel" or "renovate" the old structure. For instance, cycles of ambition may complete themselves and start over without our changing professions. But even when we approve of a cycle in our experience, even when our foundation is solid and true, we will probably build a new structure in the next cycle. A writer may continue to put pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard) from one creative cycle to the next, but a shift is almost inevitable — from novels to essays, perhaps, or non-fiction to fiction. Or the shift might be less tangible; the same writer may continue as a novelist, but with significantly greater depth and maturity, or broader scope, or better characterization. In any case, a change is necessary, for each cycle presents an opportunity to grow closer to the poetic divinity of our essences. In every life, no matter how exalted or debased, each new cycle offers another chance to get it right, to express who we really are, and to do so with greater effectiveness (power) and compassion (love).

In the Balsamic phase, we prepare for that new chance. We cocoon ourselves inwardly, dissolving into the universal oneness of the womb. Outwardly, we destroy old structures, sifting through the rubble for usable materials, tossing the rest onto the compost heap. Sometimes the process of destruction is active; sometimes it is passive. In either case, what will be left is humus, the moist, black, fertile soil in which the seed we are about to germinate at the next New phase will find nourishment and sustenance.

addendum — new phase redux

When the New Phase of the next cycle begins, Jack will not repeat precisely the same patterns of awakening. Jack doesn’t need to; experience matters. Nonetheless, Jack will have new realizations, new moments of sudden and staggering insight that will burst into a passionate desire to move beyond his old perspectives and limitations. Whether the previous cycle’s overall experience was wildly positive or horribly negative for Jack, he will still tend to regard his former understanding as quaintly archaic in light of his newly unfolding perspectives.
In the gestation of the new cycle, moments will occur, however, where Jack is seemingly transported back to ground zero, as if the first cycle had never even happened. During those brief times, he will approach the reality of home-owning with an innocence and naivete that will seem utterly natural and appropriate to himself. Others will have quite divergent reactions to his born-again stance. Some of his comrades will be shocked, especially those who appreciate or have grown accustomed to Jack’s worldly understanding, or anyone in his world who is particularly attached to images of adult stability or cool intellectuality. Certain friends may even harbor private concern for Jack’s mental health. Some people will be delighted, especially those who are drawn to newness, passion, or enthusiasm, wherever it occurs.

In other moments of the gestation, Jack may achieve a sublime integration of the old and new, where the former cycle’s distilled experience combines with new insights to produce a broad perspective on home-owning and home-building that is truly brilliant, far beyond anything we might expect from him.

What will finally take root in the seeding of the new cycle? Will we endlessly repeat ourselves in merely an illusion of growth, or will actually build on the past, improving and maturing with each new cycle?

That, dear friends, is part of the mystery of it all.

the importance of understanding cycles

The eight phases constitute a basic structure for understanding astrological cycles, whether those cycles are moving, such as in transits and secondary progressions, or fixed, as in interplanetary natal aspects. Once we comprehend the meaning of a particular pair of symbols in astrology — Sun/Moon, Venus/Saturn, Neptune/Mars, etc. — we can describe their relationship through these phases.

The eight-fold analysis of the cycle presented here is not meant to be considered superior to the twelve-fold division traditionally used to create the signs of the zodiac. Many different logical schemes could be applied to dividing the complete cycle into different numbers of phases, and each scheme has its inherent strengths and weaknesses, working better for some applications and worse for others. Especially in the 20th century, the zodiac of signs has come to be understood and used largely as a system for analyzing basic personality types. This particular application has woven itself deeply into popular culture, so much so that in being embraced by consumer media its meaning has been diluted into stereotypes. As a result, the zodiac is no longer particularly well-suited to the task of understanding cyclic reality. The eight-fold division, linked with monthly soli-lunar cycles, is ideal for this purpose.
cycles and aspect interpretation

Perhaps the most important impact of understanding the eight phases is in fully grasping the profound differences between waxing and waning aspects of the same type, especially in the interpretation of natal charts. Far too many astrological students learn to interpret natal aspects without reference to whether they are waxing or waning. Even a surprising number of astrological professionals fall prey to this mistake.

With the exceptions of conjunction (0°) and opposition (180°) — which carry their own special polarity — each major aspect occurs twice in the cycle: semi-squares (±45°), sextiles (±60°), squares (±90°), trines (±120°), and inconjuncts (±150°). These five pairs are fraternal, not identical, twins, and the individual aspects in each pair should always be considered with respect to that crucial distinction. In addition, aspects may be applying or separating from partile, meaning that a natal opposition is considered effective with an orb of ±8°, so that the opposition might fall in either the Gibbous or Full phases.

Consider the example of Venus square to Saturn in a natal chart. The traditional “textbook” interpretation of this particular aspect surrounds difficulties in personal relationships, especially those involving romantic or sexual intimacy. The individual is frequently characterized as insecure or over-sensitive where love is concerned, likely to be drawn into partnerships that turn out to embody a certain coldness or lack of feeling.

Such common interpretations as this are a sentence to a life in purgatory. At the very least, they are fatalistic and likely to increase the person’s anxiety. Considered from a cyclic standpoint, however, the art of interpretation acquires greater depth, as well as revealing subtleties that are potentially more helpful in real life, in understanding and growing.

If Venus is ahead of Saturn, the aspect is a waxing square, either applying (Crescent) or separating (First Quarter). The message is that, in this life, personal love is at an early stage of development. Physicality is more important than meaning. Intimate relationships represent a crisis in permission where commitment is a real issue.

If the square is applying — still in the Crescent phase — the individual must deal with fears of failure before entering into an actual relationship. The advice is to move forward, but to move cautiously in intimacy, making sure that the foundation of a relationship is healthy and loving before any outward commitment is made. Don’t rush into love, for demons of the past must be reconciled before the future can be created.

If, on the other hand, the square is First Quarter, caution has no value. The challenge is to get into a real, ongoing intimate relationship, however many rough edges may exist. This individual must push forward toward concrete fulfillment whatever the cost; to be held back by failure or rejection is the kiss of death. Intimate problems exist here to be worked through by actual effort, by the
hard work of loving, of being with someone even when things aren’t so hot. The motto concerning personal love in this life should be: *If at first you don’t succeed… try, try again.*

If Venus is behind Saturn, the aspect is a waning square, either applying (Disseminating) or separating (Last Quarter). The message here is strikingly different from either of the previous two possibilities. Meanings are more important than structures. Understanding the implications of love is more important than simply having a relationship.

If the square is applying, and therefore still in the Disseminating phase, love will tend to improve with age, like fine wine. The challenge for this individual is to learn from accumulated experience in love.

Thoughtful communication rather than unconscious acting-out can transform behavioral blocks into bonds of sympathy. Fears and anxieties should not be downplayed or hidden. Instead, they should be analyzed, first alone, then discussed together to diminish their emotional impact. Literal success in intimacy is less important here than learning from one’s mistakes.

If the Venus-Saturn square is separating, and thus officially in the Last Quarter, the challenge is no longer sharing and learning, but letting go. Possessiveness and jealousy are demons to be overcome, and relationships succeed when independence is granted. This individual must recognize self-defeating patterns of excess attachment in love, to realize that they are nothing more than bad habits from the past so they can fall away like the worn-out, outmoded skins they really are.

*One* aspect — *four* quite different life conditions. Whether you are a professional astrologer dealing with clients or an interested student wanting only to better decipher your own chart, an understanding of the cyclic implications of aspects can transform your vision of astrology.

*Everything in astrology must be seen finally in the context of cyclic meanings, for cycles are truly the essence of astrology.*

**meanings of the twelve aspects**

- *conjunction* 0° fertile union to produce intense feeling
- *waxing semi-square* +45° vanquishing the ghosts of the past
- *waxing sextile* +60° preparing the foundation
- *waxing square* +90° pushing outward to confront reality
waxing trine +120° flowing into external manifestation
waxing sesquiquadrate +135° perfecting the structure
waxing inconjunct +150° total immersion into duty
— opposition 180° awakening into full relatedness
waning inconjunct -150° broadening the social base
waning sesquiquadrate -135° abstracting experience
waning trine -120° sharing understanding
waning square -90° challenging inner attachments
waning sextile -60° letting go of the past
waning semi-square -45° dreaming of the future

meanings of the eight phases

new 0° the magic of new beginnings; planting the original seed; experiencing urgent emotional impetus
crescent +45° formulating a working plan; laying a foundation for later expression; banishing past inner demons
first quarter +90° moving into real-world manifestation; conquering external obstacles; building the shell of the structure
gibbous +135° dutifully sweating the details; endlessly perfecting the structure; letting the self be absorbed into the project
full 180° harvesting the crop; occupying the vehicle; realizing the original vision; moving into full social expression

disseminating -135° sharing the fruits; converting failure to success by understanding; teaching what has been learned
last quarter -90° realizing the cycle will not last forever; feeling the shock of detachment; experimenting with alternatives
balsamic -45° composting the worn-out structure; dreaming of the future; cross-fertilizing fantasy with reality
On Illusion Versus Reality

Part One

the changing face of illusion

When I was young, I loved illusion. I loved fantasy. I felt that escape into the realms of imagination was the best thing since sliced bread, an antidote to the dutiful boredom of reality. Later in my life, after I had seen some of the consequences of the attempt to escape from reality, I changed my mind about illusion and fantasy, and I banished them to the hinterlands. Yet now, mainly because of the amazing symbolic whomp of Uranus and Neptune that is turning the whole decade of the 1990s on its head, I am beginning to think that the answer isn’t headlong pursuit of fantasy or, conversely, harsh prohibitions against illusion, but instead, a conscious education toward learning which illusions can cross-fertilize with reality to improve it, and which are toxic and will destroy it. But more about that later.

When I was young, I loved movies and TV. The flickering, larger-than-life images of the silver screen and the more compact and religious iconography of the cathode ray tube possessed me. I was in their thrall. The stuff in movies and on TV seemed to me much more vibrant and interesting than real life. Why would anyone choose to go outside for green grass and yellow sun when those hues were so much more brilliantly saturated in Technicolor? Why would anyone choose one’s real family, with its inevitable sufferings, over the perfect sitcom families of *Father Knows Best* (50s), *Leave It to Beaver* (60s), or *The Brady Bunch* (70s)? Why would anyone choose to go to real war — where you could actually die, or worse — when the need for savage bloodlust could be satisfied, and with less risk of injury, by simply turning a knob (*in those days, there were no remotes, no cable, no channel surfing)*.

I don’t go to movies anymore. Besides a steadfast refusal to pay what seem outrageous prices, I don’t like being trapped in a theatre seat for two hours. Oh, I watch movies on cable — I still love movies and watch and average of two movies every day — but I can no longer suspend disbelief and melt into the
illusion. The innocence of my childhood is gone. In part, I know too much about how films are made, so I’m always “behind the camera.” Some of my discontent is purely political: All the image-driven entertainment media in our culture, movies included, boil down to manipulation of the viewer’s emotions and control of his behavior, not to mention influence on his attitudes and beliefs.

The main reason I no longer go to movies is because I have learned that fantasy carries a steep price tag. I never fundamentally changed my perception that illusion is essentially a hedge against the harshness of reality. But in my 20s and 30s, I was obsessed with the idea of hunting for and telling the truth (chalk that up to youthful naivete). Beyond dogma, I was also realizing that reality is a set of laws about the quality of our manifestation. I began to understand that people established and maintained their illusions to avoid making the changes that reality suggests.

Not that reality cares what you do. No, reality merely says, “Do A, and the result will be B. Do C, and the result will be D. Choose whatever you want.”

I personally maintain the illusion that smoking cigarettes is not killing me. That’s an easy one, since I’m not dead. Yet. Of course, in reality, smoking is killing me, slowly but surely. I maintain my illusion, however, because smoking is the “solution” to a set of unresolved problems in my life (intimacy, sex, etc.), and I sure don’t want to give it up. So I sacrifice my health, my income, and perhaps my life just to avoid changing.

Sessions with clients showed me just how illusory many relationships are, especially romantic relationships. My own intimate life confirmed this sad news. Romance is a drug, friends, and relationships based on a drug high don’t do well in the long run. Again, reality teaches that relationships involve hard work, but most of us don’t like that, so we opt instead for the softer illusions of romantic projection.

Some people want to be seduced so much that they overlook the fact that seduction is always followed by betrayal. Always. That’s reality: Put someone on a pedestal, and they will fall eventually. And yet, when their seductive beloveds turn out to be insensitive, uncaring, or unfaithful, the seductees act surprised by the intense suffering that inevitably follows. As if they couldn’t have seen it coming, if only they’d cared to look. The point is that we don’t want to see past illusions to the real consequences of our actions, because our brains are hard-wired to resist the very changes we’d have to make.

Sidebar: What is the product of television?

Think about that for a minute. Television is a business, and as a business, it must produce a product for sale to its customers. Know who its customers are? Advertisers, who pay big bucks to air their commercials. Know what the product is that gets the advertisers? Not the shows on TV. The content of television, the shows themselves, whatever they happen to be, are just the worms used to bait the hook to catch the fish of… viewers, which TV then “sells” to advertisers. Viewers are the product of television. In other words, if you watch TV, and every study consistently points out that we do, on
average between four and six hours each day, then YOU are the product of television. We have become a hypnotized, captive audience that views the world through the fantasy, propaganda, and stereotypes of the One-Eyed Monster. The television screen has become the altar at which we worship, and our descent into the illusion of images, whether moving or still, has become a national obsession, our first and foremost religion, our drug of choice. And we like it.

Part Two

illusions, fantasies, dreams: toxic or beneficent?

Part One of this essay closed with this sentence: “The point is that we don’t want to see past illusions to the real consequences of our actions, because our brains are hard-wired to resist the very changes we’d have to make.”

What does “hard-wired” mean? Human beings are animals with a special propensity for patterning. Our brains are constructed with the task of recognizing and organizing patterns (i.e., perceptions that naturally group together, such as leaves, branches, and trunks all constituting the single pattern we call a tree). All animals share this ability. Human beings, however, go further than most other animals. We are not only pattern-recognizing: we are also pattern-creating. If our brains can find no existing patterns, we will create them and overlay the new patterns onto otherwise chaotic environments. Apparently, the need for coherence and meaning in all we experience is not merely a psychological fact but a biological one as well.

What has all this to do with illusion and fantasy? Fantasies are patterns of imaginary perception that we create to overlay onto an existing reality. We then experience the reality only as it appears when filtered through the “tinted” lens of the fantasy. Some fantasies blend beautifully with the realities they overlay, actually enhancing our experience of life. An example of such a positively cross-fertile fantasy is the attitude of optimism. To be optimistic about one’s future in life — to believe that life will improve in quality — is an obvious illusion, especially so given the overwhelming evidence that suffering tends to increase as we get older. Bodies decay and break down, diseases set in, physical pain increases, marriages and friendships end, disappointments mount, and death looms imminent. Pessimists are clearly in better touch with hard-core reality than are optimists. Yet study after study has shown irrefutably that optimists live longer and happier lives than “realists.” Somehow, their illusion — that life will improve over time — actually alters the fabric of reality, elevating it by reducing the experience of suffering without negative side-effects. Many such positively self-fulfilling prophecies exist: God helps those who help themselves, those who believe they will succeed tend to succeed.

Certainly reality is bigger than these formulaic illusions. Sometimes we fail when we think we will succeed; sometimes God does not offer help. But over the long haul, such religious or optimistic fantasies often reap real benefits in life for those who have them.
Conversely, arrogance and narcissism undermine reality. And our fears can be just as powerful in altering actual circumstances for the worse. Toxic illusions destroy otherwise neutral or beneficent realities. See the insert for one example of a poisonous fantasy that has worsened reality for millions of people.

It is tempting to assume that the moral toxicity or beneficence of fantasies are a function of their nature, but this viewpoint is too simplistic. We cannot say that the illusion of religion is always good, while an addiction to heroin is always bad. The suffering and violence that have been visited on human beings in the name of religion is awesome, while hard drugs have been a veritable boon in the life and creativity of William Burroughs. A kiss can be a gesture of loving affection or a Judas betrayal, yet both appear the same. Membership in a family can be a shelter of love or a prison of pain, depending on both the individual and the situation. Paranoia about big government may produce a hard-working ACLU lawyer or an insane Oklahoma Bomber.

Simple solutions do not solve complex problems. The toxicity or fertility of illusions cannot easily be judged by surface appearances, and may not be the same from one person to another, or even from one point in time to another.

Then there is the problem of reality itself. Since all human sensory perception is an altered and holographic reproduction that occurs not in front of our eyes but inside our brains, we encounter a spiritual challenge of immense proportions: Before we can assess the toxicity/fertility of a fantasy, we must first become aware that the illusion exists.

One of the hallmarks of an evolving spiritual maturity is the almost astonishing ability to recognize the filters of personal fantasy through which one observes and alters reality.

Since most illusions we cling to “work” to produce the desired end, at least in the short run, perhaps the toxic/fertile question is moot. Perhaps all fantasies are eventually harmful, and, as with drugs, the problem lies in preventing the negative side effects. In other words, we’re looking to keep our illusions karma-free. To that end, we must first “see” our fantasies, then learn how to release or change them before they inevitably devolve from fertile to toxic. And that, friends, is the mother of all challenges.

Sidebar: Toxic Idealism

Our cultural standards for attractiveness in America are tragically toxic, especially for women. Look at the average heights and weights of feminine icons versus real women, and notice how they’ve changed over 50 years:

- **1940s Miss America winners** ------ 5’6”, 135 lbs.  
  **1940s ideal woman:** 2”taller, 5 lbs. lighter
- **1940s real American women** ------ 5’4”, 139 lbs.
- **1980s Miss America winners** ------ 5’7”, 120 lbs.  
  **1980s ideal woman:** 3”taller, 20 lbs. lighter
- **1980s real American women** ------ 5’4”, 140 lbs.
This disparity is an impossible standard, yet it is fueled by all venues of image-driven media — fashion, TV and movies, advertising, etc. No wonder anorexia is epidemic among girls. The result is entire generations of women who hate their bodies, yet are obsessed with their physicality and superficial appearance to the detriment of every other aspect of their lives. Our collective fear of the feminine dies hard, and our fantasy that “you can’t be too tall or too thin,” which is so toxic for so many of us, quite probably traces its roots, among other sources, back to the 1960s, to a seemingly harmless plastic doll named Barbie.

Part Three

*america as disneyland*

Since its conception, America has been and remains today the world’s quintessential fantasy theme park. This country is the repository for the world’s dreams, from the best hopes and highest ideals all the way to the most depraved nightmares that haunt our big-brained species. Every country has its own particular brand of loony rituals and bizarre customs, but America stands alone at the top of the heap. Our refusal to deal with reality is expressed not merely through quaint idiosyncrasies. No, America’s escape from reality is woven into the very fabric of this nation as part of the fundamental principles that formed our origins.

Consider religion. America is and always has been very big on religion. Other cultures embody a working double standard, where religious beliefs stop at the doorway to business and politics. Almost without exception, these cultures regard America as naively innocent, in that we actually believe our religions and take them so seriously. The paradoxical fact that, as a largely Christian country, we Americans manage to ignore all the basic tenets of Christianity, from compassion and forgiveness to the Ten Commandments, demonstrates how completely we have insulated our fictional self-images from our actual behavior.

America was founded on the idea of freedom of religion and populated largely by those fleeing religious persecution. The good news is that we still have freedom of religion; the bad news is that too many Americans use that freedom mainly to justify their feelings of superiority over anyone who does not share their particular religious beliefs.

Consider racism. Measured by the sheer weight of needless human suffering, racism is probably the worst of the self-inflicted human disorders. America was founded on the idea of equality, but for the signers of the Constitution, this equality extended only to white males of European ancestry who also owned land and property. Again, paradox rules. While America has, indeed, produced some of the most profoundly progressive movements to establish the rights of
women and minorities, and to protect the rights of workers and children, we were still among the very last nations on earth to abolish slavery, and that event came only with a civil war bloodbath. I am among those who believe that our civil war never ended. Even today, the struggle against racism has produced only the dubious results of legislation. In our personal beliefs, Americans are still deeply racist, to the point of relegating those whose skin is darker — Blacks, Chicanos, Indians, etc. — to the impoverished status of a permanent economic and sociopolitical underclass.

Consider the “American century.” The 20th century is clearly the American reign. It has been our century. We have been the winners. And who have been the losers? How about the 100 million human beings who were killed in wars and political purges during this century? How about the more than one million species of plant and animal life that disappeared from our planet in utter extinction over the past hundred years? Archaeological evidence demonstrates that every human culture has trashed its environment, but it took Americans to teach the world how to destroy the ecosystem on a global scale. If our species survives, and if this time goes down in the books as the “American epoch,” then we are likely to be judged by future generations as the greediest, most shortsighted and completely irresponsible nation in recorded history.

One might assume from this diatribe that I hate America. Not so. This is the land of my birth, and I dearly love many of the illusions and fantasies of this culture. I can imagine life without the internal combustion engine, but it’s a stretch. I can imagine crisp autumn Saturdays without college football, but fall wouldn’t be the same. I can imagine not owning my own home, but I wouldn’t be happy without the fantasy of property so essential to our cherished American Dream. Hell, I don’t really own my home — the mortgage company owns it; I simply make monthly payments, just like a renter. But then we don’t need actual ownership, do we? We need only the illusion of ownership. Nothing can buy security in this life, but humans seem to need the illusion of security. And who cares about real freedom, whatever that is? All we want, and all we really need to be happy, is the illusion of personal freedom.

The sheer brilliance of America lies in our choosing illusion over reality, in valuing image rather than substance, and in embracing the idea of the individual (as propaganda) while actually responding to the dreams of the many. Pure genius!

“I am you and you are me and we are all together. I am the ape man. I am the ape man. I am the walrus. Koo koo katchoo.”

Sidebar: A Short Lesson in the Illusion of History

On June 25th, 1876, near a Montana creek called the Little Big Horn, General George Armstrong Custer, along with a detachment of 220 men of the 7th Cavalry, while intending to destroy a Sioux village, blundered into 6,000 of the Sioux nation’s fiercest Indian warriors, led by Chief Sitting Bull (Tatanka Iyotake). The resulting “battle” was little more than a frenzied slaughter. Custer and all his men were ignominiously
annihilated in less than twenty minutes. The truth of the massacre, however, would not
do, especially in a country where nearly the entire population agreed that “the only good
Indian was a dead Indian.”

The original graves of the slain cavalrymen, randomly scattered over the hillside, were
later moved into a defensive ring more in keeping with U.S. Army notions of courage and
discipline.

“Factual” newspaper accounts of Custer’s “heroic last stand” were shameless
fabrications that exalted the fictional heroism and steadfast grit of the troopers against
what was alleged to be the cowardly, immoral attack of the Indians (despite the fact that
the Army had intended to slaughter these same Indians without so much as a moment of
conscience).

In 1885, only nine years later, Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Exhibition toured America
and Europe. In its bogus re-creation of the battle, Custer was portrayed as the innocent
victim of Indian deceit. So much for the truth. Sitting Bull was hired to play himself in
the cast.

Lest we forget, the odd marriage of History and Hollywood is hardly a new invention.
On Six Billion Universes

Of all the many things astrology has taught me, the most shocking is just how big life is. Life is big, folks.

In my work, people talk to me about themselves, their lives, and their beliefs about life. This has occurred more than 9,000 times over the past quarter century. Because these conversations are the vehicle for my work, I listen differently than most people do. I listen through the special filters of astrology and intuition. I also listen without judgment and with compassion. Finally, I listen with an intelligence that has greater sensitivity and more wisdom than that of my ordinary life.

When I listen in this altered state — still myself, but as a clearer channel than my normal self — I hear a shocking truth. Despite the myriad ways we are similar, each of us is fundamentally singular in the reality we construct and experience.

People turn out to be more vastly more different than I could ever imagine. The extreme differences go unnoticed in ordinary life, in part because we are seduced by our superficial similarities, and in part because we tend to assume that others must surely be like ourselves. But we are wrong about this. We are not even remotely like one another.

For this reason, I have largely stopped taking advice from others. And, with a few notable exceptions, I have also stopped giving advice, even in my work. As time goes on, I’m amazed at how quick many people are to presume that they know enough about the reality of other’s lives to tell them what to do and what not to do, how to act and how not to act. It’s as if these people believe that they have learned the “rules” of life, or, at least, of certain aspects of living, and they feel qualified to instruct others as to what these rules are.

I understand that I may be guilty in this essay of committing the same sin of which I’m accusing others. As far as I can tell, however, there are no rules about life, at least, none that can be invariably applied to real situations in individual lives.
— general principles, perhaps, but no hard-and-fast rules — because beneath our seeming commonality of experience, every circumstance is unique.

I do believe it possible to give others information that is relevant and true for them. If I didn’t believe this, I’d surely quit doing sessions and give up my profession. What distinguishes for me information that is worth offering another from propaganda that is just so much crap is perspective. While whatever small glimpses of truth I glean come out of my personal experience, I must consider the perspective of another person’s reality in order to translate those glimpses of truth into a form that will apply for that individual. In pragmatic terms, I must understand what it feels like to be that other person, to have that person’s history, karma, and spiritual purpose, to comprehend reality as it is experienced by that human being.

This skill — the ability to put oneself in the shoes of others and actually understand their issues and challenges in light of what they’re up against and what they’ve got to work with — is apparently quite rare. The wish to help, which most people sincerely feel, may be a loving motive, but that and $1.75 will get you a cappucino. By itself, the wish to help is insufficient.

To truly be helpful, you need to “see” another person clearly. That requires special lenses, like 3-D glasses. Some-times these lenses take the form of a master system, such as astrology, 5-element theory, or homeopathy. For me, astrology reveals the unique per-spective of an individual’s experience of reality better than any other system I know. Life is big, however, and you don’t need astrology to see clearly. In this “spiritual optometry,” many different lenses can work beautifully.

Besides the obvious attempt to feather my own professional nest, the point here goes beyond sessions with me.

We are so routinely misunderstood by others, even those closest to us, that when we find someone who can see us as we really are, someone who actually understands us, we need to honor that relationship, for it’s rare and special.

It matters little whether this person is a friend, a comrade, or a paid professional — pay attention and listen carefully. You just might learn something about yourself.

Sidebar: On Individuality

Every individual has a place to fill in the world and is important in some respect, whether he chooses to be so or not.

— Nathaniel Hawthorne
(1804-1864)

At bottom every man knows well enough that he is a unique being, only once on this earth; and by no extraordinary chance will such a marvelously
picturesque piece of diversity in unity as he is, ever be put together a second time.

— *Friedrich Nietzsche*

(1844-1900)

The [human] race advances only by the extra achievements of the individual. You are the individual.

— *Charles Towne*
On Astrology as a Profession

Sometimes it never quits raining
Sometimes that phone just won’t ring
Sometimes I never miss nothing
And sometimes I miss anything

— Lyle Lovett
“Cryin Shame”

Of the many opening thoughts I could pen about the practice of astrology as a profession, especially after 22 years of making my living this way, precious few stand out in my mind. The essence of my experience boils down to this: To be a professional in astrology is more a response to a calling than a choice of career, much more a mission than a livelihood, and altogether more ironically spiritual than straightforwardly mundane.

the matter of money

Becoming a professional consulting astrologer is akin to acting as a career. Of all the men and women in the world who aspire to act, about 98% never manage to eke out even a meager living in fretting their hour upon the stage. They wait tables, drive taxis, take acting classes, go to endless auditions and cattle calls, and impatiently wait for their “big break,” which, too often, turns out to be no more than waiting for Godot. Only about 2% achieve regular status as working actors, and for the vast majority of those, making a living is an ongoing hustle. A mere handful of that tiny percentage ever become stars who command multi-million-dollar movie or TV deals and achieve the dubious status of becoming household names. All the rest toil in relative obscurity.
The parallels with astrology as a profession are telling. A national survey of astrologers, called Project Focus, recently published a preliminary report based on the first 657 questionnaires received. Of those who defined themselves as full-time, practicing professional astrologers, only 46% reported making all their income from their astrological practices. More than half augment their income by other work, a decision based clearly on necessity rather than choice. Even worse, the largest group of part-time professionals (37%) reported making less than 10% of their personal gross incomes from astrology.

If you want to be financially comfortable, consider becoming a lawyer, a banker, or a stockbroker. If you wish to achieve substantial wealth, think about creating computer software or real estate speculation. And if you want to get over-the-top, out-of-sight, stinking rich, become an NBA basketball player. Unless, however, you are a virtual genius at self-promotion and/or are willing to sell your soul for a buck, don’t even consider astrology as a profession.

talking is not thinking

Astrology does not easily lend itself to professional use. Like theoretical physics or higher mathematics, astrology is, at its essence, rather arcane and esoteric, not at all mainstream as a way of interpreting reality. Our system of interrelated and multileveled symbols is not particularly well-suited to the arbitrary limitations of verbal translation. Yet, if you want to be a consulting astrologer, you’re going to talk to people concerning the content of their charts. [Note: My use of the word “chart” in this article is a convenient shorthand term meant to include all the astrological tools we use in sessions — natal charts, transit lists, progressed hits, composites, whatever.]

Translating astrological information to clients, most of whom have never studied astrology, is just about the worst way to use this system. The most natural use of astrology is as a long-term, private discipline, where our frameworks for perceiving reality are gradually altered as we deepen our study until they bear little if any resemblance to the standard ways of interpreting life that are endemic in western culture. In a 90-minute session with a client, hardly a chance in hell exists of effectively communicating astrology’s unique world-view, not to mention its poetic subtlety, its profound irony, or the nuances of paradox that are inherent in its symbols. Pickett’s charge at Gettysburg had a better chance of succeeding.

Every working astrologer knows what I’m talking about here. Charts are incredible mandalas of exquisite patterning where meaning cascades forth, then folds back on itself, then leaps out from another perspective, then turns inward on itself again, only to re-emerge anew to our fresh astonishment. Yet, in trying to translate them into spoken words, we reduce charts to only their simplest, most obvious components. We end up in the awkward position of straddling the extraordinary logic of astrology with the ordinary nonsense of rationalization most people embrace. Even if we are verbal wizards, and even though our clients may be very happy with their sessions, we are still painfully aware of how little
of the true magic we can reach with words. And because we are so busy giving out information and answering our clients’ questions in the short time sessions allow, we are usually unable to share with them any of the tantalizing mystery in charts, the evanescent quality of hide-and-seek, the shimmering of the symbols as they play with our heads and hearts.

Oh, we can tell our clients that such levels exist, just as I have written about them here, but many, if not most of our clients will be unlikely to appreciate an experience they have not had and could not imagine. Such an assessment is not elitism or feigned superiority; it is a fact that certain of the frameworks and information revealed by astrology can be found in no other discipline, spiritual or otherwise.

To most new clients, astrology is little more than a vending machine, where, instead of putting in two quarters and getting a candy bar, you put in a question and out pops an answer. Clients expect that answer to be not only concise and to the point, but to fit in perfectly with their current world-view. Little do they know the reality that as astrologers we understand all too well — namely, that when you put in a question, what pops out are a thousand answers, all different, yet all connected. Nor do clients generally realize that most astrological insight is not in answers at all, but in new perspectives that redefine what reality is for us, stretching the very envelope of our perceptions and forever changing the kind of questions we ask and answers we seek.

In our very best sessions, or with our very best clients, we may at least partially succeed in offering a new view of reality, but for most working astrologers, this is not a daily event. Such successes are, sadly, the exception rather than the rule. Most of the time we have to settle for much less.

Imagine that astrologers were prospectors living atop a mountain rich with gold. Our clients have heard that we will share our gold, so they climb the mountain and ask us to give them some. We could tell them it is right there beneath their feet, inside the mountain, and that they must dig for it, but we know they have neither the time nor the inclination, or they too would surely be prospectors, slowly digging into the mountain to uncover vein after vein. No, most clients come for the quick fix. So we offer them shiny, gold-painted baubles, and they leave happy, but not really much richer.

How fortunate we would be if all our clients were like our best — people who in one way or another have long observed their lives and gained the full benefit of experience; people who understand that astrology is not rightly a verbal language and therefore listen between the lines; people who are mature, awake, and aware. Those clients inspire the best we can offer, which, while not as full in revelation as the disciplined personal study of astrology, is still wonderful in its own right. For most of us who labor diligently as professional astrologers, however, these savvy people represent only a minority of our clientele, and perhaps a small minority at that. Mostly, our gold remains hidden. Mostly, we deal in baubles.
but thinking is not talking, either

Happily, this dilemma has an upside to complement its downside. While I am routinely disappointed with my inability to convey the panorama of wonders that are contained in every chart, I am occasionally thrilled to find myself revealing a particular wonder to a client that even I didn’t know was there.

No matter how brilliant the astrologer, any chart is still seen through a characteristic matrix of “lenses” that are developed through that individual’s accumulated assumptions, attitudes, beliefs, and experience (digested and undigested), from within astrology as well as from life’s many other realms. We strive to bring all we are to astrology, and that is as it should be. None of the astrologers I know, however — including myself — are so expanded, so exalted, so transcendent in our consciousness that we can look at charts from a truly objective point of view. We’re all biased and limited in our own ways. And again, because charts are infinitely-leveled symbolic mandalas, their implications extend far beyond any limited perspective, including that of the astrologer.

The conversational mode of live, face-to-face sessions, or even long-distance sessions over the phone, does allow, however, for certain extraordinary moments of true revelation. One way to reach these unexpected revelations is by active listening. If we are willing to really listen to our clients, we can learn very quickly certain of the basic ways they view and interpret reality. Some of this comes through what they tell us, in the actual words and meanings; other learning occurs by observing clients while we are listening. Facial expressions, body language, hand gestures, depth and rhythm of breathing, skin flushes, pupil dilation — all these and many more subtle, physical signals complement and clarify what clients tell us in words, sometimes even letting us see what they have hidden behind the words, since speech is as often used for obfuscation as for clarification.

By actively “reading” our clients, we can subtly move from viewing the chart through our lenses to viewing it through their lenses, a shift that is the equivalent of looking at an M. C. Escher print: First it’s fish, then it’s ducks, and yet it’s actually both. Merging your consciousness as an astrologer with the unique perspectives of your client allows you to see the ducks when you might previously have seen only the fish. And so the “ah-ha” deepens.

Likewise, the chart itself plays an important role in active listening. If we keep one eye on the chart while the rest of our sensors are becoming increasingly attuned to our client, we can move back and forth from the chart to the client, and from the client to the chart. Over 15 to 20 minutes of this ebb and flow, we can significantly enhance our perception of both client and chart, to the point where, again, we see what we would not have seen before, because we are no longer observing the chart only through our personal filters, but instead, through an amalgam of our training and our perception of the real person sitting across from us.
talking is talking

Another path to revelation lies in the mysteries of spoken language. For those of us who are fearlessly and compulsively verbal (a trait that certainly helps if one wishes to be a professional astrologer), talking has its own reality, separate from normal sentient awareness, in rhythms of logic that follow their own paths to unexpected insights. Once sufficiently wound up in the dance of words, we may actually forget ourselves for brief moments. From that self-transcending state, a client’s reality may come directly through our words. No matter how careful or self-possessed we are, if we log enough sessions, this will begin to happen.

Something causes an evaporation of our natural personality defenses against “invasion” by another being. Perhaps we’re tired, or maybe our empathic connection to a certain client is unusually strong, or our 8th and 12th houses are activated by transits. Whatever the reasons, our unconscious guard comes down and the boundary that normally shuts out another’s reality dissolves. In those moments, which increase in frequency as we log more years of sessions, we may find ourselves making statements that truly do not come from our perceptions, but, instead, echo our clients’ vision of reality. Such instances transcend even our astrological framework and lift us into another level altogether.

Please understand, I don’t wish to offend that percentage of professional astrologers who take great pains to keep their astrological work separate from that of psychics, trance mediums, channelers, etc. While I am personally content to toss all my tools — rational, psychological, astrological, metaphysical, intuitive, political, social, etc. — into a single, undifferentiated bag, which I spill out inside myself to conduct sessions, I can easily understand and accept that some astrologers must not do this. Different individuals have different life-purposes, each of which comes with a particular set of necessary constraints. I have met astrologers who are clearly correct in maintaining for themselves a firm boundary between the crisp paradigms of science or rationality and the sometimes fuzzier poetic orientations of metaphysics or intuition. For those individuals, I would urge interpreting the techniques offered here in the most rational light possible.

go for the gusto

For most of us who are or aspire to be professional astrologers, however, I advise letting it all hang out. Add the few techniques I’ve listed in previous sections to every other one you can think up or synthesize or stumble on to address the challenge of transcending a limited vision of charts. Spin your chakras faster if that helps. Slow them down if that helps. Use anything you can get your hands on to open up the astrology you do in sessions. For while astrology is a truly remarkable system, in professional use it never was and never will be quite enough.

Obviously, continue the discipline of becoming a better pure astrologer. Be absolutely the best astrologer you can. And honor your astrological heritage. But understand the truth of the matter: Using astrology as a professional consultant
is just about the worst possible way of applying this exquisite path of understanding. This is obviously true with clients who know nothing about astrology, but it is equally true — for different reasons — even with clients who are devoted students of the system. There’s just no getting around the fact that the spoken and written word are far from the center of true astrological revelation. So pull in everything you can to enhance the process of helping your clients.

**but be prepared for surprises**

There will be times when you are, as they say in the army, “5 by 5 in the pipe,” meaning that you’re correctly sighted dead center. You’re having a really good day, and you manage to both see and verbalize with great clarity, getting right down to the core of what your client needs to hear in his or her life. On those days, the perfect words come naturally to mind. As you finish the last beautifully coherent sentence, bringing down the curtain on true revelation, you are so happy with yourself! And yet, you look up to find your client staring back at you with the dead eyes of a corpse, mouth half-open, and that awful, slightly-dulled expression of “Duh?” spreading across the face, as if you had been speaking in tongues, or at least in a foreign language. You realize with a sinking heart that your client is simply somewhere else, that he or she isn’t going to get it, no matter how well you said it. Maybe the message will sink in that evening, or perhaps it’ll dawn months or even years later, but you won’t get to see it. That happens sometimes.

It’s considered a spiritual truth that every being yearns for enlightenment, but pragmatically, many human beings — and this includes a percentage of our clients — are so habitually caught up in the sleeping state of their own melodramas that they couldn’t pour water out of a boot if the instructions were written under the heel. Sad to say, but at least some of your sessions are going to be with clients who aren’t ready to hear the truth about themselves and don’t much want to anyway. As a general rule of thumb, clients who make a big deal out of how much they want to hear the truth and how you shouldn’t hold anything back from them are the very people who couldn’t handle it if you did. In fact, they want to be reassured about their cherished illusions of happiness or wealth or security. They want to know if they’ll ever find that perfect partner who will make the hard work of intimacy magically vanish, or if they’ll ever hit the motherlode of having enough money to stop worrying about it. Dealing compassionately with these people is an ongoing part of your dues-paying as a professional astrologer.

On the other hand, there will be times when you’re certain you’ve blown it, days when sessions are nightmares, where clients are uncooperative or apparently just plain idiots, where everything you say seems to backfire, either coming out of your mouth wrong or provoking your client into defensiveness. You’ve pulled every trick in the book and every ace from up your sleeve, all to no avail. But then, just as you feel like retiring from the profession and never looking at another chart, much less seeing another client, you’ll say something and see your client’s face light up in instant recognition. And you’ll sit there in
true wonderment as your client transforms before your eyes from apparent jerk to warm-blooded human being, opening up like the petals of a lotus blossom. The air in the room will change color, and suddenly the two of you will dance to the music of shared revelation with unexpected grace. When the session’s over and your client is walking out with a relieved smile after thanking you sincerely for the best session ever, you’ll shake your head at how even on a bad day you can still get lucky just by stumbling through the right doorway finally. Trust me, this also happens.

**truth or consequences?**

As a professional astrologer, you will eventually hear every human story, every human truth, and every human lie. Many of these will come from your clients; some you yourself will say — both truths and lies. The truths will be wonderful and feel great to verbalize, and the lies will be terrible and so embarrassing to hear coming out of your mouth. After a long time at this game, however, I have begun to realize that my life as a consulting astrologer is not finally about either truth or lies, at least not in their usual context of “objective” facts.

My work as a professional is about creative mythology, about getting to the heart of the matter of being human, and about helping people to come home to themselves. It is also about learning that, on occasion, getting to the truth involves walking — and My job, as I understand it currently, is to discover and then to tell my clients in each session the essence of what they are ready to hear about themselves in the here and now. Usually, that means confirming what they knew but did not know they knew. Sometimes, it means giving them not information, but new perspectives from which to glean information. Occasionally, it means telling clients something they have never known, never heard, and never imagined. And every so often, it means protecting them from something they are not ready to know by distracting their attention away from what they cannot handle and would, therefore, screw up, given the chance.

Some might protest that I am “playing God” with my clients, and, in a sense, they would be correct. Professional astrology is not “non-directive counseling.” Our clients often expect us to know them intimately — their past, present, and futures — even before they first meet us, as if merely erecting a chart were sufficient to show us everything about them.

However wrong-headed this may be, it is a fact of life for professional astrologers. We are expected to be cosmic authorities, and so to play this impossible role with minimal karmic backlash to ourselves and our clients, we must stay humble, clear, and open to the wonderment of it all.

As I said at the beginning, astrology is more a calling for most of us than a mere profession. For me at least, it is the embodiment of right livelihood, and for that I am very thankful. Astrology may not be much of a living, but it can be a pretty wonderful way to live.
A Modest Proposal

Introduction

For 150 years, the feminist movement promoting political and psychological equality for women has provoked us to struggle against ourselves.

Modern feminism was born in the occult spiritual renaissance of the mid-19th century, as women found their first avenue of cultural power. Social reform movements of the late-19th century were largely a feminine reaction to the horrors of the industrial age. Political involvement followed as suffragettes fought a long battle to obtain voting rights for women. Rosie the Riveter took over previously male-dominated factories during World War II. In the turbulent 1960s, women burned their bras, asserted their sexuality, and took control of their bodies.

Each chapter was another victory in the struggle to reform the outmoded gender roles imposed by culture and kept in place through social inertia. And the battle rages on.

Having been an astrologer for 20 years (as of 1993), I can attest personally to the high percentage of female clients who have bitched and moaned to me about men. Their points of view have ranged from mild dissatisfaction to hysterical negativity, and over the years the intensity has steadily increased across the board. To listen to these many women, one might conclude that cultural patriarchy was the devil’s plan, and that the male half of the species is composed exclusively of idiots, jerks, and ne’er-do-wells.

Being a man, however, I must also admit my own and my male friends’ bitching and moaning about women. Our protests may be more reactive and slower to emerge, but they are, nonetheless, equally real, and in recent years just as passionate. Listening to our litany of complaints, one might conclude that women were impossible to please, and that they exist only to exasperate and torment men in an unending effort to make our lives miserable.

Every person I know embraces divergent, conflicting opinions about the male-female dilemma — from heartfelt hopes to profound cynicism. Each of us
actively promotes equality and reconciliation in certain ways, yet each of us also staunchly resists reform at other levels. We are divided not merely between ourselves, but within ourselves as well.

So what’s to be done? My modest proposal is offered not as a solution, but, instead, as a simple, elegant social experiment, a leap into the brave new world:

Let’s give the country to the women.

By that, I mean turning over to women the running of local and federal government — lock, stock, and barrel.

why?

Men have attempted to govern this nation for more than 200 years, to direct its growth, to substan-tiate in law and policy the high ideals of its philosophical mandate. Almost no one is happy with the results. We are all —_men and women alike — utterly fed up.

Women are gradually making inroads to formal positions of power and influence through politics, and this coming election in November promises their largest gains. But it is so damn slow. Let’s shortcut the whole process by giving the government to the women.

We’ll set it up so that men can continue to run the business world. That’s only fair. But women will occupy all elective offices, from county commissioners and school board members, mayors and governors, congresswomen and cabinet members, all the way to the White House.

Think about it. What are the critical issues where government is stalemated? Abortion, education, social security, medical care, homelessness, rebuilding the infrastructure, cutting military expenditures, insuring environmental protection... Why, all these are issues that involve nurturing and protecting human beings, which is precisely what women have been practicing for centuries.

Crap like “Line-Item Veto” debates goes right out the window, because women are terrific at working out agree-ments among themselves. Congress will never adjourn.

Taxes? The federal deficit? Government spending? No problem. We cut taxes to a flat 5% of gross income _for both individuals and cor-po-ra-tions. No exemptions, _no sheltered income, no funny business. Bye-bye, IRS.

Slash military funding. War is just men arguing over whose dick is bigger, anyway. Bye-bye, phallic missiles.

The femme government will hire male-run business to create corporate social entities. No more padding or cost overruns; women office-holders will shop ’til they drop, insisting on sale prices. Business will provide high-quality, efficient social services at a profit. In other words, women will set the agenda and men will solve the tasks.
Conclusion

It’s perfect! And even if the experiment doesn’t work, even if the country remains just as screwed up as ever, we can then justifiably tell anyone who still bitches — male or female — to put it where the sun don’t shine.
On the Future of Astrology

introduction

What exactly is the state of astrology today? What is its current status as a pathway and a cultural institution here in the waning years of the last decade of this millennium’s astonishing final century? No great intelligence is required to understand that humanity has stumbled to the brink of disaster, and no crystal ball is needed to see the impending crises that loom on the horizon of the coming century. So, whatever our opinions and judgments may be about astrology’s past currency, what will it take to make astrology valuable to humanity in the difficult days ahead? What is the primary challenge faced by those of us for whom astrology is a personal discipline, a part-time passion, or even a full-time profession? After all, astrology can speak only through us. What do we need to work on now to better insure that astrology’s contributions to humanity will shine more brightly in the new millennium than they did in the one now passing?

The entry of Pluto into Sagittarius and the simultaneous passage of Uranus into Aquarius, to be followed soon by Neptune’s crossing into that same sign, have inspired some astrologers to make glowing predictions. Astrology will experience greater acceptance by the culture, they suggest, as well as an expanded role in helping to foster the presumed “peace, harmony, understanding” of the precessional new age. While I can follow the symbolic reasoning that informed such optimistic forecasts, I worry and cannot yet agree. In fact, I am deeply concerned that we astrologers may have lost our way.

My concerns emerged not from the lofty philosophical overviews of mundane astrology, but out more limited and pragmatic perspectives, namely, the day-to-day effort of life in the trenches as a working astrologer. The concerns grew out of a personal critique — a slowly-built perception of my own limitations and even failings as an astrologer. Only on the heels of this self-criticism did I then turn my attention to my astrological comrades and colleagues, and, at first, I did so only to find answers to what I considered my own shortcomings. But in canvassing other astrologers to find what I was missing, I slowly discovered that
most everyone I knew, talked to, and read seemed to be suffering from a similar problem.

Before identifying the problem and offering what I believe to be its causes and possible solutions, I need to fill in the background out of which these perceptions emerged.

**the amazing arc of the 1990s**

I began doing astrological sessions with individuals and couples in 1970. By the time 1990 rolled around, I had logged almost 8,000 sessions. Over that twenty years, I think I heard from my clients just about every human story there is, and, believe me, many of them are much weirder than fiction. Life, however, felt “normal.” What I heard in confidence from clients made sense to me, what I saw in their charts made sense to me, and what I said in response or explanation usually made sense to my clients.

As the 1980s ended, everything went haywire. The entry of Saturn into Capricorn and its subsequent passage over both Uranus and Neptune synchronized with the sudden, shocking collapse of the Soviet Union and its former fiefdom of buffer satellites in Eastern Europe. And that was only the beginning.

Uranus and Neptune were moving toward their own conjunction in Capricorn that would reach partile in 1993. This obviously critical outer planet alignment would be accompanied simultaneously by the most significantly powerful Saturn-Pluto square *in over 1200 years* (namely, Saturn and Pluto’s right angle formation from within signs that each planet *ruled* — Aquarius and Scorpio — something that had not occurred since the year 736 A.D.).

The problem for me was not *identifying* what was happening. That was as clear and obvious as anything could be. The problem was understanding what it all *meant*, and then converting that understanding into terms that would make sense and be helpful to my clients, whose reactions to their own lives were becoming progressively more abnormal as each succeeding year passed.

The statistical demographics of these alignments are quite revealing. Over the eight-year period from 1990 through 1997, more than half the world’s population will go through the most significant, difficult, and downright nonsensical clustering of transits that they will ever experience in their entire lives. Some individuals went through it early, like I did. Some would cluster around the middle of the decade. Others will experience the clustering later. And some extraordinary cases have five- or six-year stretches unabated, with no slack.

All told, about three billion people will experience this Alice-through-the-looking-glass dissolve into altered consciousness sometime during the 1990s. My best guess is that for every person who emerges from this psychedelic sabbatical refreshed and renewed, spiritually healed, and ready to lead us into 21st century with a new and healthier vision of human affairs and relationships, there will be another individual who cannot take the pressure of watching cherished values disintegrate. For these unfortunates, the walking wounded who are unable to
“transform,” life will be reduced to the illusion of holding onto what is no longer real or viable. Many of these casualties will be unaware that anything has changed; they will exist as before and may even mistakenly consider themselves among the “transformed.” But they will exist only in fantasies past, permanently shunted away from the new current of social evolution. They will live out their days without so much as a clue as to how lost and damaged they are.

the view from the trenches

Imagine doing a session with someone who walks into your office hoping to gain clarity and insight, as well as emotional relief, whose chart has, say, a natal T-square involving Mars, Moon, and Saturn all late in fixed signs being activated in transit by the Saturn-Pluto passage, who also has a cardinal Sun in Cancer undergoing the simultaneous opposition of both Uranus and Neptune! Such nightmarish chart configurations were routine among my clients during 1993.

What could you possibly tell this person that would make sense of the nearly three-year onslaught of such impossibly contradictory symbolic influences? Nice, new age phrases like “transformation” and “original vision” may suffice for a journal article, but they don’t cut it when there’s a real live person sitting in front of you, someone who’s in deep psychic pain and profound confusion who is paying you a significant hourly wage in the hope of regaining a little sanity. As an astrologer, I had to come up with something better than pat phrases.

Discussing each transit separately might simplify my task, but besides the fact that some of my clients’ attention spans were hardly longer than that of a gerbil, I knew all too well that one at a time was not how transits operate in a human life. Simultaneous transits blend together into a unique matrix that leaves standard cookbook interpretations in the dust.

So I pulled out all the stops to attempt a synthesis, explaining the big picture over and over, talking about how the new science of ecobiology in the 1960s had made observations of organically interdependent life systems growing to a certain point, then collapsing and dissolving inextricably, only to reorganize later at a higher level of sophistication. I discussed how mathematicians got together with ecobiologists to come up with what has now been named Chaos Theory, and how this sudden dissolution (sudden-Uranus, dissolution-Neptune) applies to people and life circumstances as well. I went through the history of Uranus-Neptune conjunctions, explaining how every 171 years cultural values changed in a radical new vision, from the industrial revolution of 1820, back to the idea of democracy in 1750, back even to the discovery of perspective in art and architecture in 1480. I talked about the “cosmic colonics” of Saturn-Pluto transits, with their ruthlessly total destruction (de-structuring) of old, antiquated forms, followed by a later Phoenix-like rising from the ashes. I preached endlessly about attachment, about our egos’ clinging to the illusion of Maya, and the importance of getting off the Wheel of Sang Sara by letting go, letting go, letting go. I discussed the inevitable confrontations with power and authority (Saturn-Pluto) and the necessary humbling of defeats, as well as creative fantasies (Uranus-Neptune) and their cross fertilization with reality in either beneficent or toxic ways.
Hell, I talked myself blue in the face trying to be authentically helpful in making sense of these paradoxical symbols. I worked to be compassionate with my clients even in the face of what is often self-induced suffering, and also to remain firmly matter of fact in acknowledging that correct disillusioning is difficult but critical to growth.

At any point during 1992–1994, I would no sooner get through one impossible session than I would be faced with another equally incomprehensible set of transits belonging to another client whose consciousness had been dramatically altered, often to the point that some clients just sat there and babbled incoherently about their lives, as if the public water supply had been secretly laced with LSD. People went nuts (and they’re still going nuts, even today…).

When these overwhelming clumps of paradoxical, once in a lifetime transits weren’t occurring simultaneously (as they routinely did during 1993), then they were unfolding sequentially, back-to-back-to-back, over a two- or three-year period. Before 1993, it would be Neptune first, then Uranus over the same natal symbol the next year. After 1993, it was Uranus first, then Neptune. Bang-bang! And if the passage involved a wide-orb natal opposition or square, you’d get four successive overlapped transits taking perhaps three years to wade through.

For those of us who are psychologically- or spiritually-based astrologers consulting with regular clientele, these difficult sessions — and all the strange, phantasmagorical real life circumstances that accompanied them — have been an ongoing event now for the past five years, and even though Saturn-Pluto is just a memory and Uranus is moving into Aquarius, well past the conjunction with Neptune, the hits just keep on coming, and will pretty much until the end of the decade.

Even though my clients seemed satisfied with our sessions, I never was. The inner voice of conscience kept saying, “Well, almost, but not quite…” As every working astrologer knows, you can sometimes transcend even the limitations of your own wisdom when you’re really cooking and into the zone of a given session. It is like channeling then. Despite those occasional moments of self transcendence, however, too often I sounded good but never really nailed it. I knew deep down that I didn’t grok what the union of these symbols was all about.

So I read every astrological article that crossed my desk, I browsed every new astrology book on the subject, I asked each astrologer in my personal network. The conclusion I finally came to was that no one I read and no one I talked to had any better understanding of what was happening than I did.

Oh, there may well be astrologers and other enlightened individuals out there who grasp the central essence of what’s happening and where we’re headed, but either they’re not writing articles (perhaps because they know better than to try to put the incomprehensible into words) or they’re not talking to me.

My view is that few, if any of us who labor as professionals or devotees in the discipline of astrology, were adequately prepared for the tumult that is now unfolding around us throughout the 1990s. We could see the alignments coming, but no one I know anticipated the depth or breadth of the real changes. Phrases
like “the 90s will make the 60s look like the 50s” turned out to be incorrect. The 60s were change at the surface, like a tornado; the 90s are change from deep within, like an earthquake.

Basically, we were all taken by surprise. All the psychological jargon, new age catch phrases, and metaphysical gobbledygook we sprinkle over our writing and public speaking in the vain attempt to authoritatively define these momentous changes doesn’t begin to capture the actual experience of what’s happening in billions of real lives. And, unfortunately, astrologers seem to be just as confused as everyone else.

so where is astrology now?

My position is that all the issues raised in the defense and prosecution cases represent the endless conflicts that go on within any discipline or institution. The pros and cons of credentialing and licensing, public forums in writing and publishing, access to and use of cultural media, the problems of professionalism and making real livings, the mass marketing of astrology, technical changes within the system — all these subjects will inevitably be debated, but in my view, we need not take them so seriously. Most of all, let’s stop worrying about what the almighty public thinks about us. Who cares if we’re “respectable” in a culture whose historically warped values are going through their death throes, and not a moment too soon?

Astrology has waited patiently, for hundreds of years, to get to this moment in history. We have stood in the shadows, on the sidelines, at the fringes of culture, waiting for this precise time. Unlike science or psychology or philosophy or economics, astrology is perfectly suited to this crisis, because our discipline doesn’t have to change at all to be in harmony with the times. Astrology actually has the information — coded in its symbolic mandalas — about what is happening and why. We don’t have to wait for astrology to become a socially powerful institution; nor must we wait for broader access to cultural media. We have the information. To take our rightful place in helping the human species through this extraordinary crisis, all we have to do is just talk to the people around us. Just give them the information that astrology reveals.

We cannot, however, share what we have not understood, and I have come to believe that as a group, even almost to a person, we do not yet understand the current information that astrology offers us.

the parallel paths of astrology

The mastery of astrology requires walking two quite separate paths. The more obvious path involves the external discipline of mind — learning the nuts and bolts of the astrological system, as well as their assembly. Here we study planets, signs, houses, aspects, transits, progressions, solar returns, sabian symbols, eclipses, asteroids, chart synthesis, etc., correlating them with the experiences of ordinary life, in personal psychology, interpersonal relationships, collective movements, health and healing, broad areas of timing and decision, and even
natural manifestations, such as weather or stockmarkets. Here is where we dance with the system, as professionals or as students, letting our growing intelligence merge with the inherent intelligence of astrology.

The other path, the less obvious of the two, involves the internal devotion to spirit — personal growth, gradual maturity, and eventual freedom from the compulsions, drives, attachments, and illusions that come with life in bodies. Here we use astrology as our meditative mandala, surrendering rather than striving, observing rather than judging, accepting rather than controlling. By looking at life through the lenses of astrology, we may get a glimpse of objective reality.

Each way supports the other. Every step taken to better understand the symbolic contents of astrology brings us closer to a readiness to see life more clearly and to discard our illusions. Every step taken to stop our clinging or cease our fearful manipulation of reality for the benefit of our egos brings us closer to the clairvoyance (literally, “clear-seeing”) necessary to understand and feel in depth the meaning of these mysterious symbols and their interconnections.

To intensely pursue the discipline of astrology while only dabbling in the devotion of spiritual awakening will result in little more than the most superficial understanding of astrology, where no mastery is possible. Conversely, to intensely pursue the devotion of awakening into full maturity while only dabbling in the disciplined study of astrology will produce the very same result: only superficial astrological understanding without any possibility of mastery.

In decades past, I was concerned with how little we all seemed to know about astrology. Technical interpretations were often unsophisticated and revealed a lack of study. At the same time, however, I felt most people I knew who were interested in astrology to be, if not exactly “enlightened” — in truth, I’ve never met anyone who seemed enlightened to me — but at least, shall we say, further along on the path toward maturity than many others in their peer groups.

Now, in the mid-90s, I feel the situation to be reversed. Having earned over 25 years the dubious distinction of becoming a battle scarred veteran in the wars of astrological infighting, with purple hearts in authorship, unethical sneak attacks on my reputation, and thin skinned ego conflicts, I wonder about us. All of us.

I know many astrologers whose sheer knowledge of the system is impressive indeed. In fact, most of us who have long slogged through the trenches seem to me now almost incredibly knowledgeable, to the point where I have great respect for others’ achievements in the technical discipline. Oh, how I wish I saw the same advances in the devotional path of awakening, truthfulness, courage, and compassion! Sadly, I don’t. It seems that our discipline has outstripped our devotion.

Yes, we give lip service to spirituality, and some astrologers among us are brilliant actors and actresses, sheer masters of the let’s-pretend-to-be-sacred game. Presenting a superficially “spiritual” image with subtly holier-than-thou posturing is the astrological equivalent of dressing for success in corporate culture. It has become almost de rigueur to promote oneself as spiritually aware.
But scratch the thin veneer of false humility, and too often we find arrogance and narcissism. Puncture the evanescent bubble of supposed compassion, and too often we find ego wolves ready to leap out and tear flesh at the first sign that others have “sinned” by not behaving according to the strict codes of a particular dogma.

**time to catch up with ourselves**

At one level, astrology will inevitably remain part of the ordinary world of pettiness, jealousy, greed, envy, revenge, lies, feigned superiority, and every other human vice. The cult of personality will still rule. Members of the astrological community will continue to be wrapped up in their egos and illusions just as are those whose primary life game is business, sports, or Hollywood. Such is life.

But invisibly, between the lines, we who have chosen astrology as an important or even primary life game must continue to work on ourselves with renewed vigor, to work toward true humility, honesty, and ego transcendence. If astrology is to have the positive role in the next century to which many of us have been long committed and all of us aspire, then *astrologers need to grow up faster. We need to mature as human beings much more than we have thus far.*

The further we go in this incredible decade, the more our illusions and attachments are likely to become tangible and heavy, like wet blankets, which may make them easier to recognize and eventually wriggle out of, like old, worn-out skins. This requires ongoing inner work — all our minds’ powers to observe, all our hearts’ grace to open, to love, and to forgive both ourselves and others for the endless occasions where we forget our highest calling and fall back into being petty and immature jerks.

Is this not the fundamental message of the shift from the Piscean to the Aquarian Epoch? That we stop our addiction to suffering by confusing fantasy for reality, that we give up our judgmental fanaticism, that each person work alone to awaken into responsible freedom, yet all arrive together.

This maturity or “enlightenment” I’m talking about may seem intangible or airy-fairy. After all, what good is it? Will becoming an awakened human being help you to sell more astrology books or get more clients or give more workshops? Will it put food on the table or get you laid more often? *Probably not.*

But all the great sages down throughout history repeat the same message over and over, that the **inner work** is, finally, the **only** work, because it is the sole way to create joy that does not boomerang back into suffering, as well as the only way to reduce suffering that does not lead to further anguish.

The problem confronting us as astrologers is not that we are confused. Rather, the problem is that we often fail to acknowledge our confusion. Astrology tells us that our collective path is shrouded in fog, that until the end of the century we must “fly on instruments and circle the airport.” Let’s use this time to work on ourselves, to work toward maturity, and thus, to make sure that we have adults in the cockpit, not children.
The essay that follows represents a broad vision based on two decades’ work with thousands of individuals, some of whom continue to help me delve into the mysteries of human life — into the contradictions, the paradoxes, and the ironies of this life, a life that has us every bit as much as we have it.

Writing authoritatively about any reality is risky, but writing about alternate realities is an especially tricky business. This amounts to playing God, and such a monumental presumption confers not only immense freedom and a giddy sense of power, but special responsibilities as well. At least a percentage of readers tend to believe anything they see on a printed page, especially anything that reinforces their own emotional assumptions, as if it were Gospel — capital-T truth. In the glib idioms of pop psychology, such a tendency may be “their problem” as readers, but, considered from an ethical standpoint, it is also my problem as an author.

I do not intend to write about religion, although my subject matter is metaphysical. Nor will I stake any claim that the essay is scientific, although the implications of science have encouraged its development. More akin to science fiction, it is a spiralling series of speculative structures, each interwoven into the others. The weave seems logical to me, but cannot be proven or verified. I am concerned here not with the truth in fact, but with the truth in feeling, and with
the heartfelt longing for graceful order and creative meaning in these lives we
have, lives in which nearly continual struggle is apparently a given.

To maintain even the illusion of rationality, I must begin by setting up an
understanding of the background of Outpost Theory. This entails working from
the largest and most simple realities, those ordinarily impossible to understand
or talk about. From there, the essay gradually works inward toward smaller and
more complex life systems.

Outpost Theory is about individual human beings — you and me — about the
rights and responsibilities of our uniqueness as spirits, about what each of us has
to contribute and gain from our experience.

Very simply, Outpost Theory holds that every one of us longs for acceptance
even as we struggle to find our uniqueness. Conformity and rebellion shape the
world; the power of the community versus the integrity of the individual. This
may not be an American invention — to recognize and exalt the value of an
individual life, to give it equal weight to the assembled congregation — but
America is the country where the idea took root. Americans created the political
and cultural imagery of balance between the collective

and the individual. Now, as we stumble out of the most tumultuous, brutal
century in the history of humankind, toward an ever-more uncertain future, we
need to substantiate that balance.

Despite the appalling fact that human beings killed more members of their
own species in the 20th century alone than in all other centuries combined, our
population continues to increase at a staggering rate. More of us are alive at this
moment than have lived throughout all previous history, nearly seven billion at
the end of the century, and ten billion merely twenty years later. Those numbers
represent a level of complexity that will inevitably produce a confrontation
between civilization and savagery.

Our human community is an amorphous, amoebic movement, growing
through a difficult and dangerous adolescence, moving into the unknown. But
this new territory, this alien ground, is not completely unknown. It is foreign to
the Collective, but not to individuals. While each person is a member of the
larger community — straining for acceptance by conformity — each of us also
occupies an Outpost in the unrecognized ground of possibilities, sending signals
back to the community from our lonely and desolate stations.

Outpost Theory is about the reconciliation of acceptance versus ostracism,
about the karma of recognition and the isolation of invisibility. It reveals
techniques for discovering your unique contribution, and ways to share that
uniqueness to help both yourself and civilization.

But to get to that, I have to set the stage, define the precedents, and build the
cosmology necessary to understand just how and why Outpost Theory is
relevant to each of us. So we begin with the universe itself.

Please bear with me; this is a long poem.
**the universe**

In the beginning, there was no “universe.” At least, there was no universe as we understand it. There was, however, something. We can give it whatever name we will. Call it God. Call it Life-force, or Consciousness itself. I will call it Unity.

In Unity, all is one-ness, a living within. There is no separation, no relatedness, no growth, no experience. A reality beyond the real, beyond the known, it is the stillness between breaths.

For anything to happen, Unity must divide and reproduce into the multiple. The first step in that diversification is for Unity to become duality. One must become two. All the opposites in our experience are expressions of that first altering wrinkle: day/night, male/female, black/white. These are all polarized and contrary realities, each of which has no meaning without its complement. Experienced together, they point back toward the experience of Unity; separated, they lose all meaning.

Breathing is one such primary division. Breath is a two-fold cycle of inhaling and exhaling, the rhythm of duality, the music of awareness. Inhalation requires exhalation, naturally. One without the other is ludicrous.

Breath is essential to all life: if it lives, it’s got to breathe. Conversely, if it doesn’t breathe, it isn’t alive.

These dyads are the first manifestation of comparative consciousness, of this in relation to that. They are the touchstone of awareness, for awareness cannot exist in a vacuum, needing instead the mirror of relatedness. Even Unity seeks to become aware of itself, so it creates mirrors, diversifying into duality, establishing relatedness to itself. Even Unity breathes. Our universe is one phase of the breath of Unity — it is the inhalation.

Theoretical physics suggests that the universe was created in an instant, through an inconceivably spectacular event popularly known as “The Big Bang.” Prior to that event, the substance of life was fundamentally one thing, a vaguely amorphous cloud of plasma-like gas, but the “explosion” created diversity as it sent the various building blocks of matter hurtling outward to fill the Void.

In the scientific view, the universe that was manufactured in that instant is still thrusting itself outward; everything is moving farther from everything else; differentiation is continuing. But according to our current understanding of the laws that govern this cosmos, there will be a point (in what we must call the “future”) at which the complex and contradictory forces of celestial mechanics (a kind of primary “two-ness”) will reach maximum extension. Inertia will overcome momentum. Unimaginably great centripetal forces will marshal their
energies to defeat the centrifugal. The outward acceleration of the universe will gradually be slowed, and finally stopped in a state of maximum tension, a subtle equilibrium of opposing forces.

The actual shift in direction will occur after a long period of seeming stasis. Imperceptibly, our universe will begin the long journey toward inward collapse. Negative acceleration will increase as everything is pulled closer together, beginning with a stately, ordered march, but moving in the latter stages to a frenzied rush. Finally, this whole spectrum of matter will re-merge in a momentous cataclysm exactly the opposite of The Big Bang, crushing together into an extraordinary black hole, returning to obliterated but altered Unity.

Fortunately for us here on earth, this sequence of events is not expected to happen tomorrow. We needn’t gird our loins for the impact. The events described are still billions of years off. Our sun will be long dead before the shift occurs. It will be merely another burned-out cinder cycling around the galaxy, dragging along its small entourage of what will then be cold, dead, lifeless planets. Mother Nature’s job here on earth will have been long finished, and our species — this tiny band of intrepid fools — will have either perished as a life-form or moved on to other worlds and other realities.

Science invented an eloquent, beautiful, and exquisitely logical language to reveal and explain this scenario through a fascinating set of causes and effects, hypotheses and proofs. True science is painstakingly careful in the generalizations it makes concerning how this cosmic drama will unfold. Despite the encouragement of speculative theory, it is nearly paranoid in the adamant refusal to allow such speculation to cross over from the mechanism to the motive. Science is interested in how life unfolds, not why it is doing so. But part of the paradox of being human involves scratching the itch of what is behind things, so science will never be enough. That’s where metaphysics comes in, where poetic truth supplants factual truth.

Creation myths are part of the fabric of human consciousness, at both the individual and collective levels. In the linear progression of brain evolution among earthly life-forms, there are various leaps where a new order of species appears with enhanced capabilities. The most recent of these leaps occurred with the development of the neocortex. This “fore-brain” carried with it the potential for self-reflective consciousness that is responsible for much of what is best and worst about human beings. Although it is doubtful that our brains are the last word in nervous system organization and evolution, they are at least the current state-of-the-art. So while Mother Nature may evolve species with abilities for understanding and acceptance far beyond what we now generally experience, human beings are left to contend with brains whose very construction creates a single, unanswerable question that bounces around our consciousnesses like a superball. The question is “Why?”

Who created the universe? What does it all mean? Where are we going? When will we know? Why am I here?
If we survive a million years more, our descendants may look back with quaint disregard on these questions, the ones that drove us, their ancient and primitive ancestors, to distraction. But for the time being, we are stuck with the questions. We already know enough to understand that we cannot respond to these infernal queries with “real” or “correct” answers. But understanding that does not make the questions go away, nor does it remove the burning desire for satisfaction. So, knowing in advance that we are engaged in objective folly, but recognizing also that our condition demands a response, we make up answers.

When we breathe air, we inhale a mix of gaseous compounds in order to provide our life-systems with elements crucial to their continued functioning. We take from the air what we cannot exist without, specifically, oxygen. In a very real sense, however, what we need from the air is new information, a precise, delicate balance of fresh data from which to build our life-programs. When Unity breathes, it creates the universe — new information — the expression of diversity, of exploration. In creating many forms for consciousness instead of only One, Unity refreshes itself, providing a type of reality without which it cannot survive, become aware, and grow. The only difference between the micro and the macro is that in our case, as human beings, the oxygen [read: information] we need in breathing comes from “outside” ourselves, whereas the diversity in forms of consciousness that Unity needs in its breathing emanate from within.

We wouldn’t say the universe is breathing. Instead, it is the universe that is the manifestation of Unity breathing. Our universe is breath itself.

The Big Bang is the moment in the breath cycle when inhalation starts. The nutrient in that inhalation — the oxygen — the new information — is the creation of a potential for diversified, differentiated, relatively separate and evolving consciousnesses, each of which can grow and experience in ways Unity Alone cannot. These separate consciousnesses are individual entities, or beings, or spirits. Again, the names we confer are arbitrary. Whatever we call them, they are fundamental units of awareness. Birthed in progressively larger numbers in the momentum following The Big Bang, these spirits are free to evolve as they can into a myriad of forms, an infinity of substances, a wealth of awareness. We here on earth are such beings. You and I. We are them. Isn’t it wonderful? That doesn’t mean we’ve been human ever since Unity popped its cork back at Bang One; our humanness is a very recent acquisition in the overall scheme. These bodies we inhabit are specialized forms. We are the life. Together, in union, is evolution. Bodies are simply organized levels of matter that we enliven by our presence.

Not every level of organized matter in this universe can be called alive, for matter itself is that-which-is-becoming-alive. The words on this page are not alive and aware and experiencing, for instance, nor is the computer I’m using to transcribe these thoughts, nor the paper upon which the words will be printed. But there is life and awareness and experience present within each of those,
buried invisibly within, for atoms are alive. I am alive, as are you. The earth is living. The solar system we live in is alive, as is the larger community of our Milky Way galaxy. These are all entities — beings — each with consciousness and purpose. They are all nutrients in the breath of Unity, created for its continued well-being and growth.

When inhalation pales, when it reaches the limits of experience and sufficient new information, when it is replaced by exhalation (the digesting of experience and elimination of waste), when the universe crushes inward to a reintegration of Oneness — when the breath cycle is completed, Unity will not be the same. Unfathomable as it may seem, Unity will have grown. It will have changed. For lack of a better term, it will have learned.

What is the mechanism that will gradually overcome the momentum of expansion? What is the nature and form of the forces that will eventually cause the universe to cease expanding and begin contracting? Science has already begun to address these questions, and it is providing tantalizing glimpses of the machinery of this most astonishing of melodramas — the shift from inhalation to exhalation.

But science speaks in an ineffably sophisticated language, one understood by only a select few, a language of fact rather than feeling. To open this language to the commune, to translate emotionally, the answers must be more accessible and graphic, more analogous and relevant to lives here and now.

There is an ancient parable (I believe it’s Hindu) that describes the universe as a webbing of diamonds. There are an infinite number of these diamonds, and each one has an infinite number of facets. Each facet of every diamond reflects one of the other diamonds in the netting, so that by observing even a single diamond, you see all the diamonds reflected in that one. Look at any one and you see the whole jeweled universe.

In feeling, the mechanism that will gradually overcome the momentum of expansion is a webbing, not of diamonds, but a webbing formed by individualized consciousnesses — rather like a net of beings. This webbing is currently under construction — right now, today — during the inhalation phase. It is elastic in quality, but incredibly strong; it is permanent and unbreakable. As it is completed, it will stretch, slowly halting the expansion of the universe. At some point, the webbing will reach the limit of its elasticity. It will do this when the “weave” of the net has penetrated all the space occupied by the universe. The fibers in the webbing are like jet trails of individual beings, the accumulated history of their awareness, creativity, and experience as they travel throughout the universe, connecting to “posts” that anchor the myriad of strands. These posts are other beings who exist as stations, providing symbiotic and nurturing “staging arenas” where experience is gained and consciousness can evolve. We would call them “places.” And our earth is one such place.
the earth

Our universe is unimaginably, unbelievably vast. In just the tiny section visible to us, there exist perhaps ten thousand million galaxies [10,000,000,000]. This is difficult for our minds to comprehend. Think of it this way: if all these galaxies were placed end to end, they would easily stretch from here to, say, uh, Pittsburgh, and probably back again. Hard to believe, isn’t it?

Out of all those galaxies, one is ours. We call our home galaxy the Milky Way System, and it is composed of approximately one hundred thousand million stars [100,000,000,000]. Placed end to end, these stars would stretch... oh, forget it.

Out of all the stars in our particular galaxy, each of which has its own accompanying environment of other, smaller bodies, one star is ours. It is a small star that we call the Sun. The Sun moves in orbit around the galactic center at a speed of roughly 12 miles/second [40,000 miles per hour]. It carries with it all the planets, asteroids, comets, meteors, and the millions of other fragment elements that make up the whole of our solar system. Currently, it is “aimed” in its path at the constellation Hercules [Right Ascension 277°, Declination 30° north]. We can plot the Sun’s direction through the galaxy each December, when the earth is directly behind the Sun, as we are then in line with what is called the Solar Apex. Each June, we are directly in front of the Sun, “on point” in the solar system’s long trek through the galaxy, a journey that takes two hundred million earth years, and is called the Cosmic Year.

Our earth is a bright, blue-green planet in this system, third in line from the Sun, the first to have a satellite of its own. Its average distance from the Sun is 93 million miles, but its orbit is one of the more eccentric among the closer planets. The earth travels at 182 miles/second in its orbit around the Sun [66,000 miles per hour], making slightly more than 365 axial rotations in completing one orbit. Ours is a carbon and oxygen planet, with liquid oceans and solid land masses floating over a molten core, with a complex atmosphere that extends above the surface of the planet, creating a semi-permeable filter that selectively screens certain of the radiations that would otherwise reach the surface.

But so what? This is all common knowledge, accessible through any encyclopedia or astronomical/geological reference. It’s interesting, but it fails to note the single most important fact about the earth, my crucial assumption: that the earth is alive. The “life” I’m discussing may not be what we humans think of as life, but it is nonetheless a very real living. The earth is an organized, functioning, self-integrated entity, one with both function and purpose, a pattern of growth and evolution. Part of a vaster Consciousness, it yet possesses a distinct consciousness of its own. Very simply, it lives, and this living earth is sometimes given the name Gaia.

The concept — the faith — that the earth lives is part of the vitalistic tradition in human culture, an orientation that dates back through the annals of recorded history. This is an antiquarian paradigm, a life-view that has survived to this day
in spite of the sneering condescension heaped on it in recent centuries by a mechanistic western science. But the notion that the earth is alive is an idea whose time has once again come. As modern physics and systems biology perform their revolutionary work of announcing that the old emperor has no clothes, moving from cold analysis to warm reverence, we are urged to remember the magnificent vitality of our planet, to revel once again in the mystery of it all.

These resurgent views stand in bold contra-distinction to the two extremes of classical thought on the place of the earth in the universe. On one side, the bulk of Christian theology views the earth and its life (essentially human life) as unique and ultimately special — God’s chosen playground. On the other side, there is the above-mentioned tone of traditional science, that presents earth-life as totally insignificant when compared to the galactic context in which it exists.

Each of these perspectives has a place in our knowing, but neither reveals in any calm and considered fashion the meaning of the earth in its galactic context. One promotes the hysteria of a cosmic responsibility too great to bear, the other a convulsion of existential emptiness too vast to overcome. New paradigms are needed, born of the marriage of science and theology, with our deepest intuitions as midwife. We can — and should — investigate the possibilities of fresh metaphysical frameworks to understand the life of the earth, and the life on it.

The purpose of the earth, the purpose of Unity itself, is difficult to speak of in sensible terms, since the earth is an encompassing consciousness we live within. Can fish understand the ocean? How do they conceive of their world, and how do we? Fish are empathically united with their environment; humans are not. Fish can survive and evolve without ever considering the structure or the function or the purpose of the ocean, but especially with modern industrial-technological culture, humans can neither survive nor evolve without a conception of the earth.

Technically, it’s asking for trouble (with a capital T) to reduce the earth to human terms, since her consciousness is more evolved than ours. She is our parent, and we are very, very young. But it’s trouble we can’t live without if we are to grow up. Wisdom and sanity depend on better and better myths and more relevant stories. Not history (his-story), but ourstory (our-story).

our story begins

But enough background. What is our story, or, more precisely, what is the story of this essay? What is my mythological, metaphysical point of view? Let’s jump right in.

Billions of years ago, the earth began a process of evolution, an evolution of possibilities. She had a certain niche within the solar system, within the galaxy, and within the universe. She possessed a set of circumstances and a mix of
elements that could be arranged, unfolded, or “cooked” in innumerable ways, according to the laws of this sector of the universe. Her job was to assimilate information from beyond this galaxy, for she was to function as a “post” in the webbing that would eventually be built to slow and then stop the inhalation of the universe. She was not unique in this function, for there are countless other posts in the webbing. She was unique in the precise pattern of resources and environment to which she was heir.

The earth was not created as a traveller. She was “placed” here, and here she stays. So how was she to gain the information she needed? How was she to connect to other posts in the webbing? Through her evolving ecosystem, she could “advertise” her availability to beings of other types — beings more mobile than herself. Just as ant or termite colonies succeed through wondrous organization and division of labor, with workers, drones, warriors, etc., so the universe offers more than one category of being during its inhalation. The earth, being placed, is given the resource of matter, the ability to create and permute life-forms out of her own substance, with the aid of the Sun.

If we think of the entire duration of the earth’s existence as being represented by a single year, it was not until September of that year when the first forms of organic life began to appear on her surface. Long after the cooling of her molten mass had hardened into crust, long after the release of gases from primal combustion formed the atmosphere, long after the precipitation of liquids from that atmosphere had created the oceans, there was still no life. But the greenhouse effect of sunlight and air and water promoted a special chemistry in the seas, and in the “autumn of her year,” she succeeded in nurturing Life, though at that point, still not Life as we know it. She began with viruses and bacteria, increasing the complexity to single-celled plants, then onto sponges and jellyfish, graduating to self-propelled organisms, an arena of microscopic bumper-cars. It was not until November of her year that vegetation could exist beyond the womb of the oceans, and not until December that the fishes began to crawl through the mud toward dry land.

All this time, while she created life-forms, the earth advertised her availability as a place for mobile beings to gain experience. Life-forms are mere machinery, however beautiful their conception; they must be occupied by the spirit of a living entity for vitalization to occur. It is a union, but it is not a true marriage, for marriage is defined as a relationship existing between equal partners. Life-forms are evolving entities — they are beings-in-the-becoming. Beings are evolved entities — even though they continue to evolve, they have reached a stage of relative autonomy. An entity always has a superior but symbiotic relationship to its life-form.

When a life-form becomes available, when the possibility of its conception becomes a probable likelihood, there is a notification made “public” to beings in the universe through the ineffable imprint of their prior Unity. For though the universe is certainly a family, with each entity carrying the warm, permanent memory of pre-natal Oneness, it is also a business. This “notification” of the
availability of a particular life-form can be thought of like the employment section of the want ads in the Sunday paper, though in this case it is the employment agency representing the workers seeking employers. A more apt metaphor would be the channel on cable TV showing instantaneous updates of prices on the New York Stock Exchange. You don’t have to be in New York to do business; you can sit in the comfort of your own living room, watching the exchange prices, calling your broker by phone to do business.

While not an encompassing framework, it is valuable to see the universe as a gigantic marketplace of bidding and negotiation and contracts, an arena where goods and services are bartered, where value is exchanged according to agreements struck between separate and impersonal consciousnesses. The earth could offer her goods and services, and beings could “buy” them in exchange for the “money” of their mobile knowledge of other sectors of reality, the “coin” of their diverse information. Through such trading, every being is free to gain greater experience, greater knowledge, greater diversity, and learn the infinite joy of creativity in playing the game.

Initially, all the earth could sell in the marketplace were two things: bodies and time. But these are not inconsequential offerings. On the contrary, they are extraordinarily attractive products.

**bodies and time**

Not just every being can inhabit a body. The vast majority of individual entities in the universe are “beings of light,” which we could call energy entities. What the earth offered was something different, a life-form of matter, of physicality. This is very special. In many historical stories of human mythology, the explorer-heroes are again and again warned to strengthen their auras to prevent invasion by beings who want their bodies, beings from “another dimension.” Tales of possession by devils, demons, or rakshasas are crude reminders to us all of just how coveted bodies are. To have a body. To experience matter, density, the “sensors” of touch or sight or smell, to feel the organic emotions of hunger or desire or satiety. This is special. The wind in your hair and the sun on your face? You’ve got to have a body for that. And the earth offered bodies, simple at first, able to express and experience only the most primitive levels of material life, but more complex as time flew on.

Every bit as astounding as bodies is time itself. The experience of linear flow, of past cascading into present evolving into future. To exist within a permanent here-and-now, with a selective and changeable memory of what has already happened, and an often dimly-perceived sense of possibilities for what could become. Astonishing. Time is neither constant (as Einstein demonstrated), nor is it universal. It is very much a function of our specific life-forms here on earth, created and conditioned by our particular chemical, sensory, and nervous systems.
Imagine, if you will (for a moment...), life without time. To do so will ultimately take you back all the way to Unity, for in Unity there is no time. From that impossible perspective, the imposition of time initially appears to be a dreadful limitation, almost a strait-jacket. Not remembering clearly what has occurred, not knowing what will occur, not seeing which crises will pass versus which must be dealt with, existing in the terror of constant confusion, linear time is a nightmare of peek-a-boo hide and seek, a juggling of too many balls with too few hands. Surely this is purgatory.

But appearances can be deceiving. In fact, time is a laboratory, a controlled experiment in practical awareness, rational organization, and intuitive receptivity. It is also an exercise in power, for although love works best when unlimited, power succeeds only when placed within limits. Time provides such directed limits. It is a bullet, fired from the past, heading toward the future, a rocket we can steer. Finally, it provokes a unique kind of creativity by giving each individual the freedom to make what he can of his life. No absolute certainty, no guarantees, no insurance. Simply the knowledge that what is born into time will eventually die, and the gamble of playing the game well, with the chance to grab the gold ring of becoming Godly.

Bodies and time. In linking these two structures, the earth had created a business bound to succeed. Nearly infinite numbers of spiritual entities in the universe who were looking for opportunities to grow became eager customers.

**earth business**

So, after long preparation, the earth opened her storefront, selling time and bodies. It was a cottage industry, at first merely a modest success. But as beings agreed to incarn into her organic life-forms, as they willingly animated her primitive flora and fauna, she took into herself the history of their information. Moving closer to critical mass, she formed the first fragile strands in her webbing network.

The initial travellers who came to experience the life-forms of this planet were relatively “young” spirits, “light” in the mass of their experience. But limited as their information was, they provided the earth with additional resources of creativity, and she gradually increased the sophistication of her products. This view of earth as a living parent, nurturing her life-forms, is not intended in any way to challenge nor invalidate Darwin’s theories of evolution; the metaphysic being developed here is not a denial of science, simply an adjunct. The earth did not, and does not interfere in the lives of entities who come here to experience. She loves us, in the most universal sense of love (complete, total understanding and acceptance), she is pleased when our lives prosper and we grow in wisdom and grace, but she does not interfere. She remains aloof even as she nurtures. Refraining from attachments and judgments concerning her charges, she
performs her functions while focusing on her purpose: to gain information from afar, and get the webbing connected.

Initially, when the earth achieved her first and most primitive life-forms, business was straightforward in simplicity. DNA was her salesman, for not only was it the coding system for earthly life, defining within precise limits the possibilities for experience and creativity in any particular organism, but it acted as a kind of “radio transmitter,” sending signals from parent organisms announcing the availability of each new species member to beings seeking to incarn. The marketplace was busy, but it was local; entities were drawn from what might be called “nearby,” although the term implies distances in miles or light-years, a far cry from the reality of the situation. Nearness is in fact a measure of sympathy rather than distance, a concept indicating matching densities of power to help the earth form the webbing.

Business was high-volume, low-profit, with the earth offering brief life-experiences with small chances for creative growth in return for relatively cheap information from her customer-spirits.

Implicit in the contract was the understanding that any being incarnating in an earthly life-form would be made to feel safe during the interval between birth and death. This was a guarantee — a being could, in essence, take a chance on this experience while continuing to be aware of the illusion of it. This would be much like going to see a scary movie; it would be an experience of momentary thrills where you’d still know that you were completely safe, that what was happening on the screen couldn’t really touch you. This was a fair bargain for her early customers: you don’t get a whole lot except bodies and time, and you don’t get much creativity, but you get something better than a money-back guarantee, you get the memory of Unity even when you’re in the body, working through time. Business thrived, and the earth expanded her success, gaining a reputation for honesty, warmth, and imagination.

It is a measure of her success that in the final month of her mythical year — in December alone, and in fact in the last week and even the final day of December — she could amass information very quickly due to the burgeoning growth of her products. Demand was high, as was gross profit. Her corporate strategy was based largely on a considerable investment in R & D — research and development. Her own information (the profit) was increasing algebraically, and this allowed her to re-invest that information into an accelerated complexity of life-forms. New species appeared at what was (in geological time-frames) a dizzying pace. Each had greater capacities for intelligence than the previous ones.

The past ten million years on this planet have seen a veritable hurricane of evolution. Our earth moved closer and closer to critical mass in achieving her goals. Entities with more information, experience and awareness were attracted to incarn into her vastly improving nervous systems, spinal cords, and brains. Business boomed.
Many of Earth’s most primitive life-forms still continue to exist very successfully, even to this last day of her metaphorical year, and the earth continues to nurture them as her environments will allow. She is not personally saddened when any species ceases to exist, for she has no particular attachment to any specific life-form. Species interact and compete, the environment changes, ecological niches come and go. That is all part of evolution, a changing fashion within the general fabric. She maintains her primitive forms as a foundation from which to insure the diversity necessary to achieve those more advanced.

Consider MacDonalds, one of the biggest business success stories of this century. MacDonalds began over three decades ago with one store and an idea: sell fast food in a clean, non-threatening atmosphere; make the food quick and inexpensive; and pander like hell to what the public wants. Don’t worry about nutrition; just give the folks what they like. Give ‘em burgers and fries and shakes. Does this market strategy work? You betcha. Is it fine food, the essence of culinary art? Hardly. As a friend once said about such food, it’s quick, easy, and it don’t taste too bad. Do gourmets eat at MacDonalds? Not that they’d ever admit. Who likes MacDonalds most of all? Kids, of course, and in a larger sense the “child” in each of us. Children are the spirits the marketing strategy is directly aimed at. This is lowest-common-denominator business, a primer in mass-marketing. I remember being a kid myself, seeing those first signs: “Over 500,000 Sold.” Ah, yes, MacDonalds has come a long way since then, a mega-bucks multi-national with thousands of stores and fingers in every economic pie. Burgers in the billions. So many cows that their flatulence has a negative effect on the ozone layer.

The earth is like MacDonalds in many ways, absurd though the analogy may be. Her initial business was in burgers and fries, too, so to speak, and she was incredibly successful. Inexpensive, quick, and don’t taste too bad. But unlike MacDonalds, the earth never had any intention of specializing in fast food. She had a necessary vision of the finest “cuisine” imaginable, because she would need to attract “gourmet” spirits.

That fine cuisine began to appear approximately five million years ago in the form of her most advanced species. These species exist today alongside her “burgers and fries” life-forms, and they represent the critical mass of information from which she is constructing her permanent webbing. Dolphins and whales are among these most evolved species, as are trees in all their wondrous diversity, although they appeared somewhat earlier and belong to a subtly different order of information.

Trees were at one time the pinnacle of consciousness on the earth, attracting the most evolved spirits around, and they remain fundamentally symbiotic agents for higher animal life, since they process vast quantities of carbon dioxide, returning oxygen to the environment. Certainly dolphins and whales exist at the top of the hierarchical heap, but they have never multiplied in numbers sufficient to form a permanent webbing, since they were more graceful and loving than
powerful and aggressive. We could think of both as artisan species, the poets of the planet.

There is one species, however, that attracts dense, aggressive, and powerful beings, one that appeared not even a million years ago, and yet has succeeded extravagantly, becoming the earth’s greatest triumph and most difficult product, the truest measure of critical mass in the webbing, both the apex of information and the nadir of consternation. That species was homo sapiens. Which brings us, logically enough, to us.

human beings

Even today, most of the spirits who inhabit the earthly life-forms of plants and animals are well aware of the bargain into which they’ve entered. They exist here with an almost palpable sense of grace. They are honorable in accepting their limits, enjoying their lot. Even in more recent and advanced life-forms — dogs, cats, pigs, etc. — there is a transcendent common sense; they do what is necessary to promote their survival, but they never lose their dignity as beings. The cycle of living is complete for them, complete in essence. Understanding life, they do not fear death, for their bargain with the earth does not require them to surrender everything they know of the universe.

But such is not the case with human beings. When the species homo sapiens appeared, the earth entered into a new and unprecedented phase in the products she offered, as well as the payment she required. This was no local business, for here she was drawing spirits from very “far away,” although the metaphor of distance is misplaced. In this context, far away means very dissimilar, and not empathic, but with great density of experience for webbing potential. Human beings are without doubt the most power-conscious entities existing on this planet. We must be, for our life-form requires it. Beings less brazen could never marshal the bravado necessary to withstand the perplexing onslaught of the human brain’s auto-stimulation.

Beginning with the genius of DNA, the earth used her peculiar balance of elements and environment to build neurons, cells that can transmit information. These cells, with their axons and dendrites, their chemical synapses, worked with molecules abundant in the ecology — such as the GABA molecules discovered in the early 1980s — to create functioning nervous systems, primitive at first, but increasingly sophisticated as evolutionary time passed. Although it represents something of an oversimplification, we can say that the “price” of a particular life-form — its real worth to the incarning spirit — is directly proportional to the complexity of its nervous system. The evolution of nervous systems gradually culminated in the centralized brain, a collating and programming machinery millions of times more complicated than the most capable computers we’ve yet developed. Not only were the most evolved brains
more complex, they were infinitely faster and more efficient in performing the increasingly sophisticated routines required for the survival of their organisms.

Along with precious few other species, what distinguishes homo sapiens is not so much the sheer size of its brain — not the mass in relation to total body weight, nor the number of cells in the nervous system — but rather the organization of the brain into component functions, and more specifically, the awesome and precocious development of certain of these component parts. The neocortex, for instance, controls such functions as symbolic thinking, mathematical abstraction, and — crucially — language. This advanced section of the brain cap and its attendant functions are major contributors to what separates human beings from other less advanced species on earth. It was presumed until very recently that we were the only species with truly symbolic language, although we continue to discover comrades in this ability in the dolphins and whales, and, to a lesser extent, primates such as apes and chimpanzees.

Insect brains are elegant and to the point, rather like a well-designed, superbly manufactured ten-speed bicycle. They do very little, but they do it very well. When the Bible speaks of the meek inheriting the earth, it ought to be understood as a reference to insects, for they are likely to be here and thriving long after we are gone. Human brains, on the other hand, are more on the order of a modern jet fighter plane: powerful beyond comprehension, unbelievably intricate, able to execute awe-inspiring feats almost automatically. But with complexity comes fallibility. Both the fighter plane and the human brain are victims of Murphy’s Law: if anything can go wrong, it will. Design flaws, cost-overruns, competitive obsolescence, equipment failure, faulty maintenance, pilot error — every sort of nightmare can and does occur within the human brain.

Nonetheless, it is still an extraordinary machine, this brain capable of creating its own reality. Not only does it manufacture reality, it maintains it, alters it, augments it, and adjusts it. Our brain allows the luxury of self-awareness while imparting the majesty of apparent choice. In the jargon of the computer salesman, the human life-form with its highly evolved brain is not necessarily “user-friendly,” but oh my, with a little training... Such possibilities.

Needless to say, demand exceeds supply. There are more spirits interested in human existence on earth than there are available human life-forms. That’s one reason we now number in the billions. Homo sapiens is quite the successful venture, so successful in fact, that the day is approaching when the earth will no longer need our species. Why? Because the webbing is nearing completion, and our species is undergoing the crisis of autonomy. We must grow up or become extinct. We must evolve and mature or disintegrate and perish. It is that simple.

What is not so simple are the questions that arise. Just what is the nature of the bargain between the earth and spirits who agree to become human? What are the terms? How is the contract for a human life-form different from that of other species? What are its rights and responsibilities? What are the limits and liabilities? From there we move into the concept of Critical Mass in the Webbing. Why are humans so critical to the construction of the webbing? If we wield so
much power in determining the future of life on this planet, how can we have remained so blindly adolescent?

Then, how are the mechanics worked out? What happens during Incarnation, between conception and birth? When is a human life-form truly a human being? Is abortion acceptable or immoral? How much control does a spirit have once its human life is underway? How much of life is chance? How much fate? What is the difference between the conscious self of personality and the true Self of spirit? And how do you — as a human personality — contact the unique spirit that is your real and unique Self?

the human contract

The basic contract is simple: each spirit will be provided with a body existing in time, in exchange for certain information that spirit has accrued in its particular universal niche. The incarncing spirit is in full and complete possession of the organic body, usually from a beginning point in time defined as birth to an end point in time defined as death, and all experiences appropriate to the individual that occur within that duration are the property of the incarned spirit. These experiences belong to you — literally, metaphorically, and spiritually — and you are free to make of them what you will. Certainly, many reactions to life experiences are pre-programmed, according to the genetic structure of the nervous system and the species membership into which you are born. The more primitive the organism, the less freedom to exercise willful choice in creating and interpreting experience. This is the origin of the “safety clause” in the contract.

What is the safety clause? It is a guarantee that every being who comes to the earth will be made to feel safe during the interval between birth and death, regardless of what happens to the organism during its earthly existence. Why is this insurance necessary?

For most life-forms, especially those less-evolved on the scales of biological complexity, life brings little if any freedom; earthly existence could easily be seen as cruel imprisonment rather than cosmic adventure. The earth realized this limitation, so she arranged what is, in essence, a “money-back guarantee” to get customers into her store. No risk.

How was the insurance achieved? The earth allowed every being who incarned into one of her life-forms to remember Unity, even while living a life apart, a life separate — even while alone. She did not take quite all their information in payment, only part. Such a deal: come to the earth, experience bodies and time, exist separately in a magnificent illusion of aloneness and self-reliance, and still be aware of Unity. No wonder business was good.

Again, it’s like going to the movies. You sit in the darkened theatre watching the images dance on the screen, becoming part of the melodrama, free to identify as much as you wish, free to feel joy or fear or desire or exultation, yet always...
safe, always knowing it’s not real, you’re still yourself. Part of the enjoyment is knowing the movie will end. That knowledge increases the appreciation of the event as you savor each emotion, but even if the emotion is terror, you can feel safe, for it will pass. The story will end, the screen will go blank. House lights up, and you’re back in your real life again, awakening from the dream. This is the effect of the safety clause. It is an insurance felt by every life-form, every individual organism, every species on the earth. Every species, that is, except for one, and that lone exception is — naturally — *homo sapiens*.

Why should this be so? Has the earth somehow singled us out for harsher treatment? Hardly. Does the increased market for human life-forms mean that she can simply afford to offer less in her bargains? No, this is not the case. The earth would be happy to offer us the same guarantee she offers every other species, if she could. No, the real answers lie elsewhere, buried both in the webbing and in our nervous systems.

When the earth began the construction of her universal webbing with the first fragile strands of information paid her in return for primitive life-forms, she was building a temporary, almost crystalline structure. The webbing was delicate and ephemeral. Part of the reason for this lay in the safety clause, part in the economics of her business. She was dealing with beings of relatively recent evolution, the kind of spirit suited to incarnation into a less-evolved life-form. Information here was less sweeping, less grand, and fundamentally less powerful. These were — and still are — beings more concerned with love than with power. The jet trails of their radiance were light and graceful, well-suited to the initial blueprint of the webbing. But it took information from an astronomical number of these beings of love to form sufficient substance for the earth to weave the beginnings of her net. She had to reinvest most of the information back into her own processes of life evolution to increase the sophistication of her life-forms in order to attract denser and denser beings, spirits with greater accumulated evolution and experience.

Certainly some of the beings with whom she bargained have “grown” with her, and there are humans currently existing on the earth who have been with her since the inception of life on the planet. But most of the time, her new and more complex species were “sold” to different categories of beings than the simpler ones. As natural evolution progressed toward greater “intelligence” — meaning heightened awareness, creativity and choice — her targeted markets changed. She attracted a different clientele, more powerful beings with more “money” to spend, beings whose total experience of the universe was more solid. Humans are such beings.

*Critical mass* is a concept used in chemistry. Critical mass is the point in a chemical process where essential transformation takes place. For instance, the critical mass for boiling water is 212° Fahrenheit. At that temperature, the water boils. Anything less than that temperature, and the water may get hotter, but it will not boil. The concept itself has broad application into life. Many processes, including emotional and spiritual ones, have their range of critical mass. Homo
sapiens is the species that represented critical mass for the earth in the construction of a permanent (as opposed to temporary) webbing. It wasn’t simply the appearance of the species that made this permanence possible, but the incredible success of humanness. So much is at stake here that the earth is willing to allow the danger of obliteration of billions of years of evolution at the hands of a still-adolescent human collective. The earth needed the considerable whomp of our spiritual power for the webbing. Now she has it.

We wouldn’t expect a five year-old to be able to fly a jet fighter, nor would we allow it. The earth has a similar orientation toward her human life-forms. Not just any spiritual being can become human. Only relatively powerful and knowledgeable beings even get the chance at human life, and this is a fundamental necessity. The machinery of human beings is every bit as sophisticated as the construction of our entire galaxy. Complex beyond imagining, replete with psychological and physical paradox, the human machine is an awesome challenge, a living puzzle. For even the most advanced beings existing as human, it is no easy task to master the potential of this particular life-form. This is as it should be, for we are the only life-forms on the planet with the innate tools necessary to achieve true freedom and creativity.

The failure rate is staggering — most human beings do not ever come close to anything even approaching transcendent freedom, and about all most of us ever really create is more little human life-forms to be inhabited by other spirits. But the possibility for real freedom is there, inherent in the organism, thanks to the extraordinary properties of the human nervous system. What is required, however, for a spirit to have even a shot at fulfillment in this form is total concentration. You’ve got to have your wits about you. You can’t be anywhere but here.

When a human being is born, he gives all his experience, all his information, all his memory directly to the earth for use in webbing construction. All of it goes — including the awareness of Unity. For one thing, the memory of Unity is a crucial element in the structure of the permanent webbing, for the webbing must be sufficiently “cosmic” in its nature to be able to slow and then halt the inhalation of the universe. For another, a being must be “voided” to be able to enter, occupy and take utter possession of its human machinery.

Conception is the moment when genetic coding is determined. It is the first step in a sequence of events and processes that will ultimately result in a human being. Conception is never pre-destined, but is instead the natural result of physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual circumstances existing in the environment of the parents. Conception is never mental, being outside the realm of the will. (Note: we can prevent conception mentally, but we cannot cause fertilization to occur merely by application of the mind.) When sperm and egg successfully unite and DNA information is constructed into a unique life-form, then spirits in the market to incarn are made aware that there is an available body/psyche in development through gestation. This is the rough equivalent of
a temporary-employment agency, where one fills out an application for gainful work, then waits for a job to become available.

Following the momentous event of conception, there is — for lack of a better term — a sort of “bidding” that takes place. The bidding is complex, involving numerous factors. A spirit seeking to incarn will often have accumulated previous earthly experience, human or otherwise, and may be “in line” for the appearance of a particular life-vehicle. This is a measure of priority. An entity may have especially valuable information useful to the earth at some point in webbing construction. This is a kind of serendipity, the good luck of being the right spirit in the right place at the right time. A spirit may be somehow connected to the already-incarned parents through other levels of existence, human or not. This is a brand of nepotism. So bidding isn’t always a level playing field for all buyers. Some spirits have distinct advantages.

Sometimes the contract is negotiated before actual conception, as conception becomes likely, so that the spirit is linked irrevocably with the fetus from the moment of fertilization. Other times the bidding may continue for days, weeks, or even months until an agreement is negotiated. Instances occur where no spirit agrees to link with the fetus, for reasons of negative circumstances (like faulty DNA coding), inadequate bids (no usefulness for the webbing), or general disinterest in the life-circumstances likely to unfold for a particular fetus.

No fetus can be born without a spirit having agreed to incarn through that life-form, so in those cases mentioned above, the pregnancy is aborted, miscarried, or the baby is stillborn. Not all terminated pregnancies involve the lack of a spirit. Beings sometimes agree to be linked with a life-form and yet not experience successful birth, a process referred to as “karma-burning.”

The point I’m striving to make here is that there is no single, dogmatic manner for spirits to link with emergent life-forms, no “law” defining exactly how linkage shall be achieved. Each conception is individual, each case unique. And everything is negotiable.

Following conception, after the contract is negotiated and agreed, the entity and the fetus are not truly merged. Sometimes they occupy the same space in the womb, sometimes the spirit even follows the developmental processes of fetal maturation, but spirit and fetus are not finally and irrevocably one until the moment of birth, specifically, the experience of first breath. The life-form is technically animated when breathing begins, for this moment establishes certain rhythms unique to the entity, rhythms that will persevere until death. These rhythms are the “signature” of individual selfhood. However sincere the agreement between the earth and the incarning spirit may be, the contract is simply a hollow promise until the last moments of labor. That is when the goods are delivered, when the bond is forged for certain, when the promise to pay becomes an actual debt. In those moments before the instant of first breath, the entity delivers full payment for its life-experience. It pays by surrendering the awareness of its accumulated experience into the earth. This is a willing
surrender, almost like a surgical procedure, a palpable draining away of memory — the temporary lobotomy of the soul.

This metaphysic may shed some light on the controversy currently raging in this country surrounding the issue of abortion. Pro-life and pro-choice factions have dug in as warring ethical armies waging a battle for moral and legislative supremacy. The “pro-life” movement states unequivocally that abortion is murder, that a fetus has rights, specifically, the “right to life.” This position holds that it is morally (and spiritually) wrong to terminate fetal development, and should thus be legally prohibited. The “pro-choice” movement argues in response that an unborn fetus is not a valid human being, that a woman’s body (and what comes out of it) must be under her own dominion for dignity and full responsibility to be maintained. This position lobbies for the rights of parents to reach a conscious decision as to whether or not to bring a child into the world.

This debate is gradually straining toward an almost epidemic hysteria. It is a fascinating and important issue, one of the fulcrums of our collective future. The issues surrounding abortion or forced birth can stimulate the razor’s edge of painful but productive re-evaluation of our lives and our world, if only we can leap over the quicksand of knee-jerk partisan propaganda. What are the implications on this issue of this essay’s particular view of reality?

Is an incarnating spirit violated by willful termination of its as yet unborn life? Is abortion murder? Should all fetuses be required to come to term and result in the birth of another human being? To even begin to answer these questions, we need to explore the spiritual processes that occur during gestation, from the moments before conception all the way through birth.

the gestation period

Birth-trauma is memory-erasure. That’s crucial to understand. Prior to birth, after the negotiations and following the “sale,” the spirit is aware. Not only is it aware of its own history, but it is conscious of all the circumstances surrounding its entry into human life. This is an understanding that far transcends the narrow boundaries of ordinary human knowing. It so surpasses precisely because it is unlimited as yet by the parameters of time and space.

Beings awaiting incarnation are still in fundamental contact with Unity, even as they exist in relatively separate consciousnesses. This is a difficult paradox. How can you be one with something, yet simultaneously be separate? As the Firesign Theatre so eloquently queried, how can you be in two places at once when you’re not anywhere at all? Ah, that’s part of the magic. To be “anywhere at all,” you must first be in Unity. Then you are somewhere. Of course, once you’re in Unity, you’re everywhere.

An individual spirit is a quality of consciousness that has, by fantastic artifice, concentrated and limited the focus of its awareness in some directions. Beings
(us, for example) are representatives of Unity, volunteering to develop more intensely in some ways than in others. We always have access to everything, through our connection with Unity, but we agree to “ignore” some of what is available in order to more deeply enhance the experience of what remains. There are consciousnesses probing every sector of the universe, awarenesses that are limited but complete, for there is no such thing as “partial” consciousness. Consciousness is by its very nature always whole, always complete (i.e., no one can experience half a reality). So when any factor in life — whether true or false, real or imagined — is excluded, whatever facets are left expand to maintain wholeness. It’s a risky business, that paradox, but this is how Unity has chosen to evolve itself; multiplying by dividing, adding by subtracting.

A spirit awaits incarnation in a pre-limited state. It is ready for limitation, preparing to be concentrated into bodily form, but still “out of time,” and thus able to perceive far beyond the small spectrum of human or earthly events.

Imagine what it would be like if you could perceive people’s thoughts, actually hear them thinking. Difficult to envision? It would certainly be rather overwhelming, all those conversations and images going through your mind at once. Arguments, wishes, philosophical tracts, irrational smatterings of sentences, fragments of words repeating over and over, fears, dreams, rationalizations, and all at a frantic pace impossible to conceive.

But then imagine that you aren’t locked into a particular time-frame — you exist outside the flow of linear duration — and imagine that you don’t occupy a particular place. Then, in “listening” to people’s thoughts, you would not hear conversations, you wouldn’t hear words and phrases and sentences, for those are all part of the linear flow of time. You would simply understand the essence of what was in the minds, what was innately there to be thought. You could see the basic relationship existing between two people (or two hundred people, or two million people). You would know the fundamental meaning of the relatedness. You would not see, nor would you need to see, the particular events that were happening, or had happened, or would happen, for events have no meaning removed from the flow of time. You would simply understand who and what was present in your field of perception.

Such is the mode of perception for an entity awaiting incarnation. This is not a condition of absolute certainly, for the spirit has already agreed to attachment with a specific earthly and human situation. The spirit is beginning its involvement with a particular genetic code, a certain family and lineage, a given period in history. The involvement will deepen as the spirit achieves fuller empathy with the bodily life-form approaching birth. The more involved the spirit is, the less “full” knowing it is capable of. The spirit is approaching its time and its body, and that approach gradually focuses its understanding, like the iris of a camera lens, narrowing the field of vision to a fine point. The entity is gradually coming out of the universe, out of its prior breadth, and into our world, into confined boundaries, into the wonder and terror of being human.
The narrowing into dimensionality that spirits undergo as they involve themselves in humanness is related to the models of quantum mechanics, a framework developed by 20th-century physicists to explain the micro-structure of the universe.

From the perspectives of ordinary life, our world seems made up of solid stuff (called *matter*), forces (called *energy*), and emptiness (called *space*). Sir Isaac Newton and others promulgated laws to explain the various relationships between matter, energy and space. These governing laws are the foundation of good common sense. They cover not only our ordinary world; they also have some application at the spiritual level as well. For example, “for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction” is an eloquent definition for Karma.

But as science developed the means to explore the micro-structure of the universe, to look at smaller and smaller pieces of matter right down to the molecular and sub-atomic levels, the classical, common sense laws broke down. Matter didn’t behave as our previous understanding dictated that it was supposed to. Depending on the techniques used to detect their presence, the electrons of atoms could appear either as particles or as waves. It all depended how you looked at them. When they appeared as particles, electrons were localized, focused into a definite direction of movement. But when they appeared in their wave-forms, the electrons were non-localized, seeming to be in many places at once.

Before conception, the spirit seeking to incarn is in what might be termed its wave-form. It is non-localized, occupying neither a definite space nor a precise time-frame. The nine months of gestation represent a gradual shift for that entity, a shift from wave-form to particle-form, from non-localized to specifically placed — located in a particular body during a particular time. During the wave phase, the spirit “knows” about the life into which it’s entering. It understands in a non-specific way the basic essence of its life-setting, including sympathetic feeling for its parents and other individuals likely to be connected during the life-yet-to-come. While the fetus develops in complexity during gestation, the spirit is gradually drawn first toward contact and then toward eventual union with its evolving life-form. As it does this, the spirit loses its ability to know the essence of things and people, and it becomes more and more linked with circumstance, the flow of time, events, cause/effect, choice, etc. It becomes gradually more earthly and human in its way of perceiving reality.

**the tragedy of abortion**

A human being is an amalgam of two distinct levels: *human* and *being.*

*Human* means “of the species *homo sapiens* — having to do with that particular earthly life-form.” Flesh itself is not intrinsically sacred. Certainly the body is a temple, etc., and just as certainly the stuff of life (matter and energy) is all finally
divine in any ultimate sense, but the life-form is not, nor was it ever truly alive, or at least not sentient in the spiritual sense.

*Being*, however, means “a consciousness that exists, that is alive.” In the metaphysic of this essay, a spirit contracts with the earth to take possession of an individual life-form (which that spirit agrees to evolve with and through). The contract is sealed sometime prior to birth, but full possession does not occur until birth itself. Therefore, in the fetal stages before birth and first breath, what is growing in the womb is “human and being,” but it is not yet a bona fide human being.

We have come far afield since raising the question of abortion, but the issue has been always between the lines of the previous sections. The crux of the matter is that entry into human life is always based on a matrix of agreements. There is the agreement between the human lovers, felt as attraction, which results in the fertilization of egg and sperm. There is the more subtle and usually unconscious agreement between the lovers and their community — all the other human beings who form their enfolding world. There is the agreement between the incarning spirit and the earth, the contract to become human in return for information to be used in the webbing. And crucially, there is the agreement between the incarning spirit and the parents, most specifically the mother.

Of these various contracts, the only one that is always necessarily conscious is the agreement between the incarning spirit and the earth. The rest are normally unconscious. In fact, they are almost always unconscious. But the earth and the spirit-becoming-human understand the pressures affecting the parents, both pressures emanating from within the lives as issues of personal psychology, and pressures originating in the environment as issues of social circumstance and cultural belief.

If even a slight chance exists that abortion, miscarriage, or other complications will be an issue during the gestation of a new human life-form, the entity bidding on that life-form is made aware of those possibilities. The spirit will know the general probabilities concerning the disturbed or terminated pregnancy, and its negotiations with the earth will proceed on that basis.

In other words, and in simpler ones, you just can’t fool an incarning spirit. You can’t take it by surprise, you can’t violate it, you can’t do anything to it that it hasn’t already understood and accepted. The incarning spirit is the most conscious member of the whole matrix of agreements. Whatever someone might decide concerning a pregnancy filled with difficulty, hesitance or trepidation, the incarning entity already understands in all the factors.

This is not the same as saying the entity does not care about its life-to-come. Incarning spirits care a great deal, and in most such cases, they hope to be born and live a human life. Cases do occur where entities agree to associate themselves with fetuses that will never come to term, either through abortion, miscarriage, the death of the mother during pregnancy, still-birth, etc. These are “partial” incarnations, and the price of the contract is adjusted downward.
accordingly. Generally, spirits who bid on a human life-form and who agree to incarn through that form want the opportunity to live out the life. If they didn’t, they wouldn’t be interested in the first place. Store-windows are for browsing; auctions are for buying. Human life is in some dimensions an amazing, incredible auction, although the atmosphere could hardly be compared to the “going once, going twice, sold to the entity in the blue serge suit” milieu we associate with so many auctions.

All spirits who incarn as human, however, accept many limitations. Pure, unlimited potential is not the gig in this sector of the universe. If you want the sense of untrammeled, open-ended possibilities, either for real or as a pipe dream, you came to the wrong place, and this life will be hell for you, or at least temporary purgatory. No, part of the formula of each human life is in the unique pattern of the limitations that must be understood and for which an adjustment must be made for maturity and realization to unfold. For instance, the rather tight laws of time and space to which we are heir are, in themselves, incredible limitations. Having to wait for Wednesday to follow Tuesday is often no fun, and taxing to the psyche. Unlike the birds, we cannot flap our arms and fly.

But beyond the generic limitations, each individual human life-form comes complete with its own set of limits — glitches, ironies, paradoxes, etc. The idea that babies are born perfect is a crock; human beings are born damaged, convoluted, and generally screwed-up. The damage may be literal, as in certain obvious, physical birth defects; it may be invisible, as in learning disabilities; or it may be latent, as in many personality disorders.

Why would so many spirits be eager to participate in such a tragicomic state of affairs? Because these limitations, painful and unjust though they may seem, can be tailored to a certain phase of spiritual growth, crossroads of evolution, or crisis of consciousness. Our limitations act as a spur to creativity. Necessity becomes the mother of invention, but only for human beings. We cannot flap our arms and fly, but we can invent powered flight, something birds could never do. Each creative solution to a limit fosters other problems down the line. The airplane was a marvelous invention, but with it came a myriad of new problems — air and noise pollution, plane crashes, the need for regulatory agencies, the lust for more speed, etc. These further push the envelope of creativity in an endless spiral of problem-solving. Perfect for spirits who want the experience of being pushed toward gradual mastery of themselves and their environments. Perfect for spirits who seek a tiny bit of appreciation for the difficulties of being God and creating this universe.

So, what do we have so far? The spirit cares about its incarnation in the life-yet-to-be, but it cannot be violated by any form of termination, even the most callous. Does this mean the pro-choice factions are right, and the pro-life factions wrong? Well, not exactly. It does imply that the pro-life position is misinformed in portraying the spirit of the unborn fetus as a helpless victim. An incarnating spirit is neither helpless nor a victim. This essay’s point-of-view is that pro-life is
guilty of a technical error when it defines the unborn life-form as a human being. It is human and being, but not truly a human being.

Perhaps the most significant evolutionary advantage of pro-choice is its revelation concerning the contractual nature of human life. Becoming human is an event based on agreement between a number of different parties at different levels of existence. It is really an agreement between two human lover-parents, their human support community, the earth, and an incaraling spirit, and usually those parties are not all equal in conscious awareness. It is ideally an agreement between fully equal and conscious parties, and the pro-choice propaganda line serves to bring pressure to the evolution of conscious parenthood. If you cannot agree in full awareness, do not simply allow events to take their otherwise unconscious if natural course.

But every coin has its flip side. Pro-choice can easily become a license for irresponsibility, a demeaning of the sacred in human relations. The rights of the unborn are not inherently superior to the rights of the living, for they exist at fundamentally different levels of reality, but the wishes of the unborn need to be considered. These wishes are the essence of good faith bargaining, of clear desire, and of the willingness to experience. We come from very far to live human lives here on the earth; we should not be lightly brushed aside. Pro-choice is not permission to be cavalier.

If the unborn being is not the central issue in the spiritual dilemma surrounding abortion, a spiritual problem still remains, one which is too often obscured in the confrontation of partisan emotional attachments.

There are different phases of human evolution. The opening section of this essay described some of the general biology the earth has provided to make homo sapiens possible. But biology is not the sole governor of either the pace or the direction of human growth. Biology was the dominant director for over a million years, and this duration places it at the apex of the hierarchy with considerable seniority, but recently — very recently — its position has been challenged by a new contender.

Humans are naturally familial and social creatures who form into groups, for support of all their various needs. The evidence all the way back suggests that even from our earliest days, we lived and roamed in multi-family bands of up to forty individuals. With changing environments and the beginnings of agricultural and animal husbandry, our social groups grew into villages and small town encampments. We evolved to the point where we had to create culture, and having been created, culture began to affect our evolution.

The culture of early man represented the roots of civilization, seeds buried deep. They were a long time in germination, and it has been only during the last three millennia that they have finally managed to crack the soil’s crust in search of the sun. Civilization and the evolution it could produce are nowhere near flower. Nowhere near. A start has been made, however, in the development of
conscious civilization, and it is precisely during this infancy that questions such as those surrounding abortion play a crucial role.

Abortion is an issue concerning not God, but Humanity, not the morality of the divine, but the rules we impose on ourselves for membership in our cultural club. The collective decisions we hammer out in public forum, in open debate, in heated assemblage, surrounding questions of chosen ethics, of the ways we wish to approach life, of the values and ethics and moralities we agree upon — all this is the way evolution is being determined on the collective front.

If we decide in favor of the pro-choice options involving new births, new “members” of the club, we evolve in a certain direction, with one set of long-term implications. Basically, we say that existing members of the human club have permission to sponsor new members — or not to sponsor them. We agree in favor of limits of convenience for individuals; if you make the mistake of getting pregnant in a situation that is less than ideal for you, we grant you the right to terminate that pregnancy. Further, we agree not to hold you responsible for unexpected grief that may occur, for broken love relationships, or for the tragedy of diminished meaning.

If, on the other hand, we choose the pro-life package, we evolve in a substantially different direction. We agree that pregnancy, birth, and membership in the human club are all functions of divine will, and that once fertilization has occurred, no intervention is allowed. We also decide in favor of collective responsibility for the care and raising of all spirits who incarn. If you make the mistake of getting pregnant in a bad situation, we urge you to rise to the occasion and become a responsible and loving parent. If you cannot, however, the tacit assumption of the pro-life position is that we will help you raise your child, or even raise it for you by providing suitable foster parents.

The pitfall of the first decision — the pro-choice agreement — is that what is convenient may obscure what is sacred. (And make no mistake: Human life is sacred.) In allowing individuals the choice of abortion, we essentially give permission to say “no” to a special relationship with an evolving spirit who wishes to be with us in human form, yet has no power of its own to influence our decision. We also run the risk that many individuals — perhaps millions — will interpret permission to choose as a license for cavalier and insensitive behavior. Why should one be selective about sexual partners or careful to avoid unwanted pregnancies when the “problem” can be so easily solved? The legacy of a pro-choice position is that many individuals will have to learn painful lessons through emotional loss and bodily violation. That is the price we pay.

Curiously enough, just as the pitfalls of the pro-choice agreement involve obscuring what is sacred, so the pitfalls of the pro-life decision bring up the very same possibility. Only the forms are different. If we give unborn spirits rights-to-life by legislating that all pregnancies must come to term and result in birth, we do not put an end to abortions. No, they will simply go underground. Those women (and, to a lesser extent, men) who simply cannot face the massive responsibility and burden of parenting will become an invisible outlaw class,
served by a black market of often unqualified abortionists. Further, given the historical inability of culture to prepare its members for the rigors of parenting, we are likely to see a dramatic rise in the number of dysfunctional families. The legacy of a pro-life position is a world full of lousy parents and damaged children, where we will have to face the music and redouble our efforts to legislate collective love and caring in spite of individual human fallibility.

Either way, we take a step, for better and for worse. We chart the future of our species and of our world in collective agreement.

Questions such as those of abortion (or slavery, or drug addiction, or changing economic structures, etc.) are debated in what I call the Center. All problems of social relevance eventually find their way to the Center. Some originate there; most do not. They are picked up and amplified until they eventually occupy the Center.

Once there, they must be dealt with, decided, resolved in some fashion — the Center must move, and evolution for the species will occur. Where must the Center move? It must move in the same dimensions from which the questions originally emanated: back toward the Outposts.

the center and the outpost

The Center, simply defined, is all of us together. The Center is an idealistic mirage, a grand illusion, and a re-creation of the ultimate reality — Unity. It is both the alpha of spiritual origins and the omega of evolutionary destination. Governments of all persuasions, from the democratic and egalitarian through the autocratic and totalitarian inevitably refer to an imaginary entity called “the body politic,” or more simply, “the People,” as the source of their mandate, the fount of their authority, and the beneficiary of their activities. No one has ever seen or talked to the body politic; no one has ever had supper with the People. But it is invoked every day by anyone wishing authorization by implication, and it is a powerful concept.

The Outpost, simply defined, is each of us alone. It is the existential fact of our lives here on the earth. We exist as separate beings, related to others by our humanness (as well as by our very being-ness), but still distinct from them, separated, even alienated. No one else can think your thoughts, feel your feelings, live your life. You are on your Outpost, and you are there alone.

In fact, the Center is the illusion. All that exists physically are the billions of separate and disconnected human Outposts. In spirit, the Outposts are the illusion and the Center is the true condition of consciousness and life.

[A note about semantics and my use of the prefaces “in fact” and “in spirit.” The usual connotation of the phrase “in fact,” is to contradict a previous statement and replace it with the one that will follow: “I wanted to go to the store, but in fact I stayed home.” Most often in conversation it is used without
any regard for what the true facts are, but rather as a tool of emotional propaganda, a kind of coded buzz-word to subtly convince the listener of the truth of the statement that will follow. Politicians are notorious for prefacing totally unprovable statements with the phrase, “in fact.” Just listen to the news on TV any given evening. On the other hand, the phrase, “in spirit” has a connotation meaning, “in the ideal,” or “in intent or philosophy.” One could easily say, “I can’t back your proposal, but in spirit, you have my support.”

I’m not using these phrases in their normal connotations. I mean them literally. “In fact” means just that: in fact, in physical truth, in verifiable, empirical, scientific reality. And “in spirit” means exactly what it says: having to do with the realm of spirit, the invisible, intangible, metaphysical reality of our origins and our ultimate future. So let me restate the former paragraph...

In fact, the Center is the illusion. There is no verifiable, demonstrable link tying us all together in some telepathic, organic whole of one-ness. Many devices provide an interface: language, familial/regional/national trait similarities, laws, customs, now the spread of mass media. All that goes on, propelling the illusion of togetherness, but in fact, there is no Center. All that exists physically are the billions of separate and disconnected human Outposts.

In spirit, however, the Center is the reality and the Outposts are the illusion. In spirit, everything begins and ends in Unity, with these lives we live as individualized consciousnesses only a phase of the inhaling/exhaling of Unity’s breathing. So in spirit, there are no Outposts, and the Center is the only true condition of consciousness and life.

The casual reader may conclude that the Center and Unity are identical, one and the same thing, but they aren’t. Unity is the ultimate togetherness of everything everywhere; the Center is the relative togetherness of the human species here on the earth. Same feel, absolutely different context.

Another way to think about the difference between the Center and the Outpost is in time-frames. Within the human time-frame of a single life, the Outpost is real, the Center is not. Our birth is the first event of aloneness. We may live with the assumption or the longing or the pursuit of togetherness, something never demonstrated with complete security but always alluded to. Finally, however, we are rebuked from that quest for secure sharing by the event of our death, an occurrence each human being must do alone. Death, like birth, is an individual experience. Nobody dies with you, just as no one is born with you.

If we extend our time-frame past human existence, through the millennia of culture and the eons of geology, past even the existence of the earth, all the way to a “time” encompassing the complete breath cycle of universe-creation, then everything reverses. From that perspective, everything begins and ends in Unity, in the ultimate Center. In between, we live as individualized (alone) spirits, amassing a personal history of experience, exploring our universe and increasing our consciousness as we can, even when our directions are limited. So we have an in-between time of aloneness bounded by end points of ultimate togetherness.
Now look within that. Look in-between the in-between. We come to the earth to be human, specializing our limits, focusing our conscious growth, forgetting Unity completely in the bargain with our mother planet, and thus dealing for the first time with the experience of seemingly utter isolation and the terror of alienation.

To deal with that fright, we re-construct Unity in confined dimensions, first family (biological togetherness), then culture (social togetherness). Alienation on earth is so powerful for human beings, and the loss of Unity so painful, that we must create a forceful mechanism for re-creating the oneness we so miss. We need an experience of us-ness, a way to feel at home and at one with the other five billion alienated spirits walking the planet, and the Center is the way we do it.

And we do it with a vengeance.

Once again, I use a phrase literally, not figuratively. The vengeance I speak of in the re-creation of the feeling of Unity through cultural togetherness should be an ideal, a warm dream visualization. Unfortunately, it has been for too long and is still too often a semi-conscious form of retribution, a kind of angry reaction to the alienation of being human, a violently enforced propaganda for conformity: you’re either one of us, or you’re one of them, so you’d better look, act, feel, think, and behave like us.

Before discussing this fearful pit of human fascism in the depth it deserves, we need to discover the roots of alienation in the human condition by returning once again to the metaphysic. The fear of aloneness is first experienced in the traumatic entry into this life: the forgetfulness of being born.

**the approaching trauma of birth**

In the final weeks of the nine-month gestation period, miraculous changes are occurring. For one thing, the pregnant mother-to-be is about fed up to here with the whole damned kit ’n kaboodle. She’s tired of being Blimp City, tired of doing the limbo just to sit down, tired of idiots telling her she’s “eating for two.”

Most of the biological miracles have long ago taken place. The physical transformations within the womb are unfolding at an accelerating pace, and certainly all these manifestations — kicking, shifting within the amniotic sac, the general commotion of a life-form coming to term — all can be explained perfectly well by the rational analyses of biological science. But the suggestion of this essay is an alternate, poetic route of understanding. These changes are the result of an encroaching sense of union, an evolution that has mental, emotional, physical, and most of all, spiritual ramifications.

Pregnancy is akin to a nine-month courtship. Like lovers gradually sighing into an intertwined embrace, the spirit gradually embraces its life-form, and as the lovers are transformed by the tempestuous currents of rising passion and
open-hearted receptivity, so the spirit and the evolving life-form are similarly altered by their growing togetherness. The DNA-coding of the conceived life-form sets definitions and limits for the direction of the spirit’s soon-to-be-focused consciousness, and the accumulated experience of the spirit confers upon its life-form the divine will to grow, to emerge into coherent, moveable life. In this context, mere mechanical growth is a tragedy, a cruel joke. The fetus develops into a vessel for the eager spirit. The spirit narrows its vision to fit the parameters of the DNA code. It’s a wonderful symbiosis.

Consider the mother’s position. The initial stages of pregnancy are a time of unheard of hormonal change. There is a tumultuous confusion about. This leads to a second period of demonstrable, visible alteration, a time of magic and awe. How positive this magic is depends upon the psychology of the mother, her physical health, the nature of the parents’ relationship, and the context of social and environmental circumstances present. In the best of conditions, this period is marked by exquisite wonder; in the worst of conditions, new pregnancy is distinguished by a disgruntled hysteria at the inevitability of life processes, a loathing of the bargain that has been struck.

But as the birth-moment approaches, in the final weeks of gestation, when the mother’s body comes to resemble over-ripe fruit about to burst, the nature of the magic shifts. No longer are the changes experienced as hormonal explosions; those have become second nature as the mother adjusted, as she felt out and learned about the experience of pregnancy, altering her personality and her behavior to account. She has performed her own magic, becoming malleable, almost plastic in pursuit of physical and emotional homeostasis. What was initially a tempest of other-worldly invasion has become now a presence more and more recognizably human. Arms, legs, torso, the dominant head, these are all experienced directly by the mother. They are palpable evidence of something easy to understand as human. The fetus is no longer an unknown or alien presence; it is more and more person-like.

Those who seek to reveal, to physically demonstrate the existence of spirit and consciousness are (in my opinion) destined to fail, for though it has been a goal of people from time immemorial to link the material and the spiritual, the effort is wasted. From auras through Orgone collectors to Kirlian photography, no one has ever succeeded in producing verifiable, believable results that could stand up to careful scrutiny.

But if we give up the quest for “proof,” and instead concentrate of mythic visions to transform our lives, we could visualize what gestation might be like — the poetry of pregnancy.

In the early stages, there would be a kind of howling wind in the distance, and yet simultaneously the sound would seem to emanate from within the womb of the expectant mother. This sound would be loudest in the moments following conception, resonating down to an echo by the second month. From there, sound would be displaced by heat. The woman would gradually emanate a radiance of warmth. She herself would be absolutely cool to the touch, but the objects in her
environment would register a slight increase in their kinetic saturation. That heat would build through roughly the sixth or seventh month, slowly folding back on itself, gradually returning from the environment around the pregnant woman back into her own body, which would then warm. In the eighth month, the heat would be transformed into light, and our mother would again radiate, but now the aura would shift, becoming a phosphorescent glow, almost a luminous fog.

Each of these manifestations — sound, heat, light — would be an expression of the spirit that has chosen and agreed to incarn through this particular circumstance. The changes in chemical metaphor are analogous to phases in the spirit’s shifting consciousness as it approaches birth.

One of the profound difficulties with this kind of schematic is the inevitability of making generalizations that don’t conform to real-life experience. Each pregnancy is unique. The time schedules given here are only approximations, averages. What is common to all pregnancies is the symbolic order: first sound, then heat, and finally light. However, the timing varies wildly. A woman could conceivably be through both sound and heat by the third month and spend the rest of her pregnancy developing light. This would imply the presence of a spirit eager and able to connect with its life-form very early on. We could also see the reverse, a pregnancy staying in the sound phase for upwards of seven and eight months, meaning there were delays in the linkage of spirit and life-form, perhaps extended negotiations taking place, perhaps some hesitancy or difficulty in the environment, perhaps simply a spirit that wished to stand in the background and observe from a distance. Generalizations are invariably deceiving.

fetal phases

In the first phase, which I’m poetically terming Sound, there is an announcement that negotiations are underway toward a final contractual agreement. A spirit is trying to work it out with the earth. Here there can even be a shift from one spirit to another, although this is the exception rather than the rule. Generally, bids are firm; not many spirits are simply browsing, not much window-shopping goes on in the earth’s storefront. The sound becomes an echo as the first limitations are imposed on the spirit that has agreed to incarn.

Then comes the second phase, poetically Heat. Here the entity is linking itself with the circumstances of the human melodrama it is preparing to birth into. The spirit familiarizes itself with history of both a general and a personal nature, learning about its parents, and their parents. This involves a study of the potentials of the precise DNA code it will be adopting for its human life. But it’s not solely a family history; also studied is a general cultural background, the collective milieu of the “time” the entity plans to be born into. Beyond literal history, a mythological history being constructed, a personal sense of what might be called “hypothetical pasts and futures.” This is a tricky concept to explain simply, but what goes on during the Heat phase is the creation of a life-setting, a
setting both literal and fictional. Every human being has factual scenarios containing possible and probable events, psychological and physical scenarios mapping the territory and style of maturation, emotional scenarios detailing the tapestry of feeling growth, and even mythic scenarios laying out a background of evolutionary heritages in the occult sense.

The Heat phase is the most trying for the entity awaiting incarnation. Still free to understand its own natural past, still able to feel and identify with the ineffable presence of Unity, excited and pleased in its contact with the earth, yet having to stretch into creating what seems a largely artificial situation. The air of expectancy thickens. This phase is like making a movie, like being the director of a fictional, yet necessarily autobiographical script. Heat involves living in two realms simultaneously, artist and pragmatist. It's hard work, involving some inspiration, but mainly perspiration.

The third phase is poetically Light. At this point, the spirit has encountered the earth and shared communion with her. An agreement has been drawn and signed for the exchange of information to be used in webbing-construction in return for a human life of experience, both in a body and in time. Various histories have been studied or created; the entity understands its life-setting, its all-too-human contexts. Now that spirit must begin the descent into true focus, and it accomplishes this by becoming dense.

**densification and labor**

The descent into true density is a variable process. Sometimes it is accomplished with a long slide, sometimes with a rush. Remember when you were a child on a snowy day in winter? You took your trusty sled or toboggan to that one special hill. After trudging to the top, you got set, sitting astride with your feet on the rudder, or if you chose, lying on your stomach, your face inches from the quiet but tingling snow. There was the momentary pause as you considered the dizzying view down the slope, seeing your buddies who had gone before down so far in the distance below, and then, finally, you pushed off. The snow would catch at your runners, grabbing, sticking, and you might even have to push off a second and third time there at the crest, but eventually gravity would reach out like a huge slow hand, and you would be off. The first fifty feet would have your heart in your mouth as you settled in to control the ride, picking up speed, more momentum, and more, and then suddenly you would be rushing, hurtling down the hillside, adrenaline pumping, not really steering, just whooshing, flying almost above the snow rather than on it. At the peak of acceleration, you would be faced with a split-second decision regarding the inevitable tree or creek or road that loomed ahead. And whether you made the right decision or the wrong one, whether you glided smoothly, eking out every last foot of distance, or crashed in a feigned apocalypse, nothing else was quite like it. The hyperbolic curve of experience provides the rush: still at first, then
shifting forward into little surges of momentum, and finally, sudden, breath-taking speed. This parallels the slow path to densification some beings choose.

Or remember your first dive off the high board or that tree whose branches extended out over the creek? You climb the ladder or scramble up the trunk, each step taking you higher. Reaching the platform or the limb, you inch out onto the board. The world falls away, the water is miles underneath you. Standing at the edge, you want to crawl back toward safety, but pride denies it. Shall you dive? Jump? Fall? Usually, the first try is an attempted dive that feels more like a jump and is in truth as much a fall as anything else. Once you overcome your fear enough to mistakenly commit yourself, once you have given up the tenuous security of the edge, the plummet is instantaneous. There is no gradual acceleration, no slow-developing momentum. You drop like a stone, yanked by gravity toward the shocking solid granite of the water’s surface. And the impact is like being belted by a brick wall. Somehow, you manage not to die. This is the fast path for a spirit’s densification.

The object of density — the purpose of the process — is two-fold: to embrace the mother, and to get into the fetal body. At this point, claustrophobia is the most pressing problem. The spirit still has access to its own experience and the awareness of Unity (although this is beginning to fade into a memory, like anesthesia coming on), but it must identify with its life-to-come by narrowing its focus. As the entity approaches its body and its time, it will feel trapped, unless it can embrace its new mother. In the embrace is an emotional reassurance, a soft substance that yields yet cushions. Whereas the father was an important figure during the first phase of history-creation, the mother is now all-important. The spirit is full of awareness, knowledge, and experience. It could be called an adult consciousness, although this varies. But it is definitely not child-like, and there is equality with the mother: the entity is dependent on her for entry into life, for the very substance of a body, but it is also superior to her, seeing life more clearly than she could ever hope to. And both need to recognize this symbiosis through a relationship as beloveds. In a flowing and positive pregnancy, this love affair occurs with a fullness even strangers can feel. In the ideal pregnancy, the relationship between mother and unborn child is downright mystical. But most beings don’t enter into ideal settings, nor do they expect to. They relish their peculiar out-of-roundness, their individual skew.

The kicks and jerks of the life-form are, at this stage, the manifestation of a spirit getting tentatively “behind the wheel,” rather like driving a car with a manual transmission when you aren’t familiar with the clutch linkage. The spirit is gaining a “feel” for its new body, experiencing the first jolts of linear time as it is introduced to the perplexing machinery of human life-forms. It needs emotional sympathy with the mother to help it through this period of wrenching awkwardness. Unity is now fading fast, and Mom is the closest direct experience of any similarity.

As the spirit occupies the body more fully, entering the womb for good, the biological mechanisms of impending birth are set into motion. Labor may still be
a week or a day or only an hour away, but the bargain is sealed. There is no turning back now. Once completely in love with Mother, there is only one possible exit — to experience birth and expulsion into our world, to take the leap past simple identification with a body and into full imprisonment in that body, an imprisonment that makes it imperative that the spirit master the use of the form in learning to operate it.

To achieve even minimal mastery, the spirit will have to give up every shred of knowing, every memory, every insight. It knows now that all will be forgotten, and yet the spirit is still eager for the adventure. Think of it, to go from full awareness and security in the divine order of things, suddenly to find your consciousness locked into a singular, incomprehensible self, swirling through an overwhelming maelstrom of chaos, confusion and disorder.

That’s birth.

**the maelstrom of birth**

*To be born is to forget; to live is to remember.*

The forgetting can take no more than an instant or it may require many days. However long it takes, forgetting is inevitable, a prerequisite for entrance into human life. The remembering has no such inevitability, no such certainty. Remembering will take an entire life, if it can be accomplished at all. For most human beings who have lived and breathed and walked the earth, full memory is never regained. Sleepwalking is the ordinary state of affairs. Relative unconsciousness is the status quo.

Birth is the boundary between one dimension of consciousness and another. Prior to the event, an incarncing spirit is concerned with all the myriad preparations necessary to enable it to fully experience life. First there is negotiation with the earth, then familiarization with its environment to come in the effort to understand the place in time the spirit will occupy as a human self. The entity moves in time-space dimensions, niches of earth-time, cultural-time, family-time, and personal-time.

The spirit must construct a logical history for itself, one that allows a sensible coupling between what the spirit is bringing to the earth in the way of accumulated experience — that is to say, the continuity of its own growth intentions — and this must be fit into what the spirit will possibly encounter in its life-circumstances, the family lineage, probable social environment, anticipated cultural changes, etc.

These two levels (pre-birth experience and post-birth likelihoods) are harmoniously arranged, at least to some extent, in the very choice of a life-form; a contract with the earth is not likely to be brought to fruition if the match is too far out of natural synchronization. But much of the work to arrange and create more overall harmony is done by the individual spirit during the nine months of
gestation following conception. Tremendous study is involved, although the ordinary human learning processes we associate with formal schooling are not a good analogy for the process. Study at this stage is more similar to listening to a library of musical works — savoring each of Beethoven’s symphonies for instance — gradually assimilating a feel for the whole body of the composer’s work, coming to appreciate the aesthetic, to love the music as it both represents and transcends the composer. No intellectual memorization occurs; instead, the process involves aesthetic and emotional embrace. This is the study undertaken by an incarning spirit during gestation. The spirit must grow into love with its evolving life-form, its parents, and its future environment, and it does so willingly, eagerly, with complete fascination.

By the time the convulsions of labor have reached their crescendo, the incarning spirit is fully involved with the journey on which it is about to embark into human life. The memory of Unity, the intangible and omnipresent security of knowing that All is One, fades into an echo. This is like lying on the operating table and hearing the anesthesiologist say, “Now count backwards from 100, slowly...” 100. 99. 98. And suddenly 97 doesn’t even exist. It’s a floating into transition, a sinking, a surrender. In the tumult of birth, the prepared spirit and the human fetus are forged into their own symbiotic Oneness. Loss of Unity, loss of memory of everything that has gone before, even loss of identity itself occurs in the pressure of pushing through the birth canal and into the world.

The spirit may be tranquil (or tranquilized) even to the last moments of labor. It may be observant, and interested, with a benign curiosity at the birth process. It may be coolly sympathetic to the efforts of its mother as her bio-psychic system is shaken and wrenched, or it may be apprehensive at the magnetic pressure of being sucked into life. But however the spirit feels in those last moments, its awareness is crushed in the act of birth, in the unbelievable shock of first breath, the severing of connection with a mother it has only recently fallen into love with.

Consider the shock. You meet your mother in gestation, gradually embracing her life, understanding it, respecting her paradoxes and predicaments, learning about her essence. Then, as you live closer and closer to her in the months of gestation preceding labor, you begin loving her with emotions not yet entirely human nor perfectly universal. You are becoming attached to her as Unity fades. You are falling in love with her, and the illusion — painful though it may be, as is the case with all forms of romantic, need-driven love — is necessary to bridge the gap between security in Unity and the jolt of living alone in your body. The addictive potentials of attachment increase as the biochemistry of birth reaches the height of its fever. At the peak of your need, the apex of your romantic clinging, you are pulled away from your beloved mother and pulverized into your new self, thrust into an alien world, compressed into time and expanded into your body.

The experience of falling into love with your mother prior to birth is the first act of what will become an ongoing introduction to human reality on the earth.
Gestation and birth represent an extraordinary seduction — and always a success, for it has to be. The first breath sets the tone. That first inhalation is the initial separation, for it symbolizes the point at which you are no longer living on the oxygen provided by your mother. From that point on, as the fluid is forced from the lungs, displaced by inhalation of the atmosphere, you are on your own.

Mother is ripped away, the embrace of biological unity with her is dramatically halted, and you are forced to reach her by learning how to operate your own still-developing bodily machinery.

There is nothing like birth; no experience within life can serve as an effective analogy or metaphor to describe it. We can't relate any activity within life as equivalent to the symbolic and physical experience of birth. We may suggest that some process or evolution in our experience of life is an echo of birth, but it will be a hollow analogy. Birth is the superlative, the *sine qua non*. It stands alone and indescribable. For some of us, birth is an event from which we never fully recover. Tragically, it is sometimes the dismembering of a spiritual self from which we never re-member.

**.birth and death**

Some people fail to realize that of the two boundaries that define human, earthly life — birth and death — birth is almost always the more traumatic of the two. Birth is difficult; death is easy.

This stands in bold contradiction to the ponderous weight of 20th-century psychoanalytic thought, which tends to represent man as a creature terrified of his own death. But in truth, man is a creature whose terror of death stems from an inability to remember himself following the pulverizing trauma of birth. Our anxiety about death is actually a fear of unsuccessful birth.

Birth is a stressful challenge, whereas death is a surrender into relaxation. Birth is shooting the rapids, a tumult of turbulence, noise, and chaos, a whooshing through narrow openings. Death is floating down the calm expanse of the river delta — water smooth as glass, a gentle drifting with the current.

But if we have already been through the most difficult portal — that of getting born — then why does so much of life involve suffering. Why is so much of living so painful? Because being born contains many levels. Birth is a continuing event.

Life is a struggle precisely because we are required to go on birthing and rebirthing our selves throughout the whole of our journey. Again and again we must discover where in ourselves we remain unborn. If you are unborn, but also undead, then you’re in purgatory — hell on wheels, so to speak — moving through life but not living. The exquisite paradox of our physical bodies is that they are constructed in such a way as to discourage or even seemingly prevent rebirth, while simultaneously they not only allow for it, but they also make it a
necessity. The tendency of neural patterning to reinforce habits is strong, almost obsessive. Yet these very pathways will “burn out” consciousness if left unchallenged.

When you were a child, did you ever stare at some arbitrary point for as long as you could, holding your eyes perfectly still with the absurd concentration that only children can muster? The payoff for that exercise was a very gradual reduction of your field of view. Slowly your visual world would darken at the edges, the darkness creeping inward like the closing iris of a camera, eventually leaving you with only the object you were staring at, and then even that would blur and vanish for an instant. You had achieved momentary total blindness. This phenomenon has to do with “rods and cones,” the receptors within the eye that send signals to the brain, which then in turn reconstructs the imagery on the back, upside-down “screen” of the cortex. (In truth, everything humans experience is a construct, a computer-simulation of reality.) Those rods and cones depend on tiny and rapid motion by the muscles of the eye to maintain their functioning. Vision depends on constant movement; stop the movement, fixate on a pattern, and vision dims quickly into failure.

The same sequence can occur psychologically and spiritually. Fixation at any level — physical, emotional, mental, or sexual — is a living death, a false death, a death that represents a denial of continuing birth. True death is a surrender into change, a refreshing. The occult concept of reincarnation (something secretly believed in by more people than any logical person would ever suspect) is not a system describing the objective structure of reality, but rather a macro-metaphor for reminding us how we must live in the here-and-now. The same can be said for new-age Christianity, whose entreaty to be “born again” is often misunderstood by the over-zealous who wish only an escape from suffering and responsibility.

Physical birth is imprisonment — into a body, into a state of amnesia. Each successive death/rebirth experience, short of physical death itself, represents an opportunity to become less imprisoned, less caught in forgetfulness of the self, more free to remember who we really are, and more able to create in life some of the meaning of that delicious remembrance. Our first birth is a KO punch that puts us on the canvas, out like a light. All following births offer us the option of re-awakening. Understanding that, however, is one thing; doing it is something else again. Talk is cheap; life is dear.

**cultural anesthesia**

We seek to belong, to be recognizably the same as others, and yet simultaneously we pursue uniqueness, that which makes us different and separate from others. *The Center* is my term for the urge to belong through socialization with others in general cultural conformity. It is the pressure to re-create Unity in its most pragmatic aspect. The construction of civilized
togetherness is both valid and appropriate for human beings. *The Outpost* then represents each of us alone, isolated from others, with a specialized spiritual background and a unique contribution to make to human living, something that is obliterated in the process of physical birth. This too is valid and appropriate.

The ability to remember our true selves is limited both from within and from without. The inner limitation is obvious: how does one remember what has been obliterated in the lobotomy of birth? Trapped now in time and space, locked into a temporal body, how can a spiritual-cum-human being transcend the structures of biological knowing to recall vividly what is beyond time and space? We build our human consciousness through the experience provided by our bodies, so how can our consciousness leap beyond those bodies without endangering the delicate relationship? Many theories have been offered, but dependable, verifiable techniques are hard to come by.

The formidable task of transcendence is made more difficult by curious pressures from outside the individual as well, pressures that arise through the fear of alienation, pressures reinforced by others in our environment. In the ideal state of consciousness, The Center is a level of shared reality wherein we will be nurtured to rediscover our true identity through the relaxation of comradeship. One might think that culture — the development of a collective human evolution in civilization — would benefit immensely from the release of creativity such remembrances can provide. But paradoxically, culture is too often a kind of purgatory in itself, substituting artificial values and arbitrary appropriateness instead of promoting true rediscovery of identity. Civilization functions on a lowest-common-denominator basis, keeping us in our synthetic sleep rather than elevating us toward the wonders of remembrance.

Civilized living is designed to reduce anxiety and fear of life, to create a comfortable “us” through which we can escape the various terrors of our predicaments as human beings. Reducing anxiety and fear can be achieved in a number of ways, two of which stand out: first, by promoting individuation, thus increasing the possibility of true memory; or second, by further anesthetizing each individual through establishment of shared standards — societal rules and regulations. Since our longing to remember ourselves produces anxiety in the first place, one logical way to reduce that anxiety is to push it further back into the nether regions of the unconscious. All too often, the pressures of socialization in each of us take that route, by denying the validity of birth/death processes.

Consider one small area of collective morality and propaganda; the problem of intimacy through marriage. For centuries, the mythic propaganda of western civilization refused to permit relationships to die. Divorce was frowned upon with all the stringent pressures culture can bring to bear: ostracism, legal and religious sanctions, etc. “Til death us do part” was the accepted rule. Individuals were coerced by myth and by example to stay together in marriage at all cost, even when the relationships became nothing more than empty shells long burned out. The numbers of marriages that devolved into mutual imprisonment, mere stalemated convenience, the dregs of habit, were far more than cultural
propaganda would ever admit. Only physical death of one or both of the partners could end a relationship. The denial of death in marriage often prevented any birth from occurring — the birth of enduring love (rather than the transitory romantic variety) between the two parties, or the birth of a new, more fulfilling, and more divine love with another human being. Married couples were chained together in a symbolic and literal bondage, lifeless and hopeless, lost together but lonely.

Late in the 20th century, at least here in America and increasingly around the world, we have turned the tables. Divorce is no longer the exception; now it is the predictable statistic, the accepted rule.

On the surface of it, this appears a positive and evolutionary step for culture, a movement away from the lifeless anesthesia of anxiety, toward a promotion of healthy individuation. But is it? In our flight from the historical denial of death in intimate relationships, we have flipped over, gone belly up, thrown out the baby with the bath water. Now we exist in a cacophony of cultural propaganda (once again, through myth, example, and even statute) that promotes the idea that death of intimate relationships is natural, acceptable, and even necessary, ostensibly to make way for growth and change.

The problem is that in allowing and even encouraging divorce as an acceptable part of modern social living, in embracing permission to die, we have forgotten completely about the process of birth (and re-birth). Couples are together for six months or two years or ten, they come to an impasse, one or the other or both decide a death is necessary, and divorce occurs — legal, physical, or emotional. Too frequently that is simply the end. The individuals go their separate ways, on to new partners (and new divorces), sometimes without any awareness at all of the sacredness of what they shared during their time together.

Where is the rebirth? Certainly divorced individuals may love again — most do, and some almost immediately — but true rebirth must mean “coming home,” returning to the source. Too much of the time, couples who divorce never experience the return home to the essence of what they shared, what was revealed about themselves through their intimate interaction. This is not progress. Rather, it is a new and cynical form of hysteria, an encapsulation of life into episodic periods, each of which is forgotten as soon as it is over. Learning about oneself may be enhanced from the sheer amount of experience such episodic relating allows, but the tendency is for patterns to repeat over and over, further anesthetizing the individual away from his true spiritual self. To flip from one dogmatic illusion (marriage is forever) to another (marriage is transitory) does not take us where we need to go. It does not bring us home to our unique selves. Instead, such dogma keeps us flipping through the routine patterns of lobotomized repetition.

When we remove the tiger from his natural habitat in the jungle and place him in a cage at the zoo, he gradually loses the sense of his natural place and function in the world. The longer he is kept caged, the greater the possibility that our tiger will develop neurotic patterns, since he cannot truly “forget” what he is and
where he should be. The pressure of denied reality will eventually produce a cat who paces endlessly from side to side in the cage, always using the same number of steps, the same movements, the same repetitions of meaningless activity. This is the nervous system’s primitive way of dealing with anxiety, a pitiful technique designed to push the anxiety further into the background. Over the past hundred years, the very concept of zoos has been challenged by the cumulative observations of concerned zoo-keepers, who have understood at last that removal of animals into limited and alien environments can lead only to “madness” for the trapped animals. Zoos have gradually begun to wise up by altering their environments in synthetic replication of the each animal species’ natural state.

The parallel of the zoo tiger’s predicament is frighteningly close to our own human condition. Each spirit has a unique environment for which it is well-suited, but the spirit leaves this environment at birth. The spirit leaves even the memory of what it is, what it can do, and enters into a new and confusing environment, that of an evolving human body, a human family unit, and the world of human socialization beyond. Culture has functioned largely as an insensitive zoo-keeper, merely maintaining the cages. We live in an antiquated human zoo, and we are as slow to catch on to the tragic suffering of that predicament as were 19th-century zookeepers.

But that’s how the Center works. It is cautious, moving slowly, and only when circumstances dictate change an absolute necessity. The cycles of birth/death/rebirth are, in fact, incredibly dangerous; only the strongest and most courageous individuals among us can generate the grace and humility necessary to successfully undergo such repeated changes. Most of us are content to move with the pack in an illusion of growth, for the fear of alienation rises up within each of us like the monster of Loch Ness, like the specter of the shadow of death. We will do anything — sacrifice anything — to feel we belong with the rest of suffering humanity. Anything, that is, except the one thing that will truly help us belong — the inward discovery in our heart-of-hearts of who we are as individual spirits, and with it, the memory of what we brought with us to the earth, what we brought to create, to contribute, to revel in, and to share.

Birth obliterates that awareness, but it is contained within each of us, contained symbolically in the lives we set up for ourselves, lives we agreed to in contract with the earth, with our parents, and with the rest of our species. Our spiritual agreements are our constant companions, but always in shadow — hidden by fear and anxiety — always veiled but oh-so-close, if only we could allow ourselves to feel beyond our programmed habits and imprints. We must work backwards through our sleeping, through our automatic circuits, through our pain, all the way back to the source memory of what we were before we were born.

This working backwards is difficult, but not impossible. It is work worth doing, and finally, it is the only game in town.

How do we unravel the puzzle? Where do we turn for help and advice?
the denials of modern thought

Science can provide only the most limited counsel. The frameworks of modern science are insufficient to gain access to the metaphysics beyond human life, at least in the evolution of an individual spirit. In its current form, science is an invention of and servant to The Center, created as a way of perpetuating and evolving the power of collective knowledge. The investigations and presumptions of science are fundamentally impersonal, with little, if any, concern with the realm of spirit. Rather, science is interested in the mechanics of natural logic, and in that it is spectacularly revealing. Still, logic is but a small section of the total spectrum of existence, and though science has a seemingly infinite playground to explore, it omits a great deal more than it includes.

Psychology can be of some help, but with peculiar reservations. The evolution of sentient consciousness over the past three thousand years has culminated in a century of revolution in understanding. The pioneers of psychology, William James, Freud, Jung, Maslow, et al, have pushed us beyond the threshold of ordinary knowing about ourselves into a realm evolving so fast that few of us can keep track of all the implications. But the tenets of 20th-century psychology, revolutionary as they are, remain bound by certain problematic assumptions.

Essentially, psychology assumes that all human experience is learned. One by one, the theories of “instinct” as a motivation in human endeavor have been discredited and discarded. The problem here is that psychology, like science, has focused itself on The Center instead of The Outposts. It has searched for the presence of instinct at the generic level — the species level — and finding nothing suitable upon which to pin an understanding of behavior and growth, it has concluded that instincts do not exist in human beings. But it is hasty to assume that since there may be no collective instincts in our developmental psychologies, there must also be no individual instincts.

There’s an old joke about a drunk looking for his lost keys under a street lamp at midnight. A policeman saunters by, and inquiring about the plight of the inebriated soul, sets out to help him find his missing keys. After some minutes on hands and knees scouring the small area under the street lamp, the cop, by now frustrated, says to the drunk, “Just where did you lose the keys, anyway?” Pointing toward a darkened side street, the drunk answers, “Over there, in the alley.” Exasperated, the policeman screams, “Then why the hell are we looking under street lamp?!?” To which the drunk calmly replies, “Because the light is much better here.” The moral of the story is that if you’re searching for something hidden, you won’t find it by looking in the easy, well-lit places; you’ve got to take the light into the darkness.

Psychology has assumed that simply because the methods of revealing individual human instincts are difficult to create in a systematic and “scientific” way, then they either don’t exist or aren’t worth hunting for. In general, modern
psychology agrees with the statement in the Declaration of Independence that “all men are created equal...” This is essentially correct on the face of it. All humans are equal at their creation as human, for birth is the great equalizer, the moment of complete memory-erasure. Each of us does indeed enter life with nothing in his consciousness but the sound and fury of the birth process itself.

But simply because we are voided in our awareness does not mean that we are completely like the tabula rasa, the “blank slates” of 17th-century philosophers.

Much of traditional therapeutic psychology assumes that our personalities are formed in the first few years of life, that by the age of five or seven years we have been fired in the kiln of parental imprints that shaped the neutral clay of our basic potentials. In the extreme, these assumptions presume that most, if not all, of our behavior as adults is an extension of the values we learned in infancy and childhood, with the transference being divided into appropriate and inappropriate forms. The successful and positive extension of early imprints is thought of as maturation or responsible growth into adulthood, while the unsuccessful and negative varieties are perceived as neurosis or narcissism.

Many therapies purport to work around these imprints, either by letting go of them, as is the method in the rational or existential therapies, or by returning to them, digging them up to reveal their hidden power and thus neutralize their habitually negative effects, as in emotional or primal therapies. Whatever their specific differences in orientation, most systems of promoting or restoring psychological wellness agree that at birth our personalities are little more than raw potential. Further, this potential is presumed to be similar for everyone. No individual differences. No innate predispositions to process or understand or construct reality according to a uniquely personal bias. We are led to believe that individual personality is constructed out of whole cloth in the post-natal environment, with accelerated patterns of learning formed largely by events occurring within and around the family unit.

Even the considerable evidence of the science of genetics is shunted aside in these psychological philosophies. Oh yes, they say, genetic coding is important, but only biologically — not at the level of personality.

Can anyone truly believe this? Unquestionably, the matrix of nuclear family is crucial. That goes without saying. But are environmental imprints the sole source of personality shaping? And what of genetics? Is the coiled dance of our DNA simply a spiral of circumstance, an accident of birth? Are we stuck with the hand we were dealt by an uncaring and impersonal fate, mere victims — or even less — mere products of biological and environmental assembly lines? Forget objective truth for the moment; as a philosophy from which to live in satisfaction, such attitudes represent a whitewashing of individuality in favor of collectivity.

We grow into human life by the most amazing symbiosis between inner and outer environments. Each affects the other; each is revealed by reference to the other; each shapes and transforms the other. The conscious personality, the self-aware sense of self, is the interface of reconciliation for these two separate
worlds. At birth, there is no I, no sense of control, no personal guidance for making choices of developmental paths. These will appear later as external learning rekindles memory, and as memory then alters the selection of what is to be learned.

Buried deep within the very substance of our being-bodies lies the unconscious essence of our former spiritual awareness, that is to say, the hidden record of our experience as individual spirits. Each human being has a personal history. Even in its unconscious form, this history has been translated from the cosmic truth of its origins into the more metaphorical terms consistent with the needs of earthly existence. We spend much of our gestation, the nine months preceding birth, making the translation, storing the knowledge in containers we will later have the opportunity to re-open.

Like freeze-dried food, we take our personal essences and alter their shape and texture. We “powder” our histories and intentions, and store the altered contents in our bodies. To reconstitute this dehydrated knowledge, we add not water, but rather the presence of an aware and centered “I,” an identity able to construct reality through sensation, thought, and feeling.

Our task is to move forward (or outward) into the experience of life, into our new environments, to learn how to live and create in these bodies and families and societies, to receive human life as we encounter it. But at the same time, our task is to move backward (or rather, inward) toward a re-union of our newly human ego-selves with our deeper individual natures.

In the scheme of earthly life, centrifugal pressures must be balanced against centripetal forces. These two different directions for experience are designed to be synchronous and symbiotic; each balances and supports the other’s development. A real tragedy of human life occurs when so many of us move hardly at all in either direction. We learn barely enough to operate our bodies and hold our personalities together. We learn by deeply imprinted early habits culled from family and culture in the first precious few years of our infancies and childhoods, and then we learn no more. We never move forward out of our human families, and we never move inward toward our true homes in ourselves.

the imprints of infancy

When a human being is born, no sense of self exists, neither spiritual nor human. All is crushed and obliterated in the merger with the body entering into autonomous life. The baby does not pop out of the womb to announce its presence: “Hi Mom. Hello Doc. Well, hi there table, chair, lamp.” There is no Mom, Doc, table or chair because there is no present and aware self. There is only bio-psychic life force, the body and spirit lurching into union.

And since life cannot sustain without the inhalation and exhalation of breathing, we begin to breathe at our births, kick-starting a motor of inner
rhythms that will be extinguished only at physical death. This is not a comfortable process, this revving of the basic life engine, and cries are heard as the newborn infant begins his breathing rhythms, forcing the fluid from his lungs, stopping the transference of oxygen from mother via the umbilical. What had been the sole source of nutrition and oxygen to support the developing life-to-be now becomes a vestigial organ, a cord tying mother and child together, but a cord that has already been stopped in function and remains only to be physically severed.

There is no calm self-awareness. How could there be? The first moments of life represent a rush of new and strange and awkward sensations bombarding the sensory receptors of the infant. These moments are chaos for the nervous system. Even in the best and most tranquil of birth experiences, bio-chemical and psychological cacophony is the rule. In the worst — in the “forceps nightmare” or caesarian surgery or breech births — it is an agony of over-stimulation, for which the innate consciousness of the spirit cannot possibly be prepared. To call birth overwhelming is to practice intense understatement. Loss of prior self-awareness is not only for the transference of cosmic information from the spirit to the earth, it is also for the protection of the newly-fused human being.

Have you ever observed a baby in its work of developing human personality? Have you ever watched a newborn or young infant lying in its crib? I don’t mean just looked at it, but really identified with the supreme effort of living that is so profoundly evident at that stage?

Nothing is hidden in infancy; everything is revealed in pure, unconditioned behavior. There is no personality to see, at least not in the usual human sense. There is, however, a constant struggle to make sense of the unflagging overload of sensation, the unwavering burden of inner and outer stimulus: the inner impressions of biology moving forward in development, organs and hormone systems and meridian pathways that were not complete at birth, but functioning in limbo, not yet fed with the stuff of life process, but feeding instead directly off the experience and assimilation of the mother, now straining to grow, since the survival of the infant depends on them. Pumping heart with its lub-dub rhythm, the “information” contained in breath itself, the detoxifying and processing of liver and kidneys and spleen, the movement of waste through the intestines toward uncontrolled elimination, and most of all, the prodigious activity of a brain compounding its neural circuitry in constructions of sense and nonsense. Outer impressions abound with changes in temperature and humidity. The sensations of cloth, of wet and dry, of being held and lying down, of the ceiling and the floor and the spaces between. Of the sun and the wind and the night.

This onslaught of sensation is all a bit much — too much — and the infant, the amalgam of body and spirit with obliterated awareness, shakes and strives and strains toward making sense of it all, without conscious intention or the knowledge that this striving is taking place. The effort is staggering, the helplessness pathetic, the struggle heroic. Propelled into the breech by the blind
courage of biological life-force, with no possibility of retreat. The aftermath of birth is no damn picnic.

No wonder babies spend so much of their time sleeping. They are exhausted from the overload, from the endless endeavor of literally becoming a person, even such a tiny person. They are engaged in the most primary and difficult work of their entire lives in simply surviving birth. Each minute, each hour, each day is a lifetime of education, an infinity of experience and growth, a turmoil of change. There is little sense of duration and no patience. Instead, what exists is an explosive here-and-now that extends forward into the unknown and backward off the precipice of birth.

By the time we have lived an hour or a week or a month, we have learned so much that it’s a wonder we are not permanently deadened, used up, worn out. But spirits are strong, and bodies are filled with the determined vitality of earthly biochemistry. We flex and bend in the plasticity of our own yearning for existence, for love and power, for swallowing the world.

In the beginning, life is simply living itself. This is no different for an infant at the human level than it was for the entire universe of Unity. There is only action and movement, rhythms created and just as suddenly broken. Patterns forming and un-forming, coalescing and cancelling and augmenting each other, like waves pounding on the rocky shore of the brain. Incessantly.

But amidst this symphony of disorganized and atonal music, melodies and staccato rhythms rise out of the chaos, become apparent, and persist in what becomes continuity, gradually imprinting themselves into our eager circuits. We are literally impressed with the logic and laws of nature, the Newtonian realms of cause and effect, the Jungian realms of synchronicity. There is hunger followed by feeding followed by elimination, always in sequence, in predictable relation. There is the alternation of light and darkness in day-rhythms, the tuning of biological clocks to earth motions. There is waking followed by sleeping, and the transitional states between. There is the sound of one’s own heart, pumping a message of consistency and security, the on-again, off-again teaching of activity and rest, many cycles per minute. These experiences constitute elementary education of the most basic kind, a magical and subliminal instruction into the illusion of constancy, into the fantasy of living securely forever. Learning to dream this dream is necessary for the personality to create itself, for the human being to take his or her place in life on the earth. The biofeedback loops of such education are a full-time job for the infant, twenty-four hours each day, whether waking or sleeping.

No authentic human identity yet exists, however, no sense of self and not-self. Where there is no relativity, no relatedness, there can be no self. Day defines night, each reinforcing the reality of the other. The water around the fish has no name, for it is everywhere and omnipresent, and therefore invisible. It is not only absurd to name that-which-is-everywhere, it is also redundant and impossible. The infant has not made the leap yet into relatedness, into “this” as separate from
“that,” so there is no self, or rather, all is self, and therefore unnecessary and impossible to define.

This overwhelming condition of limbo will not endure for long. Learning and growth occur so rapidly in the first days and weeks after birth that critical mass will soon be reached. The ingredients of primal knowledge are being hurled into the boiling pot of neural assimilation, and they will soon coalesce, gelling into the tasty soup of self-awareness. How many times will the infant have to move his arm before realizing that it’s an arm, and it’s moving, and it’s his muscles and electro-chemical instructions that are causing the arm to move? Ten times, a hundred, a thousand? No matter; eventually he’ll see the pattern. Homo sapiens is a species of pattern-making, pattern-observing, pattern-sensitive entities. We respond to the rhythms of life, both within us and beyond us.

**the birth of psychological self-awareness**

If you watch a baby very closely, looking into its eyes, focusing your intuition, you can almost hear the spirit — the very adult, competent spirit — saying, “What the hell is all this? Whooosh, earthly life, human reality. Some of it’s not bad: the colors, the shapes, the textures, the warmth. But it’s a bit much, all in all. I gotta get this existence organized.”

The only way to organize the life is to build a self, and the only way to achieve that is to identify and pull away from everything that is not-self.

Pure activity gives way to identification with substance. The basic biological drives of the body provide the focus, and the parents — especially the mother — provide the target of that focus, the setting from which self-awareness will blossom. Before the spirit relaxes from its birth-shock, before it can begin to need even love, there is the hunger of a body-in-the-becoming, a desire to assimilate earth-substance. And some person on the “outside” will fulfill that hunger, providing nourishment, normally the mother.

The first associative patterns that form in our neural circuitry are based on primal hedonism. Hunger is a frustration, provoking the automatic response of crying. Tears will escalate to caterwauling if the frustration is not immediately relieved. Mother responds to the outcry of frustration with a breast full of milk, and soon sucking is mastered. So hunger’s frustration is followed by crying, and that is followed by the bliss of satisfaction that comes with mother’s milk. These associations and their sequence is learned very quickly. Mother and fullness become one almost at once. Can you remember those first associations? Few of us can, for they form the fundamental ground of all that is to come, and they are quickly buried under an avalanche of new awareness patterning.

The spirit, easing out of perplexed confusion and wonder, begins to adjust to the rhythms of human life, only to experience overwhelming emotional reactions to its own biological processes. The body is the teacher, not the student. The
body guides the nascent development of self-awareness by the depth of its desires. Our mother is the primary vehicle to the fulfillment of desires, and the impatient frustration of hunger provokes the spirit-baby to understand that she is necessary for satisfaction. They say that necessity is the mother of invention, but in a very real sense, we “invent” self-awareness by realizing the necessity of mother.

Since mother is not perpetually present, hunger is not always immediately gratified, and the spirit’s first conscious experience of self-awareness usually takes place in a shocking realization. The expression of the will (crying) in response to frustration (hunger) does not always produce immediate relief (milk). The time lag between tears and fulfillment is critical, in that the baby slowly assembles the awesome, inconceivable fact that mother/food/fulfillment are all not-I.

In identifying with what is not-self, in recognizing the importance of our mothers (and fathers), in attempting to possess, to merge with our providers — and in the inevitable failure to achieve that security, we realize. There is a difference between mother and self.

Imagine it. What a jolt. “My God, Mom and I are not merged. We are not the same. Holy cripes! Then what am I?” Or put more precisely, what is “I” anyway?

So paradoxically, the self-awareness does not emerge until the spirit buts up against the wall of non-self. In experiencing what is not-I, however, the spirit-baby necessarily develops the converse conception: that if not-I exists, then I must exist. Self-awareness, then, is the product of an insecurity crisis. Having been thrust into the world at birth by being literally cut apart from union, we move from the jolt of physical separation toward the insanity of alienation in the frustration of our inability to satisfy desires and needs.

The process of self-identity proceeds from the variable reinforcement of pleasure-pain. Hunger produces the pain of frustration and the shock of alienation. Suckling at the mother’s breast relieves the tension and reminds us of the pleasures of union, the comfort of one-ness. The two experiences form a rhythm, each heightening the experience of the other. The idea of self becomes the fulcrum between them.

With the memory of one’s “past” spiritual identity obliterated, the only direction for the quest after self is from the mirror of inter-connectedness with the parents (or, in lieu of literal biological parents, whoever functions as nurturer). We will learn who we are by seeing ourselves reflected in our parents, not only in their behaviors, but in their thoughts, their feelings, their fears, in their unresolved issues — even in the imprints they carry from their own parents and grandparents. Lineage counts.

Thus begins the process of parental imprint, one that does not follow the birth of self-awareness, but is one and the same with that psychological birth. It is the first step in going backward (before birth), inward to the memory of the real self. Earlier in this essay, we explored the stages of intense education a spirit
undertakes prior to birth. That education now becomes pragmatically applicable. We learned about our parents, accepted their predicaments, grew into love with their essences, their struggles, their hopes, the dance of human living they were already caught up in. Now, following physical birth, we begin to call on that knowledge as we learn about, and in a real way, shape our very personalities around what we can absorb and assimilate from the mirror of connection to our parents.

We do not, however, absorb everything our parents are. We do not simply suck the contents of their selfhood into the vessel of our evolving selves, like filling an empty glass with water. That can’t be too strongly stressed. What we take from our parents in imprinting is neither random nor merely circumstantial. What we take is already patterned, selective according to how their predicaments fit into ours (as spiritual entities). We chose them to be our parents in the first place because they were well-suited to the process of making earthly and human what we brought with us to the earth. The bargain for life is usually not consummated if the match between living parents and unborn spirit is not adequate to provide the spirit with the possibility of remembering itself. So now, as human babies, we are not simply absorbing information at random from and about our parents; in fact, we are carefully programmed (in part biologically through DNA, and in part spiritually through the pre-natal study of our circumstances) to select those beliefs that will link us to our own unique evolutionary paths.

We do not become human if we want to see and experience everything — we stay in Unity for that. Becoming human implies selectivity. We have built-in leanings — predispositions toward assimilating some experiences and beliefs while rejecting others. In becoming individualized spirits back in the first instants following the Big Bang, we chose — volunteered for — an existence of “partial divinity.” To live in human life is to accelerate that focus of selectivity, to evolve quickly and in specific ways, to risk much suffering in the hope for more intense evolution, to learn about creating at certain levels while being oblivious to many others.

Our humanness contains two cosmic tasks. The first and more primary of the two is to get the webbing connected to insure the eventual return to our ultimate home in Unity. That task is completed at birth. Even if we die in birth or shortly thereafter, even if we drag through lives of unending pain, grief, suffering, loss, or ignorance, even if we waste our lives totally in unconsciousness, never understanding anything even remotely real about ourselves, we have already succeeded in our primary purpose — to get the webbing connected by giving our unique spiritual experience to the earth. Even the most defeated, degraded, befouled and wasted human being has still performed an heroic function in agreeing to be born. Remembering that fact is the essence of compassion for self and others.

The second task is not what some might assume — the fulfillment of our individual lives here on earth. That is not a task; that is our innate right and
opportunity. No, the second task involves personal fulfillment, but only as a means rather than an end in itself. The second task is to assist the earth.

If we can remember ourselves, if we can fulfill ourselves in translating spiritual experience into human creativity, we can then help in allowing this adolescent species to have a better chance of maturing into independence. Just as an individual spirit can function as a “jet-trail” in the universal webbing, performing a valuable service in the eventual return to an expanded Unity, so an entire species can reach a point in development where it is capable of functioning as an infinitely more powerful agent for webbing-construction. After millions of years of evolution, the human species is quickly reaching a point where it must decide whether to grow up — becoming an independent agent separate from the earth — or whether it has only the foolishness to squander its considerable talents in a frenzy of self-destructive short-sightedness. However slight and socially insignificant our lives may seem, each of us can make a meaningful contribution to our species’ ability to grow into the first choice rather than disintegrate into the second. We do this by remembering and creating — remembering who we are and creating a vehicle out of personality and life circumstances for expression of that divine memory.

a metaphor of parental imprint

Imagine, if you will, that you awaken from sleep to find yourself not in your own comfortable bed, but instead sitting in the cockpit of a giant 747 aircraft. Not an aircraft on the ground, mind you, but in the air, flying on auto-pilot at about 25,000 feet — and climbing. Imagine your surprise, since there is no one else aboard. No pilot, no co-pilot, no navigator, no stewardesses, no passengers. Just you and this monster airplane.

This experience is crudely analogous to what happens to a spirit after birth. The metaphor is far from perfect, by any means, but it’ll do for our purposes. You gradually “awaken” into the awareness that you are occupying — stuck inside — a machine of bewildering complexity (your body), a machine already evolving — in flight — seemingly on auto-pilot, which is to say, operating from its own genetically-driven biological programs. You might expect Rod Serling to be standing placidly on the wing of the aircraft, announcing that you had just entered the Twilight Zone, but no, this isn’t TV, this is real life. Would you be a) exhilarated, b) awed in fascination, c) curious, or d) terrified out of your wits? Well, the answer is e) all of the above. And the spirit inside a human infant does indeed experience all of the above.

Now suspend your disbelief, for we are going to stretch reality a bit. Imagine that in looking out the window, you see two other 747s flying in the skies near you. They are able to execute intricate maneuvers in flight, while you are only climbing slowly on auto-pilot. The other two jets fly near, go away, then return, over and over. What they are doing is landing, picking up fuel for their own
aircraft and yours, then taking off, locating your plane, and executing docking maneuvers where they refuel your 747. All without the slightest bit of involvement or assistance on your part. Any moron can figure out that these are your parents (this is hardly what one would term a sophisticated metaphor).

If this were happening to you, and you’d gone through the various layers of shock, confusion, disbelief, horror, anger, etc., you’d reach a point of understanding that however you’d gotten here, you were going to have to calm down and assess the situation. And if you’d figured out what was going on with these other aircraft, is it unreasonable to assume that you’d come to feel not only dependent on them, but downright thankful for their presence? The fuel they provide, the security of their movement toward you, the similarity of their craft would all combine to produce intense attachment. You would feel very nervous when you couldn’t see the other planes. Every time they did return you would experience such immense relief and joy that to say you “loved” them would be an understatement of the highest order.

Initially, they would seem unable to communicate, or at least not trying. They would simply perform their loving duty of keeping your craft aloft. Their mere presence would be communication enough. But within a short time after your calming to your situation, you would begin to notice special maneuvers they performed that would seem to be “messages” of some sort. A tip of the wings in approach, as if to say hello. A loop-de-loop in parting, as if to let you know that they would return. You’d increasingly notice their attention to you, inside your craft.

There you sit in the cockpit, surrounded by controls, switches, dials, meters, levers, knobs, flashing lights of every conceivable variety. After you’d calmed down and gotten used to the predictability of your continued survival, how long do you think it would take before you would begin to experiment with the controls? Well, although you might think that caution would rule the day, that discretion would be the better part of valor, this is not the case. Keep in mind that there’s nothing to do and no one to do it with. Sure, you have no instruction manual for operating the 747, and the controls would be bewildering in their complexity, but never underestimate the power of two factors in human consciousness: boredom and curiosity. These two are symbiotic motivations in the eager willingness to learn by experiment that so characterizes early human development. What a shame that so many of us soon become dulled and unresponsive to their prodding, but that comes later, somewhat down the road, both in life and in this essay.

The answer to the question of how long would it take for you to begin at least cautious experimentation is simple: not very long. You would start to associate immediately, looking for any correlations between the condition of your flight, changes in your awareness of the aircraft, and readings on the dials. Crudely at first, but with rapidly increasing sophistication, you would come to understand the relation of flight to the controls. Making that first correct association might take a long while, but once made, would become part of a foundation upon
which you could build. The learning would progress in an algebraic curve, each realization spawning ten others. Every time you thought you understood what a certain dial signified, you would hunt for the controls linked with that dial. And you would learn very quickly some of the rudiments of flying your craft, of guiding it, of getting at least some slight sense of self-control and self-determination.

But you would tailor your learning after the model of your parents’ flight. They would be your example. You would want to fly “just like them.”

This metaphor is designed only to emphasize and illustrate certain facets of our early imprinting. As with all such analogs, it omits a good deal more than it reveals. Taken even this far, it stretches out of shape, losing the elasticity of resemblance to real life. Western science has made detailed studies of the mechanics around imprint patterns in infancy. They include the theorists such as Freud, with his emphasis on “instincts” of hunger, pain, aggression, and sexuality; Piaget, with his schemes of assimilation and accommodation, and the Skinnerians, with their classical and operant conditioning. Our 747 metaphor is not meant to challenge these or other accepted schools of thought, for it cannot include such fundamental issues as the dominance of touch attachment through clinging. The metaphor’s only design is to stimulate each of our memories of what it was like to be a spirit operating through a new and rapidly-evolving body. We must invoke the heart to open the mind.

Do you remember how totally consumed you were by the reality you integrated from your parents? Can you recall the intimacy with which you understood them, the prenatal study you were so absorbed in, followed by the trauma of birth and the headlong rushing into dependent attachment? Can you remember how important your parents were to you, how much like Gods they seemed? Can you re-envision the gratitude, the willing acceptance and imitation of their beliefs, at least those you could absorb in your unconscious selectivity? Can you recollect the unhesitating way you adopted certain of their ideas, their anxieties, their hopes and dreams, their frustrations? A tiny percentage of us can; most of us cannot.

For the great bulk of human beings, heredity and family lineage are tantamount to destiny. We go through our lives struggling to connect with or disconnect from our parents, to be just like them or nothing like them. These paradoxes are not either/or, but rather both/and. We wish to resemble our parents, since they are the first security and authority we encounter in life. We love them even before we are born. We also wish to remove ourselves from the shadowy specter of their influence, since they are finally not-self.

The initial learning about human life we undergo from within evolving bodies and yet-undeveloped minds and personalities — not able even to survive independently — is an awesome foundation. Ideally, the foundation is sound, a platform upon which we can build and grow. In practical reality, this is almost never the case. Certainly some individuals move through their lives playing out the tapes of initial imprint without the slightest question of the rightness or
naturalness of such adopted values. Others sense the continuity between the choice of their families as a vehicle to birth through and the lives they later have as adults. Some people agonize over their “misfortune,” blaming everything on seemingly insensitive and unloving parents. Most people walk a middle path — a little questioning, a little acceptance; gratitude here, resentment there. True perspective on our families of origin is a rare commodity. Deep, calm understanding with both heart and mind about the reasons we chose the parents we did, about what they taught us and what we chose to learn — this comprehension is precious.

It is also necessary. We need our parents, not simply for birth and through infancy to childhood and through adolescence, but far beyond. We need to know what is them and what is us inside ourselves. Respect is impossible without this, creativity is artificial, and the relief of spiritual memory unattainable. Going back to childhood is not enough, despite what certain psychological therapies seem to suggest. We need to go even further back, before time, before our bodies were formed, back all the way to the choice to come to the earth.

We can neither embrace nor ignore our families. They are the bridge that spans the realms of human and being. Our obvious task is two-fold: to grow up, which to grow forward through time toward true autonomy and full-hearted interdependence, building respectfully on the foundation of our parents’ lives, recognizing the gifts they offered us; but also to grow backward, all the way out of time, back toward the clear and loving understanding we had of our parents’ essences, back to the simple compassion we had for them, back before we were born.

This combination of movements in time — forward through real life and backward in spirit — can be understood in many ways. We can, for instance, describe the forward movement of environmental stimuli and the backward movement of spiritual memory in different terms, such as input and output.

**input and output**

*Input* — as defined here — represents patterns of stimulation that reach us from the environment, patterns to which we are programmed, or “spiritually” sensitive. Our most fundamental environmental *input* comes from the parents who are nurturing, training, and raising the infant. *Input* goes beyond just the parents, however, to include every kind of stimulus: human, cultural, and natural. Sources of *input* include such diverse stimuli as the habits and beliefs of family members; the influence of television, movies, magazines, and all mass media; the formal structures of the educational system; the physical environment of the home; the weather conditions characteristic of the location of childhood; the political milieu existing within and around the nation of birth during the formative years; even internal changes within one’s physical body, such as natural growth phases, accidents, disease, and recovery.
Input is not random; it is patterned. And not every environmental stimulus is input; only those patterns of stimulation for which our sensors are genetically and karmically tuned will show as blips on the radar. What is beautiful music for one person is merely background noise for another. The panorama of differentiation in human receptivity to stimulation is nearly infinite, for we are all “looking for” highly individualized patterns of environmental energy. We process our environments according to our selective perception. Even people in nearly identical situations are known to see and understand what is occurring very differently. Witnesses to the same objective event often relate radically different experiences. In fact, it is the exception rather than the rule for different individuals to arrive at the same experience in any given situation. Identical experience is sufficiently rare that it is considered an extraordinary kind of empathy.

Output is the gradual memory of self that the human being begins from birth to re-program into his evolving personality. Output is a process, a re-emergent awareness about what is important in the life-path. It is usually a gradual product of living, akin to the development of inner magnetic centers that pull us toward certain choices and repel us away from others.

The experience of output is sometimes conscious in definition, in that some of us feel occasional “messages” from within that seem to come from a distinctly different level of consciousness than our ordinary sentience. Output, however, need not be “conscious” to be effective. Some individuals are naturally in tune with their output, without ever having to consider what it is, where it comes from, or why it’s present. How we define our experience of output is less important than our willingness to factor it into our choices. In other words, sophistication in identifying output is not always required.

Examples of output are more difficult to list than the relatively obvious sources of input, since output experiences are so often intangible, like hunches or inner voices. We’ve all had the experience of struggling to understand some mechanical assembly or logical sequence: why the toilet keeps running after flushing, how to adjust the tension on a sewing machine, or what happened when we programmed the VCR and ended up with the hog reports on tape rather than the movie we wanted. When the sequence of steps in the logic chain finally becomes clear to us, we have an “Ah Ha!” experience — the proverbial light bulb over the head.

That moment of realization brings a wonderful feeling of coherency. Suddenly our world makes sense. One small step toward mastery allows us to feel graceful control and conscious creativity. The realizations of output represent a similar wonderful feeling. Their focus, however, is not on the dryer or sewing machine or VCR, but rather on the meaningful relationship between events and circumstances in our lives and the inner path of our long journey back home to divinity.

For instance, an intimate relationship may have been confusing or difficult; how could we have been drawn to someone who causes us so much hassle? A
moment of output realization might occur where we suddenly understand why our partner’s presence is meaningful or necessary. We “get” the lesson. Or we may have succumbed to an illness (input), say, a bout of intestinal flu, with symptoms of diarrhea alternating with constipation. After four or five days of blind suffering, we might suddenly realize that we’d been hanging on to something in our lives — a pattern or goal — that we need to eliminate, so naturally the virus overcame our immune system in the biological area of elimination, where we were momentarily weakened.

In the same way that input does not include every stimuli from the environment but only certain patterns of stimulation, so output is equally selective. Much of what comes out of us in the process of living as human beings is ordinary, a mechanical response to life’s routines and pressures.

We might plan a vacation or a business trip. The rational factors involved in such strategy and decision-making often have little or nothing to do with output, being linked instead with circumstances beyond our control, with superficial distractions, or with short-range ego concerns. As the scheduled time approaches, we may experience waves of inner resistance. Inner sensors go off, like smoke alarms sounding. Something inside is holding back. We try to shrug off the feelings as illogical and groundless, but they persist, tugging at the sleeve of our consciousness like children trying to get a parent’s attention. The significance of these inner feelings is not based on our always obeying their pull or later demonstrating their validity — we may not decide to postpone our trip, and, likewise, we may never discover the “reasons” for our feelings of resistance. But the simple fact that we registered the presence of these inner voices is meaningful, and to the extent that we value these intuitions in our overall decisions, we are experiencing output.

Prior to birth, input and output exist, but in radically altered form. The spirit is totally aware of its output, the sum total of its experience. The spirit knows where it has come from and where it needs to go. It knows what sort of life it seeks to create. In choosing an earthly setting for human life by deciding on a set of parents and a time in history with a specific environment for growth, the spirit “sees” potential input, the essence of what may unfold in the life-to-come. It does not and cannot know the particular events that will occur, for the spirit does not yet exist in the limited dimensions of human time and space here on earth; nor does it know precisely how it will react to being human — existing in personality is drastically different than existing in spirit. The limitation is so drastic, the potential for growth and change so dramatic, that anticipating what will occur in an incarnation is nearly impossible. The spirit does know the intent of the life and the general flow of probabilities, however. So prior to birth, input and output are truly different sides of the same coin, not at all distinct. After birth, a separation occurs. Input and output become independent processes, each working in its own sphere to form the individual, to shape the human self.
In a natural life, input and output are gradually re-integrated by the maturing individual into a mutually supportive feedback loop: each phase amplifies and refines the other.

Being selectively stimulated by the environment provokes certain kinds of “memories” within each of us. If we receive one kind of pressure, we remember a certain aspect of our spiritual background and purpose; another kind of stimulus results in feeling a very different aspect of the spiritual self. We learn about our life-dramas according to our stimuli, and our sense of purpose gradually develops accordingly, in multiple facets and levels.

Conversely, the input we tune to is slowly refined through the growing memory of the spiritual self’s true needs. In “remembering” what we’re on the earth for, we come to recognize what is personally important to us (as opposed to what is simply life randomly taking shape around us). The more we remember, the more we tend to intentionally select certain kinds of environmental stimuli in order to enhance and fulfill our specific purposes. We also learn to filter out meaningless input, to ignore, avoid, or devalue stimuli that won’t help us develop and fulfill our innate life-purposes.

Using this mutual feedback loop to provoke the memory of intention and the creation of meaning is not without pitfalls. Among the many traps that may seduce us are oversimplification and obsessive focus. Because life is so confusing for human beings, we tend to focus in one-dimensional linearity rather than in three-dimensional wholism. Too many of our solutions are simply short-sighted substitutions that produce worse problems down the line, rather than authentic changes to address our conflicts. Because we are so afraid of suffering, we tend to experience dramatic but incomplete realizations about why we act or feel a certain way. What many of us consider realizations are often little more than the pop-culture, quick-fix images of Hollywood, rather than the slow-cooked, considered comprehension of real-life maturity.

In moments of great or sustained stress, we tend to latch onto simplistic answers for the questions concerning why certain things happened or didn’t happen to us.

I’m a failure because my parents didn’t love me. The world never gives me a break. Everyone is against me. Using negative input as an excuse to explain unfulfillment inhibits and delays unfoldment of successful spiritual purpose. How our parents treat us in childhood or how the world judges us does have significant bearing on the shape of our lives. But to blame our parents or the world for our troubles is a victim’s tactic, a manifestation of rageful powerlessness.

I don’t deserve happiness. I’m too stupid/ugly/foolish to live well. Everything bad is my fault. Using negative output to explain our difficulties is equally self-defeating. The assumption of full responsibility in believing ourselves to be the author of our own destinies is a courageous way of viewing the world. But to presume that everything that happens to us is something we “caused” to happen is hardly ever totally true. Blaming ourselves is as unproductive as pointing an accusing
finger at the world; neither is self-respectful. And we all fall into those traps from time to time.

Curiously, positive experiences are often just as stressful as negative ones, and we can fall into similar traps of rationalization.

I’ve a success only because of my parents. Positive input is certainly helpful, but it falls short as an exclusive explanation for life’s bounty. Our successes are almost never solely the result of our environments.

I get all the credit for my happiness. Positive output is a measure of inner confidence — faith in the power of our spiritual selves — but as a reason for everything good that comes to us, it represents the narcissism of spiritual hubris.

Balancing these four different rationales (I get all the credit; I take all the blame; I get none of the credit; I take none of the blame) is a tricky business indeed. In any given situation, one outlook may constitute a higher proportion of correct causality, but all four are always in operation to some extent. Placing a value on input and output requires the sensitivity and perspective that come only from the experience of both confidence and humility.

To be input-sensitive is to understand that we are shaped by the events occurring around us, events over which we often have little or no actual control. To be output-sensitive is to understand that we influence our environments according to some inner mechanism, a mechanism about which we may feel little or no tangible awareness. Each is true; both are necessary.

We operate from within the here-and-now of our awareness in both the present (actually) of the one world around us, and the past (spiritually) of the many worlds within us. To a large extent, we create our futures — our lives — based on how well we are able to symbiotically align the two worlds. Can we encourage them to reinforce each other in a positive and self-loving way? Can we learn to control our environments to better remember the most beneficial aspects of our spiritual intentions? Can we remember our spiritual pasts to better select the right environments for our human selves?

Obviously, no one can absolutely control either the outer environment or inner memories of spiritual intention. Life goes on all around us, run by no one in particular, composed of many beings creating many interactive life-dramas, operating at many levels simultaneously. What may happen to any particular individual can never be absolutely limited.

If we control our surroundings by never leaving our houses, we can still suffer kidney failure, a burn from the stove, fire, flood, etc. We can never completely control our environments. Life is constantly playing trick or treat on us, shouting “Surprise!” as it overflows into our personal spheres of self-awareness. In the same manner, we never completely understand our spiritual selves and the total levels of purpose we entered into life hoping to achieve.

Part of the mysterious, awful wonder of human existence is that we can never adequately summarize the whole of who we are. If anyone tells you that your
ultimate spiritual purpose can be put into words, don’t believe it. The most we can hope for is that in any given period, at any certain time, in any particular situation, we may be able to crystallize enough of the essence of who we are, in an appropriate enough manner, to allow a truly creative response to what prompts us from within and pushes us from without.

Our spiritual life-purposes are vast in background and opportunistic in evolution. If a person could get even a glimpse of his total spiritual experience, it would be like running too much current through a light-bulb. We would suffer instant burn-out, or at the very least, momentary shut-down in the shock of over-amping.

Time is a way of keeping everything from happening at once. We are designed to gradually remember our spiritual selves in small bursts of awareness, just as we are designed to gradually become effective, efficient, and graceful in structuring our environments to suit our purposes. Too much, too soon is always debilitating, and sometimes it’s downright fatal.

living on an outpost

So much for the predicaments we face in arriving on the planet and moving through the early stages of personal growth. What happens as we grow beyond infancy and childhood, into adolescence and eventual adulthood? How do we find a niche in the social world, yet still manage to retain and express our individuality? To investigate this part of our human melodrama, a change in metaphors is timely. Enter Hollywood.

Among the many uniquely inventive American creations is the “Western,” a genre of movie-making whose beginnings can be traced back to the birth of the film medium itself. As a category of film, Westerns deal not only with a fictional and highly stylized account of one period in American history, but also with a set of universal symbols concerning the human predicament. Certain aspects of the genre do indeed reveal and romanticize our singularly American character, but, in addition, they reveal even more the essence of an emerging crisis in human evolution.

The nature of film is allegorical, two-dimensional, so all movies are symbolic, however much we may be seduced into their illusion of reality, but the Western more than most allows and even encourages us to see through the transparency into the extended symbolic metaphor it communicates. The enduring popularity of the genre is testimony to the universality of its message.

Consider one typical Western plot, the kind seen in countless grade-B Technicolor epics from the 1950s. We open with a wide-angle shot of a humanless environment: this is the West. The West: deserts and mountains, sagebrush, cacti, raging rivers cutting through huge canyons beneath towering mesas. The
landscape is a vast and uncharted wilderness, virgin but seemingly barren, haunting, beautiful, majestic, but strangely foreboding and alien.

Civilization gradually moves westward into these unknown lands, spilling over in an almost chemical osmosis. The European immigrants who flocked to these shores in the 19th century discovered a hitch in their fantasies of America. Cities paved with gold? Hardly. Crowded cities in the east produced constrictive social pressures, and the cities overflowed their excess populace westward toward freedom, toward the renewed dream of open space, good farmland, and easy wealth. Manifest destiny was the philosophical justification for Horace Greeley’s order to “Go West, young man, Go West.” Westward settlement was a utopian fantasy, a longing for escape from the pressures of unrelieved sharing, a hope for the discovery of personal fulfillment, freedom, and ownership.

Our movie environment represents new lands of evolution, analogous to the unknown areas of the human mind. The settlers who moved west were no more courageous than those of us who feel constricted by imprisonment in our bodies and psyches. We move into new regions of the mind by necessity, having exhausted the older resources of antiquated beliefs. Having plumbed the depths of the known and familiar, having encountered the limits of growth in ourselves, having met the frustration and lack of creativity imposed by habitual patterns of living, we seek to enlarge our scope, to refresh our spirits.

The habits and routines of our ordinary lives are sometimes locked cages of redundancy, boredom and anger, too much life concentrated in too small an arena. Though our needs for security admonish us to stay in the certainty of the familiar, nagging unfulfillment and the hope of a better life may eventually push us to “go west.” Even if we finally accept the risk of change, however, throwing off the shackles of complacent passivity to strike out into unexplored territory, we still need the comforts of safety. Should no real safety be available (we are, after all, moving through uncharted waters), then we’ll settle for the illusion of safety. Even the mirage of an oasis in the desert is momentarily comforting.

**the fort**

In our movie, the camera pans across the starkly beautiful landscape, and we see an unnatural form in the distance, a human structure oddly out of place in such barren surroundings, almost as if a spaceship had landed on another world (but then that’s a different Hollywood genre...). This seemingly artificial structure is *The Fort*, a particularly important symbol in our western movie plot, for it represents a point of collective security, the one spot of safety amidst the dangers of the unknown. A microcosm of civilization, it represents human law and order, a bastion in the wilderness. The Fort is a garrison, manned by military personnel for the protection of civilian settlers, and what it may lack in the aesthetic veneer of mannered, civilized living, it more than makes up for in the rugged enforcement of discipline.

Earlier in the essay we used the term The Center to describe the togetherness-aspect of human life. Each of us is a member of the Center, for each and every human being has the wish to share with the others of his species, to belong, to relax in the security of communion. The Fort is the same as the Center, for when we are in the Fort, we conform.

**Conform**: a transitive verb,

1. to act in accordance with an established rule or standard.
2. to be the same or very similar.
3. to be in accord; to agree.

Conformity is the essence of the Center. The part in each of us that longs for togetherness is willing, eager, and even dutiful in conformity, for being secure with others is possible only when there is full recognition of the agreement existing between individuals. We are together only when we are in harmony, when we are essentially the same.

Under ideal conditions, this conformity occurs as a natural product of our deep desire for gentle togetherness and graceful union with those around us. All of us are part of the Center, and we seek to express that level of ourselves as a necessary complement to the separateness of our individuality. But when the environment is alien, as is obviously the case in our Western, then the Center becomes militant and self-protective, holding us together by force to ensure the survival of the species as a whole.

Thus the Fort. When togetherness is in danger (or, at least perceived as being endangered), forces are marshalled to insure conformity. Power hierarchies assert themselves in rigid pyramids. Rules and regulations prescribe appropriate behavior, and at the same time proscribe behaviors considered inappropriate. What ways of being or acting are inappropriate? Anything that threatens our agreement by weakening the appearance of sameness, for without that the Center will not long survive.

In the Fort, we live and feel and behave according to collective pressure. We have a rank in the hierarchy, a kind of subtly differentiated sameness, and our rank carries with it both responsibilities and privileges; it provides secure identity but limits our freedom. The rules are determined by the collective
without regard for the individual, a greatest-good-for-the-greatest-number method of maintaining life.

In the movie, we cut to a close-up of the Fort. The gates open, and out rides a column of troopers, U.S. cavalry. Just as the Fort is a microcosm of the larger culture, so the column is a microcosm of the Fort. This is culture evolving into the unknown, sending out smaller and smaller units in advance, like tendrils extending from the root base of a plant.

We know the column to be from the Center, for though it is made up of individual human beings, we notice that their dress and behavior is similar (in agreement) in the extreme. They are regimented, and the column itself is even called a regiment. Each trooper wears a uniform ("uni-form" — to become as one): blue tunics with a single row of brass buttons down the front, blue trousers with a gold stripe down each leg's side, cavalry sabres to one side, holstered pistols on the other, carbines over the shoulder, Stetson hats with crossed swords above the brim, all riding brown mares. Some are privates, some corporals, some sergeants — the differentiated hierarchy of rank — but each is similar, with differences in rank marked by distinguishing symbols: patches, epaulets, stripes on the arm.

In the Center where we are One (or seek to become One), we are uniform. We strive to resemble one another, to reveal our togetherness, and, in fact, we go to great pains to make sure others know we are the same as they are. We choose clothing that identifies us as friend rather than foe. Certainly our bodies are similar (two arms, two legs, etc.), but this is usually not enough to feel one-ness with others. Similar bodies might be enough on the Moon, but here on the earth we are so sensitized to the anxiety-of-otherness that we forget how similar we are. We go to sleep to the obvious. So we begin with the superficial and gradually move inward toward recognizable uniformity. We develop shared languages, shared customs, shared ways of feeling and internally processing reality — shared beliefs about what is "good" and what is "bad." Since union is so often an intangible, and since we are all afraid of the alienation caused by our burden of individual separateness, we go to great lengths to demonstrate first to ourselves and then to others that we are truly like them, really with them, or at least willing to learn to be so.

But wait, there’s someone in our movie scene who’s obviously different, who stands out — someone who does not conform.

At the head of the column is a single figure. He is in uniform like the others, but he has epaulets on his shoulders rather than stripes on his arm, and his tunic has a double rather than single row of brass buttons. Finally, he sits astride a white stallion instead of a brown mare. This is the superior office in charge of the column, a major or perhaps a colonel. He is the same yet different, separated by virtue of his rank. He is at the pinnacle of the hierarchy, the top of the heap. Having risen through the ranks, having proven himself in responsibility, he has been awarded the distinction of relative uniqueness in privilege. His uniqueness is relative, however, not absolute, since he is responsible not only for making
sure the rules are enforced, but also for setting an example, an ideal image for those beneath him in the hierarchy. He is only symbolically an individual; more than any of the other troopers, he is limited by his position as the icon of the Collective, the leading representative of the Center in an idealized personal form. He is an archetype.

The colonel represents the leaders of culture, the guardians of the Center, the paragons of collective virtue through acceptable behavior and correct achievement. Within the Center, we are told that if we toe the line and obey the rules, yet demonstrate the contradictory qualities of personal achievement, ambition, and creativity over a long period of subservience, we will gradually rise in rank until one day, we, too, can be awarded the mythic badge of individuality. But personal achievement must always be couched in terms of the safety to the collective; ambition must never extend beyond the boundaries defined as acceptable, and creativity must be limited to forms already established within the Center. In other words, pure or radical individuality is not tolerated if it challenges the security of what is regular. The privileges bestowed upon those who succeed are always balanced against the responsibility of maintaining standard forms of behavior. The higher up the scale you climb, the more individual you appear to be, and yet the more regimented you are. The payoff is in greater power, not greater freedom.

So here we have our column of cavalry riding out from the Fort. Metaphorically, this is culture riding outward from within the safety of the Center, riding into unknown territory, trying to discover untapped new resources through which it can feed itself to grow and prosper — that is, assuming it can survive and tame the dangers of the unknown.

Are there any “true” individuals in this movie scenario? Certainly the troopers are all clones — nameless extras to be sacrificed in the inevitable battle scene, character actors, or stars-to-be early in their careers who haven’t yet made a name for themselves in Hollywood and thus carry insufficient clout. Even in the script, the colonel is only a symbolic individual, a figure with privileges of rank but even greater pressures of conformity. More often than not, he is portrayed by an actor who radiates the “feel” of collective authority, someone with chiseled features and wooden delivery, like Charlton Heston. So are there any true individuals here?

Yes, there are, but we haven’t seen them yet. The cavalry column is riding away from the Fort, into the unknown. But from the opposite direction — out of the unknown — we see one or two solitary figures riding on horseback toward the column. Who are they? They are the scouts, and they are the true individuals in this movie.

*the scouts*
We see them first from off in the distance; all true individuals initially appear to have come out of nowhere, out of the unknown, with no history, no precedent, as if their appearance were miraculous. As they ride up to the column, we notice that they’re very different-looking, almost alien in appearance, an odd blend of the idiosyncratic and the commonplace.

The scouts sit astride nimble pinto ponies rather than the standard brown mares of the troopers or the imposing white stallion of the colonel. They are not clean shaven, but instead sport full beards or scruffy faces. And their clothing can hardly be called a uniform. They may wear cavalry tunics, but their jackets might just as easily be the gray of the confederacy as the blue of the union. Instead of regulation Stetsons, they wear coonskin caps or perhaps a rakish top hat, moth-eaten and weathered but still serviceable. Their trousers may be buckskin rather than denim. Even their weapons are unique: a hunting rifle rather than a carbine, a wicked-looking Bowie knife stuffed into a boot.

The scouts ride up to the column and go directly to the colonel, as if they had some special exemption from the usual protocol of military hierarchy. And he listens to them intently, taking no umbrage at their informality, for he knows that without their advice, the column may well be lost.

Who are these scouts? They are former members of the Center who came west to the new and unknown territories years or decades earlier, long before the Fort ever existed. They came before any traces of civilization arrived, before the settlers, before the soldiers, when the West was truly a mystery.

How did they get there in the wilderness? Some came as explorers or trappers, plying their trades further and further into virgin territory. Some came because of wanderlust or an inner need for “elbow room,” an itch to see what was beyond the ordinary. Some came to escape the laws of the Center, renegades or outlaws seeking freedom from a culture of rules and regulations they couldn’t abide. Some came because they were dreamers in search of riches or adventure. But for whatever reasons they came, each confronted the unknown and learned to adapt, to an alien environment, one that forced them to befriend their aloneness and confront the alienation that is the price of such freedom.

Why did they then choose to become scouts? The motivations are as varied as the individuals themselves. Some may have discovered after years in the wilderness that they could no longer live a life of so much aloneness. They may have discovered in themselves a deep and long-buried wish for contact with the world of humanity. Some may have grown weary at the constant struggle for survival such individuality demands; they may have longed for an easier life. Others might have realized the inevitability of civilization’s encroachment, or felt an inner need to make a contribution to their society, however far from the Center they may have once felt compelled to live.

More pragmatically, they may have realized the collective value of their unique experience. Having mastered this alien environment — territory that was now becoming attractive for the evolving growth of civilization — these men
now saw that their experience had gained real worth to the collective as it moved into their territory. Their experience was now sufficiently valuable to others to neutralize their former negative status as outlaws or renegades. They found themselves in a perfect position to receive the payoff from culture that had previously been denied them by circumstance, temperament, or choice. They had survived courageously in the face of collective rejection, and since their territory was now suddenly considered valuable, their stock had shot up in value.

So these half-breed outcasts offered their services to the cavalry. Idiosyncratic to the last because of their newly powerful bargaining position, they refused to give up the symbols of their independence, the hard-won badges of their uniqueness. Though they might compromise in following certain unaccustomed rules and procedures, they would not condescend to wear uniforms, and they had their own horses and weapons, thank you.

The bargain was good for both sides, so a mutual contract was struck. To protect the evolution of “civilization” (as these transplanted Europeans understood it) and tame the alien environment, the cavalry needed the special knowledge and expertise offered by the scouts. The scouts, on the other hand, needed the camaraderie or the money or the comfort, i.e., some sense of belonging to a larger whole, that only the collective could provide. Living alone and independent, free from the constraints of conformity, free to discover a unique niche in a strange world, may be necessary, even critical to people with “scout” temperaments, but it is not enough for a fulfilled life. Though each human being embodies at least a little of the scout, the renegade, the explorer, and the outlaw, we all need to share, to contribute, to belong somehow. Human life is a balance: alone on the one side, together on the other.

If you have not confronted your isolation, if you have not discovered your unique relation to an inner and alien environment, if you have not faced up to and befriended your separateness, then you have nothing of true personal value. Sure, you may rise slowly through the ranks by careful obedience and conformity, but odds are you’ll probably not get very far. You’ll never have the freedom of the scouts even if by some long chance you achieve the privileges of the colonel. More likely, you will remain a clone in the regimental column: a nameless, faceless extra in the movie, to be sacrificed in the first skirmish and buried at the bottom of the credits. And all the while, you’ll be living at the mercy of a book of rules you didn’t create. You may tell yourself you’re an individual, but you’re not, not even if you’re a general.

On the other hand, if you have been a renegade, defying the authority of the Center, forging ahead obstinately in the face of social disapproval, risking everything in a compulsive and willful separateness, challenging the ordinary, the normal, the acceptable, refusing to give an inch to conformity, then you can never receive the blessings and comforts of human sharing. You cannot trust, you cannot surrender, you cannot contribute. You will be outside of the bubble looking in, never directly experiencing the wonderful sense that we are all one family, united in a great adventure together. You’ll never have it, and you’ll
insist that you don’t need it. Secretly, however, you’ll long for the safety of togetherness, and your longing will be a curse of invisible and private suffering.

This is among the most basic paradoxes of human living: we cannot finally survive alone, and yet we cannot live perfectly together either. We must somehow manage to embrace both in the same body, in one life.

All the characters in the movie are contained with each psyche: we are the trappers and explorers and outlaws who must eventually become scouts, and we are the nameless dutiful troopers doing our jobs, and we are the officers living with privilege and responsibility for others, and yes, we are even the Indians who lurk behind rocks waiting in ambush for ourselves. We are simultaneously within and outside the law, part of culture and yet separate from it, responsible for ourselves and others and yet driven to discover our independence. We are our own worst enemies and best friends, asleep in obedience of conformity and electrically alive in rebellion toward freedom. The Indian lands of our unknown territory are inside, invisible, intangible, part of our spiritual background. Learning about that territory, surviving in it, befriending it — remembering it — is our special work.

**scouts and outposts**

The dictionary defines the word “scout” in this way: one sent out to gather and bring back information, especially one sent out from a main body, as of troops, to observe and obtain information about the terrain or dangers ahead, so as to minimize those dangers for the main body to follow...

Before we can become scouts, we must first live for a long time on an Outpost. No one hires us as tenderfeet. No one says, “We want to hire you as a scout. So pack your bags and leave civilization. Go out in the wilderness and live for a long time, alone, by yourself, with no help — no support, no communication. Then, after you’ve learned the lay of the land and mastered survival, when we’re ready to civilize the wilderness, you can be a scout for us.” No, this is not how it works.

Scouts are “sent out to gather information,” but not by civilization. People don’t become scouts because the Center wishes them to, but because they are misfits. Such people do not fit into the conforming patterns that are required by the Center. Their understanding of the world is idiosyncratic, highly unique, often a bit warped, and those orientations combine to make them outcasts.

Every human personality is composed of many facets. Some of the intersecting planes that make up our personalities are drawn to togetherness, some are drawn to separateness. As human beings, we keep at least certain parts of ourselves in the Center and other parts of ourselves in the wilderness, on our individual Outposts.

We go to church on Sundays, or belong to the Rotary, or wear blue jeans, buy Fords or Hondas, work to make a living, get married and have babies, get old
and sick, and eventually die — just like everyone else. We laugh and cry and celebrate and grieve. We share many beliefs with everyone else. We obey most social rules, most of the time, just like everyone else. In our conformity, we are comforted by the assumption of belonging, however great or small that sense may be. We cannot help but identify with our comrades. This is what the *Center* is — collective consciousness — an amalgam of energies to which each of us makes a contribution. No one, and I mean *no one*, can exist entirely outside the *Center*.

Simultaneously, every one of us is on an *Outpost*. We are alone, often misunderstood, and frequently angry in our alienation. Our anger drives the wedge of separation further between ourselves and others. But that anger is merely a superficial reason for our isolation. Our fears of being misunderstood, negatively judged, and rejected by others are equally superficial, in that these feelings are part of the trauma of forgetfulness, part of the spiritual amnesia we undergo at birth.

We do not intend to be outcasts, nor do we choose to become scouts. We abandon the security of togetherness to explore unfamiliar territory with the possibility of later becoming scouts because we have no other choice. While we may forget our pasts, the legacy of our individual spiritual backgrounds bleeds into our lives. We are not merely alone; we have unique perspectives on the myriad problems of human experience.

**the moving center**

Where we are together, we are in the *Center*. Where we are alone, we are on our *Outposts*. This is given, inevitable, almost static. But life is not static. The Center moves. Literally, it evolves. In a crude two-dimensional representation, the Center is shaped like an amoeba, an amorphous mass, more round than angular. The Center pulsates, constantly changing its shape by pushing sections of its circumference outward while pulling other arcs inward. It rolls and flows, sometimes sending out tendril-like extensions, other times moving smoothly along a wide arc of its circumference.

Sprinkled out beyond the Center are an infinity of individual Outposts. As the Center fluidly moves, it moves toward, encounters, flows over, and eventually assimilates certain Outposts. The movement of the Center may take it further from some Outposts, leaving them functionally stranded.

The Center is not aware of the surrounding Outposts (indeed, it refuses to recognize even the existence, much less the validity, of any Outpost beyond its boundaries). The Center becomes aware of an Outpost only if and when it flows into the Outpost’s foreign territory. Then the individual human beings who occupy the “selected” Outposts become suddenly visible. Their value skyrockets; what was before that point the void of utter worthlessness is suffused with the
instant celebrity of scouthood and all that comes with this new role: heightened status, special privileges, and the burden of sudden responsibility to others.

Consider the would-be actor who toils for years in the backwaters of dinner theatre, summer stock, and movie walk-ons. He despairs of ever seeing his name in lights, but nevertheless continues the endless round of humiliating auditions and expensive acting classes, all the while supporting himself through hard times by jobs as a waiter, taxi driver, or carpenter. Then one day he wins a small but significant role in what will turn out to be a fabulously successful box office hit. Instantly his status changes. His agent is flooded with offers. Recognition by the Hollywood trade paper Variety spills over into a cover picture on TV Guide. Suddenly he is famous, an overnight success.

At any moment during his long struggle to succeed in show business, our actor might have given up. More than likely, he considered just that many times, and may even have renounced his dream once or twice. But pursuing an acting career alone, with no support or validation, was symbolically part of his personal Outpost. His discovery and subsequent success represented the Center moving into his territory. The long years of struggle, of scraping by to survive, all the while developing his skills and talents, finally paid off in recognition and celebration by the collective.

Other examples of manning an Outpost are more subtle. The woman who most wants a family and children may find herself alone, struggling against biological or social infertility. The man who is blind in one eye may want to pilot an airplane more than anything else in the world, only to find himself rejected by the Byzantine rules of regulatory agencies. The Central American immigrant who comes to America in search of a better life may find himself insulated by language barriers and ostracized by racial stereotypes. Conversely, the person from a wealthy family, born with the proverbial silver spoon, may wage a life-long battle to overcome the burden of privilege. Everyone has a story, for everyone is on an Outpost.

Consider the inventor who toils in his garage-laboratory, applying his idiosyncratic genius to the business of creating “a better mouse trap.” If he manages to invent velcro, the microchip, or anti-gravity suspenders, the world may beat a path to his door, which represents the Center embracing his Outpost. Or it may not.

History is full of instances where the creators of devices that revolutionized our daily lives and change the face of civilization received almost nothing for their inventions — neither recognition nor monetary compensation. Even more, history does not record the myriad stories of people who walked off into the desert of individuality, never to be heard from again.

What about those who occupy overlooked Outposts? What if the Center never moves into their territory, leaving them to end their lives as they have lived them — alone, and perhaps alienated? Are these tragic figures? Our opinion depends on how we evaluate the struggle of individuality. We can certainly have
compassion, even pity, for those who end their lives embittered by lack of shared fulfillment or collective recognition. But what of the millions of people who loyally occupy their Outposts, never losing faith, but heroically going it alone? How should we feel about them, since even we ourselves may end up among their numbers?

Is aloneness nothing more than the waiting period before the payoff of togetherness? Cosmically, yes — since we are all ultimately headed back to Unity. But in human terms, aloneness is not merely a temporary condition or a means to the end of togetherness in belonging. Our individuality is a valid, necessary state of being, and occupying our Outposts has its own reward. Learning to survive in an alien environment is a measure of our spiritual power. Knowing that we are connected to God even in the absence of support from others is an end in itself. Keeping faith in our innate goodness is not just a learner’s permit to be tossed aside once we pass the cultural tests of acceptance.

Being discovered by the Center is not akin to being rescued from isolation. The celebrity of a revered scout has profound costs as well as tangible benefits. More than one scout has become giddy with his new-found power. More than one has been co-opted by the riches of the collective. Power does not always corrupt, but it can, and it sometimes does. Money is not the root of all evil, but the seductions of wealth can lead to decadence and loss of integrity, and we see the evidence in the empty lives of those who succumb.

Ministers and politicians are among the most obvious scouts used by the Center to keep us safe during evolution into unknown territory. These careers are more truly callings than professions. The public trust held by those in the church and in government is a responsibility that should make them ever wary about leaving their Outposts. And yet, the list of scandals among ministers and politicians is excessive, tantamount to stereotype, and testimony to the seductive pull of power and privilege.

In the spiritual game, there is an old saying: If you see the Buddha on the road, kill him, for he is not the Buddha. Should your Outpost be embraced by culture, where you are then given special status, singled out for your abilities as a scout, you are, in effect, seeing the Buddha on the road. Offer what you have because it is right to give it. Take what you truly feel to be your just reward. But never believe the lies culture will tell you about yourself. Never succumb to the seduction.

Embracing one’s individuality illuminates the window of spiritual memory. Those who abandon the ascetic challenge of their Outposts for the relative comforts of the Center never fully remember who they are. Their sacred connection to the ultimate divinity is sullied when they forsake their personal mission. Their spiritual evolution slows when they lose their ferocity as self-sufficient spiritual warriors.

Whatever your Outpost may be — whatever constitutes your particular genius or unique perspective on life — keep the faith. Let your individuality shine through, and think of your aloneness as a scout thinks about his territory.
Watch and learn. Survive and prosper. Honor your mission by following your deepest passion. Be ready to offer the best of who you are and the best of what you have. Envision your contribution to culture, should you ever be called on to offer your wisdom, and enjoy your occasional dreams of reward. But never sell out. Never abandon your Outpost. Maintain your integrity whether you spend all your days alone or are celebrated as a scout.

As an individual and unique human being, you are spiritually on point, in the advanced forward position, operating as the eyes and ears of God. So stay alert. Don’t stop listening, and keep your eyes peeled.

back to unity

Unity is the final, ultimate Oneness. It existed before anything else, before our universe, and though we may come to embrace Unity again, we cannot probe beyond it. Theoretically, Unity might be only a penultimate reality; some inconceivable further reality may exist out of which even Unity emerged. But such speculation is hypothetical in the extreme. As far as our lives are concerned, Unity is ultimate, representing the outer limit of our spiritual understanding.

Seeing all, knowing all, understanding everything, it possesses intrinsically a total gestalt of consciousness. If a circle symbolizes the perfect wholeness of Unity — always round, with no ragged edges, no asymmetry, no imbalance, then everything that exists is included within the circle.

Omnipotence and omniscience present a problem, however. Unity cannot “know” itself through any external relationship because it is absolute and incomparable. Nothing else exists to provide a mirror for reflection. How then can Unity “grow” in self-awareness? If relatedness and comparison are to be achieved, they will necessarily have to exist within the whole. So Unity turns inward, creating the finite out of the infinite, achieving reflection by differentiation. The One Infinite Consciousness is subdivided into a number of smaller, finite consciousnesses. Since Unity cannot literally divide itself, each finite self contains the potential for the whole — microcosms in macrocosm. This artifice is like playing hide-and-seek with only a single participant in what amounts to a carnival fun-house — a hall of mirrors. Each of the individual mirrors is a limited form of the essence of Unity, with a particularized view of universal reality. Each small finite consciousness is energized in awareness by a matrix of relationship with other finite selves. Added together, the matrices of connectedness result in a potentially infinite network.

In creating this “master game” of a living universe, Unity has demonstrated a marvelous creativity. It is still everything at once, maintaining its innate wholeness, but in the explosion of the Big Bang that created this universe we live in, a differentiation of consciousness occurred, with small units of consciousness formed out of the relatedness of the exploded pieces. Each particular “unit of consciousness” — each being — has a unique view of that universe, seeing and
growing in spirit according to patterns of relatedness formed with other units within the whole. You and I are such units of consciousness. So is the earth, and all the other planets in our solar system.

The earth is a “larger” unit of evolving consciousness than you or I — larger not only in physical size but in experience and spiritual capacity as well, and part of its mandate of relatively free will is the ability to act as a “greenhouse” or breeding site for the evolution of relatively smaller (or less developed) units. In a sense, the earth is our parent, although our individual spirits existed prior to her enabling our birth here. She parents by creating a particular form of life for us to grow through. In the same manner, the Sun is an entity, parent of the earth, as the Milky Way Galaxy is an entity, parent of the Sun.

The universe has been expanding ever since the Big Bang kicked off the game, and as long as expansion occurs, the differentiation created in the first moments of the universe will continue the magic of an increasing matrix of relatedness.

At the level of matter — the forms in the universe, the seemingly physical “stuff” (which is in truth nothing more than densified, kinetic awareness of relationship) — the universe could conceivably expand “forever.” Science has not yet definitively reached a conclusion on that issue. The answer depends on the balance of centrifugal versus centripetal forces in ways we don’t fully understand, cannot measure, and can only theorize from our limited viewpoint.

But although we cannot say for sure that the “physical” universe will ever cease its expansion, we can speak with greater certainty about the “spiritual” level. As individualized beings, our longing to return home promotes the formation of larger and more powerful networks of relationship-awareness, eventually expanding our limited viewpoints into a kind of super-consciousness, an empathic linkage that will eventually re-unite us all. Re-union. The return to Unity.

Each individualized spirit has a history that extends all the way back to the Big Bang. Our history takes us back through diverse forms of experience in many different sectors of the universe. We move from form to form, enhancing our experience with each new life-form we adopt. As we move from one sector of the universe to another, from one life-form to another, we take with us the accumulated experience we have gained, choosing our next life-form based on a natural progression of growth in awareness, love, and power.

In choosing to link with the earth as a parent-vehicle for our further formation as growing spirits, and especially in choosing to be human, we face many specific challenges. The most severe of these are the loss of memory necessary for birth into this particular form and the bewildering complexity of our human nervous systems.

We forget everything at birth: who we are, where we’ve been, what we’ve learned, why we’re here. We forget Unity. We forget ourselves. We forget our bargain with the earth and our serious study of the environment of relationships into which we’ll be born. We forget our histories, our former homes and
previous forms of life. We forget the other human lives we are living simultaneously (although traditional occultists will refer to “past lives,” they are not past at all, but present...). We forget the special skills and talents we have brought with us to these lives on earth, skills we intend to contribute to the other members of our evolving species, talents we intend to use in further developing our consciousness through this human life-form.

We forget it all. We give it up willingly as part of the bargain, giving it to the earth so she can more effectively bring about cosmic re-union through the creation of a webbing of aware-relatedness. And having forgotten it all, having been born, having entered into the experience of bodies and time, we are free to spend our lives remembering what we have forgotten, remembering and creating anew.

We are born into a world where we cannot even take care of ourselves, much less know who we are. Our survival depends on others here before us. Our bodies help us as much as they are able, but at birth even the body is woefully undeveloped. In addition, we don’t know how to operate our bodies successfully for creative self-expression. We must learn all this as we grow and remember ourselves. And while many of us arrange to birth into an environment of love and nurturing care, we are still alone, still shocked by the sudden absence of Unity.

As we move beyond birth into full human life, we instantly reach for togetherness. Our instinct as infants is to enfold ourselves in those around us, those already here and further developed, for security is paramount, necessary for our survival. But not only do we move through instinct and opportunity in the direction of togetherness — since it is the only comfort we know initially — we also find ourselves in a world peopled by over five billion human beings, most of whom are not self-actualized. In fact, much of the world’s population hasn’t emotionally progressed passed the initial shock of infancy, still acting out of fearful imprints and old, illusory survival beliefs.

Five billion beings can and do put out one hell of a strong collective vibration. Most of the world’s human beings continue to be motivated more by unexamined fears than by calm joyfulness, so the pressures on us to become frightened like others are inconceivably powerful, invisible though these pressures tend to be. Fear surrounds us like the water around the fish, massaging us into its poisonous grip. After birth, we move into the jaws of a huge propaganda machine. For those of us born into relatively standard family settings, the greatest pressure to conform in togetherness come from our immediate nuclear families. Specific patterns of expectation surround us in the subtle linkage of behavior and feeling models. We absorb the family systems of our parents, extending back through generations of programming.

Spiritually — which is to say, as spirits rather than as human personalities — we understand completely the family systems and cultural-racial-collective pressures into which we are born. We have studied our circumstances, including the emotional vibrations that will surround us. But as human infants following
the tumult of first breath, we understand almost nothing. From the first moments of full life here on earth, we struggle to remember ourselves even as we are subject to the pressures of familial and cultural expectation.

As we grow, we gradually remember who we are. As we mature, we evolve out of the Center and toward our Outposts. As adults, we live at many levels, some of which naturally gravitate toward the collective Center, others of which remain isolated on our individual Outpost.

epilogue

To be a scout means to occupy your Outpost as consciously, lovingly and effectively as you can. It means befriending your aloneness, knowing that you have volunteered for the mission. It means learning about the unknown territory inside you, being willing to remember who you are — that’s the love part — and working to create new forms for expression of what you’ve brought to the earth — that’s the effective part. It means being infinitely patient, staying sane even when the loneliness and alienation are driving you crazy. It means taking comfort in the part of you that is in the Center, together with the rest of us. It means living in the paradox, and living fully, even though the paradox will not go away. To be a scout means learning to live without meaningless pain.

Our species — the Center, all of us together — are undergoing a collective revolution. We sense the inevitability of change, fundamental and unimaginable change. Since we are frightened by these unknowns, we cling to security, even when it is false. But we are preparing to move into unknown territory, and as we do, those of us who have manned our Outposts faithfully, those of us who have become adept at being scouts, will be in a position to make our contribution, to resolve the paradox of being unique in aloneness, yet simultaneously together in belonging.

As a civilization, we will move toward some Outposts and away from others. As scouts, some of us will be recognized and revered, fulfilling our mission by the assumption of great prestige and grave responsibility. Others of us will be abandoned, our Outposts ignored, seemingly left to die on the vine. Nothing is fated; there is no insurance.

But even if the territory of your particular Outpost is never recognized by the collective, you still have a rightful place within the Center, a place of togetherness, comfort, and security. You’ve already paid for that by agreeing to be born in the first place.

And whether or not your personal Outpost is validated, whether or not your services as a scout are respectfully rewarded, you’ve still got to work at being ready in case you are chosen. If you’re not ready, if you haven’t done the work of occupying your Outpost with endurance and grace, if you haven’t lovingly opened to your unique spiritual heritage and developed the potential for
creatively powerful forms of personal expression, if you’re not aware that you’re a scout with a special territory and a unique contribution to make, then you’ll miss out for sure. The Center will either pass on your Outpost, evolving in a different direction, or it will occupy your territory without recognizing your experience, a loss both for you, and for us.

The earth has dreamt this great adventure. She has provided us with mountains of courage, oceans of heart, and a life-form of exquisite potential. Now we get to live the adventure.

Living well as a human being is no small trick. Most of us come from very far away in the universe, and we’ve worked long and hard to get here. We’ve earned our humanness in this world, paid for our selves. Now we have the opportunity to grow beyond mere experience, to fulfill ourselves as individuals and as a human family, if only we can remember who we are. One way or another, we will leave the earth eventually, even if only to promote the ultimate reunion, the return to Unity.

Remembering and creating, this is what our lives are about. Remembering and creating — both alone and together.