

A Christian Heritage

THE
HERETIC'S
HANDBOOK



JONATHAN BLACK

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Kindle Singles

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Foreword

Could I ever have trusted myself to *behave* well enough to become a clergyman? With the benefit of hindsight, I'm not sure, but when I went to university to study philosophy and theology, that did seem a possible path in life.

In the event and in the course of those three years as an undergraduate, the philosophy simply ate up all the theology. My philosophy tutor was an electrifying lecturer, often talked about as the cleverest man in Oxford, and I see now he was a sort of outrider for the New Atheism. Anglo-American philosophy was fiercely and narrowly analytical and technical in those days. Idealism was a straw man to be knocked down, religion was under attack and philosophy of life didn't even count as philosophy. I remember he told me that if I mentioned Jean-Paul Sartre in my final exams I would fail.

I found the loss of belief pretty devastating and continued to yearn for it.

One of the things about a degree in philosophy and theology is that it makes you almost completely unemployable. I drifted for many years. I was searching for work and also for something to believe in. Eventually I found a job in a bookshop and then in publishing.

I was supposed to be commissioning a commercial, general interest list, but I sometimes used to slip in books on religion and the esoteric. I was becoming fascinated by the notion that the secret teachings in all the major religions say pretty much the same thing.¹

I have written about this elsewhere, but eventually I was approached by the representative of a genuine stream of esoteric and initiatic teaching. This experience helped me to shape what I had read about in books and

resulted in *The Secret History of the World*. I wrote the book I'd been hoping to find in many years spent hanging round in second-hand bookshops – not a history of esoteric thought but history according to esoteric thought. Here was a history of the world in which Isis, Mary Magdalene, alchemists and Rumi played vital parts in the evolution of humankind.

I didn't try to prove anything in this history. That would have required whole libraries of books. I merely wanted to drag these secret teachings into the light of day and show that, although some of them might risk looking absurd, these ideas present altogether a coherent picture of the world – and one which is more or less the complete opposite of everything we have been taught in school or college. My wish for this history was for it to be a living, unfolding imaginative vision. I hoped it might resonate with a few mystic misfits and help us identify one another.

Then, just as I was finishing writing it, I met an extraordinary Irish woman who told me that angels had guided her to London to find me. She said she saw angels all the time.

I soon discovered just what an unsettling and awe-inspiring person Lorna Byrne is. If we enter her orbit we move into a world drenched in the supernatural, pulsating with it. It's perhaps a world we more readily accept if we read about it in a book like *The Autobiography of a Yogi* or hear about it in connection with Mother Meera, for instance. But we tend to find it much harder to accept in a Western context, perhaps because there are fewer points of comparison. Matthew Fox, the American theologian and pioneer of Creation spirituality, has compared her to Hildegard of Bingen. There are similarities, too, with Teresa of Avila and Catherine Emmerich. The Catholic hierarchy in Ireland is beginning to invite her to speak in churches, and her unique gifts have been recognized by senior Islamic theologians.² I am also increasingly struck by the fact that if you strip out local, cultural colouring from Lorna Byrne's insights and teachings they are remarkably similar to the teachings of Jewish seers and mystics, such as the Baal Shem Tov.³

This universality and this growing recognition by authorities is important because if what she says is true, it has to be true universally – and it has to be defended from the accusation of insanity that these days

hangs over all kinds of religious belief, especially where it acknowledges the supernatural.

In many ways Lorna Byrne is like seers and mystics of earlier times. There are comparisons to be made with Hildegard of Bingen and the Baal Shem Tov, but also with Mother Julian of Norwich, Jacob Boehme and Bernadette of Lourdes:

- her consciousness works simultaneously on several different levels
- she sees the angels, spirits and other unembodied beings working in the space around her
- a giant angel called Jimazen appears to her to warn of impending environmental catastrophe
- she watches over people; so, for example, if there is an earthquake or a tsunami she knows about it
- and she also sees it is part of her job to help absorb some of the pain of people suffering
- taken altogether her visions offer a complete ‘eco-system of the spiritual dimension’
- she is allowed to be present in some sense at events in the past, for instance episodes in the life of Jesus
- and she is also shown different possible futures for humanity, depending on how we choose to act.

Getting to know Lorna prompted my second book, *The Sacred History*. I decided that rather than simply outlining what the spiritual and mystical view is, I perhaps ought to try to argue for it. I accumulated evidence to show the role of the supernatural to set against the secular version we are taught at school and university. I wanted to show that there were quite as many large-scale, well-attested miracles in the twentieth century as there were, for instance, in the time of Moses. Like a stage magician, atheism misdirects us.

The aim of this book is to ask:

If the mystical view is right, how should we live?

It’s an aim which might be labelled esoteric. Esotericism is a rational philosophy based on the belief that what mystics and what others who encounter supernatural phenomena experience is in some deep sense real –

and it asks what the implications are.

We live in a society dominated by materialism – both as a philosophy and as a way of life – and it's leading us down a dark path. I think that this esotericism has something different to show us. Esoteric philosophy is 'thinking out of the box', if the box is materialism.

It is a good time for a book on the subject. If the great philosophical battle of the twentieth century was between communism and capitalism, the great battle of the twenty-first is shaping up to be between spiritual belief and atheism.

By the end of this short book I hope to have affirmed that what mystics see *is* in some deep and important sense real – and I also hope that you will see that your consciousness is a bit more like Lorna's than you may have assumed.

The Limits of Wisdom

There is a curious feature at the heart of our experience of life that we tend to take for granted.

The human condition might well have been organized otherwise, but . . .

our happiness lies always in the balance.

At any moment throughout our lives something, even what seems at first an insignificant occurrence, the smallest thing, may tip that balance right the other way.

What we mean by ‘wisdom’ as distinct from knowledge addresses this very feature, because the definition of wisdom is ‘rules for a happy and successful life’.

For example, the Book of Proverbs is classified by biblical scholars as ‘wisdom literature’ because proverbs offer practical advice on how to live well:

He who has a slack hand becomes poor, but the hand of the diligent makes rich. (Proverbs 10:4)

A fool vents all his feelings, but a wise man holds them back. (Proverbs 29:11)

Today’s proverbs ‘Look before you leap’, ‘A stitch in time saves nine’ and my very special favourite, ‘Waste not, want not’, offer advice which is likewise prudential and commonsensical, a down-to-earth view of life. They work on the *reasonable* assumption that the world runs in an orderly way according to natural laws. This wisdom claims that if you take these

laws into account when you decide how to live, you will be safe, happy and successful.

In the mid-nineteenth century a book was published called *Self Help*, written by Samuel Smiles. It launched a whole genre of books expounding prudential wisdom that continued to thrive through the twentieth century with bestsellers like *How to Win Friends and Influence People* by Dale Carnegie and *Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway* by Susan Jeffers.

The more recent books in the genre may be informed by the latest developments in psychology, but they can still be understood as refinements of this prudential wisdom. A broad-brushstroke summary would include accepting a life you haven't chosen, gratitude for good things in life, trying not to be anxious, remaining optimistic and calm. If these books are advertised as being 'spiritual', this is meant in the sense of cultivating a warm, fuzzy feeling of at-oneness with humanity or the cosmos, rather than allowing for any contact with spiritual beings or for any other undeniably supernatural element.

I don't mean to denigrate this form of wisdom. No doubt it is useful. In fact it would probably be the last word in useful advice if we lived in a world where the universal laws described by science accounted for everything there is . . .

. . . but this other, less well-known, less defined form of wisdom exists. It's based on another view of life and the world that we might call the mystical view. In this other view the world is a much stranger and more mysterious place than either common sense or modern, materialistic science allow.

According to this other wisdom, everything may *seem on the surface* to run according to natural laws, but at a deeper level there are supernatural forces that modify them. To attain a happy and successful life in *this* world involves trying to tune into these underlying forces.

When life is easy, well ordered and pleasant, prudential wisdom may well suffice, but life isn't always like that.

When Shakespeare writes of 'a tide' in our affairs that should be 'taken at the flood'⁴, he is talking about more than just runs of good luck or bad things happening in threes. He understands as well as any writer that sometimes the tide draws out so far and for such a long time that it

leaves you devastated.

Sometimes life here on earth isn't just hellish, it *is* one of the levels of Hell. Sometimes the misfortune that oppresses us is so bad, so persistent, so damned *clever* that it may seem intelligent, malevolent – and then even if we have no formal religious belief we may find ourselves howling like Lear and crying out to the Heavens for help.⁵

Then . . .

. . . *irreality bites!*

It is at times like these that common sense is not enough, that we know deep down that our own powers of reason and our own willpower cannot save us. Sometimes we need to fight fire with fire, the irrational with the irrational. It is then that we need to follow the example of Lear and listen to the wisdom of the Fool.

Sometimes the right response to adversity is to persevere, at other times . . . be perverse!

Sometimes we need to play the part of the traditional square-jawed hero or the fearless head-girl heroine, seizing what we can on the day we want it. At other times we need to be as still as we can. As an anonymous medieval mystic advised . . .

Be the tree.

Let *it* be the carpenter.⁶

And sometimes, of course, the only way to keep somebody we love is by letting him or her go.

If we live in a universe that is informed by supernatural laws, we need to understand them. We need to address the danger identified by the Neo-Platonist philosopher Porphyry:

It is not the anger of the gods that injures us, but our own ignorance of their nature.⁷

Crazy Wisdom and the Secret Tradition

A wisdom that takes the supernatural into account, one that goes against common sense and even reason, has long been disseminated by secret societies and mystics, including Zen masters, teachers of the strain of Buddhism called 'wisdom gone wild', adepts of the Kabbalah, foolishly wise Sufis and alchemical groups like the Rosicrucians. I've also seen it described as Wyrd- Were- and even Whore-Wisdom in the context of esoteric teachings ascribed to Mary Magdalene:

If you see Buddha along the road, kill him. (Linji Yixuan, Zen Master, *Linji yulu*, ninth century)

The cure for pain is in the pain. (Rumi, 'There is nothing ahead')

This divine water kills the living and revives the dead; it clarifies obscure things and obscures those which are clear: it has power over water and power over fire. A few drops of this water will give Lead the appearance of Gold. (The ur-chemist Ostanos quoted with approval by Dr Dee in *Monas Hieroglyphica*)

If the fool would persist in his folly, he would become wise. (William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Proverbs of Hell)

I am often struck by the radical paradoxicality of esoteric thought. I think this arises because it focuses on contradictory currents in the human condition.

Underneath the skin of our lives, it claims, circulate mysterious forces, spiritual and supernatural forces that run *contrary* to the material ones. What is true in one dimension may be the opposite of what is true in another, it claims, and we have a foot in both dimensions. Niels Bohr, one of the most important and influential scientists of the twentieth century, put it like this: ‘The opposite of a correct statement is a false statement, but the opposite of a profound truth may well be another profound truth.’⁸

We may quite naturally feel cautious about all of this. There *is* something dangerous and frightening about this wisdom, because esoteric philosophy takes us beyond the parameters of consensual thought.

If it’s done right, we should sometimes find ourselves thinking.

Is this allowed?

In the ancient world and before the scientific revolution, when more or less everyone believed in the supernatural, esoteric wisdom was as closely guarded as nuclear secrets are today.

This is because this supernatural wisdom brings with it a promise of power. It says, ‘Walk with me, come round the back of the stage set to the secret place where you can see how the illusion is put together, and then you will *know* how it’s done.’

In *The Secret History of the World* and elsewhere I have traced the thread of this esoteric wisdom, in the work of mystics and philosophers, but also in the work of scientists, artists and writers who tackle the great issues of life and death – and therefore tend to be curious about esoteric wisdom. This includes, of course, Leonardo da Vinci and Isaac Newton, and in modern times T. S. Eliot, Borges, C. S. Lewis, Mondrian, Beuys, film directors like Tarkovsky, Béla Tarr, Ceylan and Apichatpong Weerasethakul, and great rock auteurs like Dylan, Townshend and Bowie.

Taken altogether the different strands of esoteric philosophy may be said to represent the longest, deepest, most concentrated thinking on the irrational element in life.

But they are seldom taken altogether, at least in an open forum, and despite all its many manifestations, and the involvement of all these highly

influential figures no one has yet sought to isolate this wisdom, to codify it according to content and tell us clearly and precisely what the advice is.

So why are so few people talking about this stuff?

I think it is partly because organized religion has long seen these ideas as heretical.

A Quick History of Heresy

Church attitudes to the supernatural tend to be ambiguous. Today the Church sometimes seems as keen as atheists to discredit manifestations of the supernatural, either because it does believe in it or – perhaps more alarmingly – because it doesn't.

Of course the Church's origins lie in explosive, large-scale supernatural events. At the dawn of Christianity, fifty days after the resurrection, the apostles and other followers were in the upper room of a house when suddenly they heard a sound like a mighty rushing wind. It seemed to fill the whole house. Then they saw tongues of flame hovering over their heads like crowns and began speaking fluently in languages they had never known. For Peter this was the fulfilment of a prophecy by Joel: 'I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh and your sons and daughters shall prophesy and your young men shall see visions and your old men shall see dreams.'⁹ The disciples found they could perform miracles. They could heal, predict the future, see spiritual beings and understand the minds of others. These 'gifts of the Holy Spirit' have their equivalent in Hinduism in the *siddhis* and in Islam in the 'signs by which you can recognize a friend of God'.

Early Christians expected to have these visions and gifts and rejoiced to have them.

Then in the second century the church began to develop a sense of itself as an institution. One of the early Church fathers, Irenaeus, wrote a book called *Against Heresies*, attacking Gnosticism, and its emphasis on direct, personal spiritual experience. Better to rely absolutely on doctrines passed down through the Church hierarchy. From now on the Church would only accredit the visions of certain privileged individuals and the

rest were to be condemned.

In the second century and in the time of St Augustine this narrowing and hardening of attitudes continued. When the canon of the Bible was agreed by committee at the end of the fourth century some visionary works with gnostic tendencies failed to make the cut, and in 380 a Spanish mystic called Priscillian was accused of heresy, of conducting the mass in the nude and of impregnating a young woman in his flock. In 386 he was tortured and executed, the first Christian to be martyred by other Christians.

The Church was moving from the position that it had a new, unique understanding of history and the evolution of humankind because it alone understood the crucial cosmic role of Jesus Christ to the position that none of the other religions contain any truth at all.

I am sure that no one reading this book will disagree with me when I say that this is, of course, an ignorant view. Shining counter-examples spring to mind. A divine light flooded into the material world when Krishna revealed himself in his full glory on the battlefield¹⁰, then when the Buddha sat beneath the Bodhi tree, when Zarathustra was transfigured in the mountains of Iran, when candidates such as Plato and Cicero reached the final stage of the initiation process in the Mystery Schools of Greece and Rome.

But the narrow, dogmatic view prevailed. Any call to direct spiritual experience not under the aegis of the Church risked accusations of heresy. Secret traditions survived underground, of course, and would flare up from time to time. The mistake the Cathars made was to take Jesus's teachings on how to live seriously. In the south of France communities of Cathars renounced property and violence, and lived simply, meditating, praying and doing good works. But perhaps their biggest mistake was to seek spiritual experiences outside the Church's control.

Access to the spiritual realms, strictly regulated and in some senses minimized by the Church, was perhaps thin gruel set against the cosmic consciousness of the Cathars, their heaving, ecstatic visions of a world woven together by angels. The Church's instrument for stemming the spread of ecstasy was, of course, the Inquisition. Having slaughtered hundreds of thousands of heretics in the south of France, the soldiers of

Inquisition surrounded and besieged the surviving Cathars in the mountain-top castle of Montségur. Eleven months later, in 1244, 200 Cathars walked singing down the mountain and into the fire the Crusaders had prepared for their execution.

Nevertheless, people kept on having spiritual experiences, either spontaneously as individuals, or in relatively open communities like the Cathars, or as part of closed initiatic societies like the Knights Templar and the Rosicrucians. When we remember the fate of the Cathars and the Templars, it's humbling to think that many have died, many have been burned alive for having the sort of ideas we are free to discuss.

A Secret Church?

The picture is made more mystifying because, despite its murderous urges against esoteric secret societies outside the Church, secret groups within it have cultivated esoteric ideas and practice – and since the very beginning.

In the Gospels, Jesus advised against throwing pearls before swine and *clearly* alluded to secret teachings to be held back from the multitude:

The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you.
But to those on the outside everything is said in parables so that they may be ever seeing but never perceiving. (Mark 4:11–12)

Paradox is one of Jesus's main modes of expression. These sayings have become very familiar to us, they may have a comfy sort of feel, but he meant to provoke, even outrage conventional ways of thinking when he said:

Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth.
(Matthew 5:5)

Or

Those who wish to save their life will lose it. (Mark 8:35)

This upside-down-inside-out quality in Jesus's teaching may be easier to appreciate in his less familiar, non-canonical sayings:

Jesus said to them ‘When you make the two into one, and when you make the inner like the outer and the outer like the inner, and the upper like the lower, and when you make male and female into a single one, then you will enter [the kingdom].’ (*Gospel of Thomas*, from saying 22)

Jesus said ‘He who seeks, let him not cease seeking until he finds; and when he finds he will be troubled, and when he is troubled he will be amazed, and he will reign over all.’ (*Gospel of Thomas*, saying 2)

There is nothing bright and beautiful, all creatures great and small, nothing cozy about sayings like these. They don’t teach respectable, civic virtues or conservative family values.

Though not part of popular public religious practice, similar ideas, similar paradoxes were disseminated by Christian mystics down the ages:

I am that which is. Thou (the human being) art that which is not. (St Catherine of Siena¹¹)

Only the hand that erases can write the true thing. (Meister Eckhart¹²)

That thou mayest be everything, seek to be nothing. (John of the Cross¹³)

The Church has always had a troubled, even agonized relationship with mystics like these. I can see that if you are a sincere hard-working priest who has never had an indubitable experience of higher spiritual realms, and down the road lives a woman who sees and talks to angels all the time, that would be troubling for you. The Church has always been very nervous of acknowledging mystics and visionaries in their lifetime, and still exhibits a horror of esoteric philosophy.

When I published *The Secret History of the World* I was attacked for suggesting that as a young man, Karol Wojtyla, the future Pope John Paul

II, had belonged to an Anthroposophical group, followers of the mystic and esoteric philosopher Rudolf Steiner, author of *Higher Worlds and How to Attain Them*. The exercises this young man performed as part of this group would lead to his first genuine spiritual experience. That he took this esoteric path is, for all the bluster of the defenders of the Vatican, demonstrably true.

His spiritual teacher at the time was called Mieczyslaw Kotlarczyk, ‘archpriest’ of a theatrical troupe called the Rhapsodic Theatre and a man with whom Karol Wojtyla also shared a home. Together they staged productions of Steiner’s mystery dramas, with Karol Wojtyla playing various roles, including the Seer John and Sagittarius. The aim of these dramas is to induce a higher state of consciousness, and it was in 1944 while walking away from one of this group’s sessions that the young man, lost in thought, was run over by a truck, temporarily lost consciousness and had his first experience of ‘higher worlds’.

Karol Wojtyla never repudiated his Anthroposophical past, and in 1975, when Mieczyslaw Kotlarczyk published a book of esoteric philosophy, *The Art of the Living World – Diction, Expression, Magic*, Karol – by now Cardinal – Wojtyla, wrote the preface. As Pope he would also pose for a photograph with a book called *Meditations on the Tarot* prominently placed on the table in front of him. The author of this book, Valentine Tomberg, had been initiated by Rudolf Steiner and the book is steeped in Anthroposophical and other esoteric ideas. It has an introduction by Cardinal Hans Urs von Balthasar and has also been endorsed by other senior Catholic writers sympathetic to Steiner and his teachings, including senior churchmen and theologians Thomas Keating and Basil Pennington.

I didn’t and don’t mean to suggest anything wrong or shameful happened when the young Karol Wojtyla joined an Anthroposophical group. Quite the contrary, I would recommend Rudolf Steiner’s ideas to anyone who sincerely seeks spiritual enlightenment, and I suspect that many leading Catholics would secretly agree with me.

Esoteric Thinking – Difficulties and Dangers

No doubt the Church's drive to hide esoteric thinking arises partly because these secrets *are* open to abuse – if they get into the wrong hands.

There are occultists, 'brothers of the left-hand path', who see the spirit realm not as the limitless multiverse of a William Blake or Lorna Byrne but as a shadowy and limited penumbra around the material world, a realm infested with spirits. For them, it is a sort of Wild West, a place where they can compel spirits to help them fight for money, power, sex – without fear running contrary to any higher purposes or risking punishment from higher powers.

If history shows that doing a deal with the Devil tends to end badly, that does not always seem to bother them.

But I also think that the silence surrounding esoteric philosophy has a lot to do with the fact that its ideas can be *really hard to think about*.

These laws don't fit into any of the familiar academic categories. If you want to think about these laws, you need to kick away all your usual intellectual supports.

Esoteric laws take psychological factors into account but are not purely psychological. They occupy a liminal space somewhere between psychology and physics.

The modern science of psychology works on the assumption that what happens in the material world affects our mental states. It posits a system in which cause and effect work in one direction only. But, as we are about to affirm, esoteric wisdom works on the assumption that cause and effect can work in both directions – from mind to matter as well as

from matter to mind. Our inner mental states affect what happens out there in the material world.

As I say in *The Secret History of the World*: We live in a psychosomatic universe.

Borrowing a term from anthropology, some atheists say that to pursue these sorts of speculations is to indulge in ‘magical thinking’ – a primitive hangover from times before modern science taught us all to be so smart, to think sensibly and rationally.

Before I go on to try to outline the different ways that the supernatural is said by esoteric thinkers to work in the world, I need to chip away at the monolithic certainty of militant atheists and the poor people in thrall to them that belief in the supernatural is a delusion.

There is scientific literacy, but let us consider that there is also perhaps philosophical literacy.

And not all great scientists are equally competent philosophers.

It is important for us to be clear about these matters. If He exists, God does not want us to be stupid.

The Rise and Fall of Mechanistic Science

No philosophy has ever transformed the surface of the planet like materialism. Its discoveries have made our lives longer, safer, easier, more comfortable and pleasurable in countless ways.

It has been so successful because of its drive to determine the criteria by which we should decide what to believe.

David Hume and those who followed in his wake, the philosophers of science, asked: When we are considering the way the world works what happens if we strip out all personal prejudices and preferences, all received ideas and superstitions? What happens if we try to look at the world as objectively as possible? This led to observations and experiments being made in what came to be known as 'laboratory conditions'.

Any theory about the way things work in the world should, they decided, be simple, consistent, coherent, *elegant*, measurable, and these measurements should be open to being repeated, tested and confirmed. You should also be able to use your theory to make predictions.

It quickly became clear that religious and spiritual claims about the way the world works failed these standards. Miracles, apparitions and other manifestations of the supernatural were not repeatable under laboratory conditions. In the face of this failure religion began to fall back during the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Belief in a personal God was one of the first things to go. A God who could be angry or jealous or loving stepped back into the shadows to be replaced by a divine clockmaker who had created the universe, wound it up, then ceased to interfere. A divine clockmaker fitted more easily with

science's increasingly detailed and successful understanding of the way the material world works.

Then, in the twentieth century another killer criterion was introduced by philosophers of science, by a group called the Logical Positivists. They said if you are making a claim about what happens in the world it ought to be falsifiable. They pointed out that if you make a statement like 'God exists' and no conceivable event or series of events could ever count against that statement, then by making it you are not really asserting anything at all. A large question mark began to hang over religious language: critics of religion said not only is there no evidence to show that it is true, it is not even a meaningful form of discourse.

This was the universe I – like many of you, I suspect – was brought up in. I think of it as the Meccano universe, after a toy that was very popular when I was growing up in the early Sixties.

It was, of course, an entirely mechanical universe. Everything that happened in it was a matter of cog turning cog, of atom knocking against atom.

Materialism continued to seep deeper and deeper into the texture of spiritual life. In the second half of the twentieth century many would call themselves religious or spiritual despite the fact that they swallowed whole the mechanical-materialistic philosophy.

A trend that began in the 1950s saw leading liberal theologians give up any belief in the supernatural. David Jenkins, Bishop of Durham, outraged churchgoers up and down the land in 1984, allegedly referring to the resurrection of Jesus Christ as 'a conjuring trick with bones'.¹⁴

The art critic Sister Wendy Beckett, who has dedicated her life to prayer and solitude, said she believed that prayer alters the material world only in so far as it helps you, the one who is doing the praying, to behave differently, with more care and attention.

Their understanding of the material cosmos, though nominally religious, is not one which would be in any way uncongenial to a rabid atheist like Richard Dawkins. In my view, there is one thing more dispiriting than atheist materialists, and that's religious materialists.

The reality is that almost nothing about Christianity makes sense seen from a matter-before-mind point of view. In fact from a matter-before-

mind point of view most of Christianity is flagrantly false, complete rubbish. The whole edifice of biblical text, symbolism, art, architecture, Christianity in all its facets looks dusty, absurd, fantastical and boring at the same time. Only when we look at it from a mind-before-matter point of view does it begin to make sense.[15](#)

That Which Has Been Lost

Now only a fool would wish away the great benefits science has brought us, but there are undoubtedly disadvantages to its narrow, outer focus.

Our sense of an intimate and personal connection with the world is inevitably diminished.

Our sense that the natural world is sacred is diminished too.

Not only have we lost focus on what the essential values are, we have lost a sense that there are essential values.

We have largely lost a sense that we are interconnected with all life – past, present and future – of history ‘forever unfolding in the heart of humanity’.¹⁶

We have lost a sense of being a part of a bigger story.

Today we live in a largely secular society, where the intellectual elite is in thrall to atheistic materialism and we also live in a society which is very materialistic.

Could these two things by any chance be related?

One effect of the mechanical materialism that dominates our culture is that *it narrows our beliefs about what the good things in life are.*

The fundamentalist atheist vision of paradise is of a place as bright, neat and shiny as a laboratory, a place without shadows, a place of positive thinking and managerial enthusiasm, where nearly everything has been explained and soon everything will be, where all intuitions are nothing more than very fast calculations – and where premonitions are taboo and ideas of destiny, of things meant to be, all of these are delusions. I’m not sure I feel very comfortable there . . .

In fact the paradise of the materialists can sometimes feel pretty unendurable.

And I think many feel trapped in materialism and that organized religion doesn't offer us a way out.

A Light at the End of the Tunnel?

Despite the impression that some campaigning atheists like to give, science has moved on since the 1960s. Leading physicists no longer believe in the Meccano universe, as pioneering biologist Rupert Sheldrake pointed out in his book *The Science Delusion*, which I was proud to edit and publish.¹⁷

‘New atheists’ like Dawkins may huff and puff and say that if, for example, Deepak Chopra thinks prayer changes lives in a way which is analogous to the effects observed in Quantum Mechanics, then he doesn’t understand the science.

But the fact is senior scientists and mathematicians who actually work in the field, like Stephen Hawking’s collaborator Roland Penrose, are much more open minded. ‘Quantum mechanics,’ he says, ‘makes no distinction between single particles and complicated systems of particles.’

John Wheeler, who with Niels Bohr worked out the principles behind nuclear fission, put it like this: ‘If the universe is necessary to the creation of life, could it be that life is necessary to the creation of the universe? Do acts of observership, in the quantum sense, have anything to do with bringing about that which appears before us?’

According to Rupert Sheldrake, the mechanical model which has in previous centuries yielded such an astonishing range of discoveries has largely ceased to do so in the last fifty years.

Perhaps the Meccano universe is rusting away?

Recently some prominent philosophers, previously outspoken atheists, such as Galen Strawson and Thomas Nagel, have moved towards a *panpsychist* view that sees consciousness as pervading all nature. These cutting-edge thinkers are asking if it is likely that consciousness emerged

from nothing, from a dead matter devoid of consciousness – or is it more likely that consciousness was somehow already there, inherent in all matter? The more you move towards the latter view, the more plausible the religious view must seem.

There have also been pretty weird developments in science recently which seem to confirm ancient mystical wisdom. In the Vedas, for example, the human mind is an outgrowth of the cosmic mind and the brain is therefore in a sense formed by mind, a sort of material obtrusion of mind. The new science of brain plasticity, for which the Nobel Prize for science was awarded in 2000, shows how mental activity can ‘switch on’ genes that change neural structure – in other words how we can rewire our brains.¹⁸ And peer-reviewed studies have been published showing that meditation causes major changes in the shape of the brains of Tibetan monks.¹⁹

Is modern science confirming what the ancients knew, that the brain is built up by our thoughts as bees build a hive?

The Great Philosophical Divide

In my books I try to identify and keep in focus what I take to be the key point at issue between an atheist's belief system and that of a religious or spiritual person – the dividing line that separates the atheist sheep from the spiritual goats.

I have devised eight questions, all framed with this key point in mind. They are questions I think you can ask yourself in order to determine at the most fundamental level what your philosophy of life is.

I ask you to answer them silently and sincerely. I appreciate that you will gather that I am trying to usher you towards making a choice, and that it will also be clear which of the two possible answers the prevailing atheistic philosophy wants you to choose.

But will you?

- If the universe is a self-organizing structure, what do we mean by 'self'?
- In whichever direction we look – whether we try to peer at the beginning of the universe, into the future, into the far distance, into our inner depths, we encounter darkness. Is that darkness seething with intelligence? Or is it dead?
- Is human intelligence a freak accident in a dead universe – or a natural growth in a living universe?
- Did we invent love – or was it out there waiting for us?
- Do the stars that burn coldly in the night sky also burn inside us?
- Are the forces that rule the universe blind or have they led us to the present point in our spiritual evolution?
- Is there value inherent in the universe – or is there only what we choose to invest in it?

- When the physical universe ends, and all that multidimensional space, that dynamic and mysterious intricacy and heart-rending beauty collapses in on itself, will that matter? Or because by that point there will be no human mind present to appraise it, will it not matter a jot?

Depending on the answers you choose to give to these questions you live in one of two very different universes.

One of these universes began about 13.7 billion years ago. Consciousness arose quite late in the history of *this* cosmos. Animal life and the beginnings of the nervous system necessary for any form of consciousness, on this view, began with a chance fizzing together of some chemicals about 600 million years ago. Consciousness emerged because of an extraordinary series of coincidences on this planet in an obscure suburb of an otherwise unremarkable galaxy. Scientists disagree as to how likely it is that this chance fizzing has happened elsewhere.

In this atheistic view mind is a small, shadowy and temporary island in a vast ocean of matter.

In the religious or spiritual view it is the other way round. The material universe is a small, fragile island on a vast ocean of mind. The world and all the matter in the cosmos was precipitated out of the great cosmic mind, a mind that meant the universe to be and has plans for it.

Now surely we should expect these two universes to behave very differently and for the experience of living in them to be very different.

But which universe is the right one? The answer should be staring us in the face.

Reclaiming Our Own Mental Space

The enemies of religion say that because claims for it don't meet the criteria for a scientific theory, there is no evidence for the supernatural.

But I want to show this is simply not accurate. There is a vast amount of evidence. Like the long-missed evidence for dark matter, you just have to look for it in the right way.

Evidence to support the supernatural claims of religion is by its very nature unlikely to be objective. This is because the supernatural in all its manifestations throughout history, in all times and in all places has only ever operated in relation to innermost hopes and fears.²⁰

And the shifts and shades of our feelings may well not be measurable by scientific instruments, then reducible to an algorithm.

I believe we all routinely experience things that wouldn't be happening to us if the mechanical-materialist model of the universe accounted for everything there is. I also believe we fail to recognize them as such because we have been conditioned by our materialist upbringing to screen them out.

Spanning the Swiss-French border, the Large Hadron Collider, a machine twenty-seven miles in circumference that has taken thirty years to plan and build and cost billions of dollars, attempts to replicate the conditions that existed less than a nanosecond after the Big Bang some 13.7 billion years ago. Arrays of detectors are being used to try to register the smallest trace of subatomic rubble spewed out from the collisions that the machine creates, with the aim of learning more about the forces that shaped the cosmos at the beginning of time. It has been built to try to find evidence in support of the theory of the origins of the cosmos according to materialism.

What machine would you need in order to find evidence in support of the opposing mind-before-matter view? Where could you find evidence that the material universe is dependent on mind and responsive to it? Is it possible to detect traces of the Mind of God?

The human brain is still the most subtle, complex, altogether the most mysterious machine in the known universe. Could it be then that we can make a more informed judgement as to what happened at the beginning of the cosmos by contemplating certain aspects of our everyday experience than we can by examining data from the Large Hadron Collider, by focusing on our innermost responses, our highest hopes and deepest fears and asking ourselves, 'Is the cosmos responding?'

In this context it's also important to bear in mind that the very word 'supernatural' has radically changed its meaning. It was coined in the fifteenth century, meaning 'having divine origins', but at the end of the eighteenth century its meaning began to change, referring to phenomena 'contrary to natural laws'. The word had referred to what you might *expect* to happen in a divinely created universe, but came to refer to events that are extremely unlikely to have happened, and by the twentieth century, when the laws of physics came to be seen as universal and immutable, the supernatural was well on its way to being defined out of existence.

I suggest that *now* is the time to reverse the great experiment of the scientific revolution. Instead of trying to look at the world as objectively as possible, let us try to look at it as subjectively as possible. So in what follows I will draw on the writings of the chroniclers of the interior life, not only the great mystics and esoteric teachers but also the great chroniclers of the inner life in poetry and fiction, the most clear perceiving and thinking recorders of subjective human experience, writers who by their precise and exact language try to trace the movements of the spiritual and the supernatural and recognize them for what they are. In opposition to Richard Dawkins, Brian Cox and Daniel Dennett we will assert the claims of Shakespeare, Rilke and T. S. Eliot, writers who are sensitive to the impress of otherworldly beings and who by the bright beam of their intelligence have penetrated mysteries of consciousness, the essence of human experience, storytellers who have wrestled with the trickiest and most shadowy of all philosophical problems, who have risked peace of mind, perhaps even sanity.

Down the Rabbit Hole

Let's bear in mind that from the point of view of common sense and mechanistic philosophy, this world we are about to immerse ourselves in is upside down and inside out. Before we try to trace individual supernatural laws let us sink slowly down into that rabbit hole.

And as we land in that universe, and get our bearings and look around, what do we find?

What is this world we have landed in like?

Well in some ways it looks very like the common-sense universe, doesn't it?

But in other ways, as we are about to see, it's like a mirror image.

Everything here is infused with mind, saturated with it. This room in which you are perhaps sitting, reading, is sustained by mind, brimming with it.

The cosmic mind that created everything, lies behind everything and connects everything. You and I are connected by mind. You will see shortly I hope that we are closer in that way than we are in a geographical sense, because we are sharing the same thoughts and the same mental space.

Let's explore this universe a little further . . . Let's go a little deeper into regions experienced by mystics.

We are conscious. Animals are also conscious, though their consciousness is, of course, different to ours. But in this universe plants are conscious too, and even a stone is infused with a consciousness, like the state of consciousness we enter when we are in deep, dreamless sleep. A stone is intelligent. If we look at a rock or stone in the landscape we should be aware that it intends to move, to play its part in the great cosmic

plan, but it is moving on a very different timescale far greater than a human timescale, a timescale that in its immensity may be hard for us to grasp.

According to esoteric philosophers we are engaged in an interaction with an intelligent universe which is all the time prompting, directing, educating, testing us, moving us around, and even moving *things* around too, helping us to evolve and helping to draw out our intelligence, our capacity for wonder, for love, for exercising free-will and creativity.

We are the growing tip of nature, and of the evolution of the living being that is the cosmos.

Because every *thing* comes from the cosmic mind, all that happens is *meant*, and all events have meaning. Nothing is totally without value. Our lives have meaning and a destiny – and we are being asked to use our newly evolved faculty of intelligence to discover what it is.

The Cosmic Cradle

Now before this book gets too weird, I want to ask you two more questions:

First, in what sense did *you choose* to read this book today? How do you come to be where you are, now, reading this book? The reality is that at most you have consciously chosen only a small part of what you are experiencing here and now. The greater part in terms of the balance of the gravitational and electromagnetic forces that allows solid matter to cohere, the dispositions of the Sun, the Moon, the earth that make complex biological processes possible, your parents, your gender, the deep geological structure, the rocks and stones that assembled themselves to form a safe and solid pathway to this juncture – none of this was consciously chosen by you, at least not in this lifetime.

I put it to you that the decision to sit where you are sitting and read this book was nonetheless on many different levels a highly *intelligent* decision!

What we experience moment by moment as material reality is, according to both accounts – the spiritual and the atheistic one – the result of the intersection of cosmic forces. My second and final question is this: what kind of intelligence is invested in these forces?

It is worth remembering here that our own bodies exhibit an intelligence which is in many ways far *greater* than the head intelligence of which we are conscious and on which we pride ourselves. A bodily intelligence lies below the threshold of our consciousness that is able to oversee the alchemical processes necessary for digestion, for example, and the functioning of the nervous system – processes far too complex for us to be able to devise, maintain and for most us, even begin to understand.

Today we have a complex and sophisticated sense of the human body as made up of parts, each with a degree of independence yet working together with other parts – a sense of the body as a living machine.

The ancients, on the other hand, had a parallel sense of an individual's spiritual make-up. They saw a human being in one of its dimensions as a spiritual machine made up of many different living parts working in co-operation and at the behest of other spiritual beings. As I wrote in *The Sacred History*: 'In antiquity the agents of these complex processes in different parts of the body were seen as spiritual – as gods or angels.'²¹

In the mind-before-matter universe of the mystics not only do the Sun, Moon and planets have to be disposed as they are for life to evolve, they also have to be disposed as they are for us to have the form of consciousness we have. As they move, so our consciousness changes. I am moved to desire by Venus and when Saturn returns I am sorely tested. They tracked in minute detail the changes on our consciousness – our dreams, our desires, our ability to think clearly – linked with the phases of the Moon.²²

Your conscious mind is, in the ancient and mystical view, like a baby that has been carried here today in a procession, and the retinue that carries the infant emperor aloft is made up of St Michael, Venus and Diana, of the great gods and angels of the planets and stars, and the lesser angels and spirits at their command.

Atheists deride gods and angels as fantasies, the result of a projecting of human qualities onto natural events. But in the mind-before-matter universe it is precisely the other way round. We have the qualities we like to call human because they have been projected on to us, lent us by the cosmic principles that traditional cultures identified as gods and angels.

The Spectrum of Consciousness

Now I would be surprised if some readers who have come this far in good faith, find that despite their sincere endeavours they cannot engage with any of it.

I think we live by a polite fiction that we share the same form of consciousness. It helps us to get along. But I think that in reality there is a spectrum of consciousness. At one end we have someone like Lorna Byrne with a very visionary, intuitive form of consciousness. At the other end we have someone like Richard Dawkins, sense-oriented, analytical and down to earth.

Researching *The Secret History of the World* showed me that when two quite different forms of consciousness meet, there is mutual incomprehension, fear and a desire to eradicate the other form of consciousness – sometimes even extending to genocide. I'm thinking of when Romans met the first Christians, or European explorers landing in America or Australia. And I think that something like that, some sort of mutual incomprehension, arises in the confrontation between followers of Dawkins and spiritual people.

I remember when Rupert Sheldrake's *The Science Delusion* was published and reviewed favourably in the *Guardian* by a senior British philosopher, Mary Midgley.²³ I read this review avidly online the morning it was published and then I watched astonished as in the course of just a few minutes an army of trolls, hundreds of them, posted hate-filled, atavistic, abusive comments, angry that prominent intellectuals were undermining their atheistic certainties.

As a society we have come a long way in learning to be tolerant of other races. We are much more tolerant, more empathetic when it comes

to class, gender, age, sexual orientation. But we have a long way to go when it comes to tolerance of other forms of consciousness.

When I hear people like Dawkins sounding off I want to say ‘Some people have mystical experiences – get over it!’ His kind of hostility is not helpful or constructive.

Because the reality is that people at different ends of the spectrum have different but valuable things to contribute. If those towards one end of the spectrum now bring forward their spiritual experiences which have been neglected, even suppressed, for a generation, then we can perhaps all try to think about spiritual matters using all the insight and rigour the other end has devised.

John Wheeler said of his colleague Niels Bohr: ‘You can talk about people like Buddha, Jesus, Moses, Confucius, but the thing that convinced me that such people exist was conversations with Niels Bohr.’²⁴

Bodhisattvas are great teachers, superhuman in that they are incarnations of highly evolved beings. Wouldn’t it be wonderful, *wouldn’t it be tremendous fun if the next Bodhisattva, the next World Teacher, worked as a scientist?*

The Cosmic Laws

The Mystery Schools attached to the great temples of the ancient world at Eleusis and elsewhere, were a bit like Freemasonic lodges today. Everyone knew they were there but very few knew what went on inside. One of the few extended accounts of initiation in a Mystery School comes in *The Golden Ass* by Apuleius. At one point Lucius, the narrator, is describing the climax of the ceremony. He says that at midnight he sees the Sun gleaming with a dazzling light. Then following on from this he encounters ‘the gods below and the gods above’.

These events, then, take place at midnight. The Sun is not in the sky above. It is on the other side of the earth.

The author is therefore describing *seeing the Sun directly through the dense material body of the earth*.

The Sun here is the Word of St John’s Gospel, the creator principle of the great cosmic mind, sustaining the whole cosmos, suffusing it and animating it. And because it is shining through the world, the world is transfigured. When St John at the beginning of his gospel writes about the Word shining in the darkness, he expected his readers to be familiar with the phrase and to understand that he was writing about the divine Sun-being. *The Golden Ass* and the Gospel of St John were written at roughly the same time and informed by the same Hellenic culture. They allude to the same experience.

People sometimes say it is impossible to put mystical experience into words, but I think we should try. If the vision of the Sun at midnight is real and not illusory, not just a fantasy, if in mystical experience we really do communicate with unembodied intelligence, then there are profound implications for our understanding of the way the world works.

I want to draw out these implications, and in the face of scepticism, even hostility, I want to ask some very clear and important questions, which have never been asked before in such plain terms, and I want to try to answer them with the utmost lucidity:

Do we routinely experience things that wouldn't be happening to us if scientific materialism explained everything there is? What kinds of things? Can they be distilled into laws?

And if they can be distilled, how should we modify our behaviour to take account of these laws?

In what follows I have distilled laws from personal experience, from the personal experience of friends and readers who have written to me or who I have talked to, and from the mystical and esoteric texts, and in plays, poems and novels with an esoteric subtext. Having extracted these laws I looked to see if I could find in them any internal logic, 'a reason in madness'. Do they show any progress and natural unfolding that one might see in one's own inner life?²⁵

1. THE LAW OF ONE MIND

Mind doesn't shine by itself being an object of perception.

The Self is the seer. The mind belongs to the seen.

To be found in *The Yoga Sutras of Pantanjali*, these are two of the most profound sayings in Hindu – or any – scripture.

When we try to observe our centre of consciousness, it soon becomes clear we cannot. Because we need to step back from it in order to observe it, we realize that the point we had assumed to be the centre and source of consciousness cannot be it – because we are observing it from somewhere else. By implication this new observation point has better claims to be the source and centre – but in the act of considering this, we become aware of a new candidate with an even better claim – and so on. If we took an infinite number of steps back, there would still always be another source of consciousness even further back.

Is there another mind a long way round the back of each human mind? A great cosmic mind?

What this mental exercise is leading to is confirmation of the ancient mystical teaching that what I might like to think of as my own little private self is an echo of and an outgrowth of the great cosmic Self.

In other words, when it comes to consciousness my own centre of gravity does not lie within me. According to mystics and esoteric philosophers, it lies instead at the centre of the cosmos. Meister Eckhart expressed it like this: ‘The eye through which I see God and the eye through which God sees me is the same eye.’²⁶

In the ancient view we are beings of spirit who have been dipped in matter, coated in it in order that it will filter out the great cosmic mind, the spiritual realms and other spiritual beings. Because of this filtering we are not overwhelmed by them and may develop our own human personalities and characters. But key to what we are considering here, the key to what we would expect to experience in a mind-before-matter universe is that *our bodies don't filter everything out*. They are not meant to. They are meant to be porous to some degree. There is a balance and in certain sets of circumstance we may satisfy ourselves that there is evidence that we are interacting with higher intelligence.

Meaningful Dreams

According to ancient wisdom we may be allowed glimpses of higher worlds and interact with these higher beings in dreams.

Lorna Byrne has observed that in sleep the soul and spirit rise partially out of the physical body and rest on top of it. Ordinarily, then, it does not float free of the body and up to the ceiling as is sometimes supposed. But when we are asleep we are not entirely enclosed in matter so angels have an opportunity to communicate with us more easily – spirit communicating with spirit.

Dreams are for the most part pretty jumbled up and hard to understand, but sometimes we experience dreams that are completely different, that are cogent, compelling and completely *real*. If we are

receptive we will see that someone or something, maybe a departed loved one, an angel or maybe even the cosmos itself, is trying to tell us something important. There are many examples of dreams like this which have changed the course of history – I give accounts in *The Sacred History* – and I believe we all experience dreams like this, even though we may sometimes bury the memory of them.²⁷

Our Inner Guide Gives Us a Nudge

Of course we may also receive similar communications in our waking lives. Some people, like Lorna Byrne, would say that the ‘inner voice’ that tells us this may be the voice of our guardian angel. Socrates had a disembodied being who advised him, an inner voice which in the language of his day he called his *daemon* (no doubt an influence on Philip Pullman), and I’m sure Lorna would identify that entity as his guardian angel. This disembodied voice guided him safely out of danger on several occasions, and in modern times many have reported, for example, being nudged awake when they have fallen asleep at the wheel. Some have had intuitions or have been prevented from boarding planes which then crashed, and who knows how many accidents we all avoid because of the promptings of what we in the western tradition call angels.

According to Lorna Byrne the spirits of the dead, those who love us, are sometimes permitted to return to earth to prompt and help us. I have asked Lorna how we might be able to tell what someone we have lost is trying to tell us and she told me that if this loved one comes to mind, we should try to remember what we were thinking about immediately beforehand.

Everyday Premonitions

We all experience premonitions. We have all heard the phone ring and known who is on the other end of the line. Rupert Sheldrake set up experiments in which people were asked to try to guess or intuit who was

on the other end of the phone in monitored, laboratory conditions. In one trial 570 participants had to say which of four potential callers was on the line. If there were no such thing as premonition, a success rate of 25 per cent would be expected. In the event the success rate was 40 per cent. This is a real phenomenon.²⁸

Rupert asked Richard Dawkins to look at this evidence while they were filming together for television. 'I'm not interested in the evidence!' spluttered Dawkins.²⁹

Everyday Mind Reading

I think we all mind read, even though we may not realize we are doing it. Who knows how often we have walked down the street and thoughts we have taken for our own have in fact been the thoughts of a passer-by that have floated into our mental space. When in dark and difficult times we eventually find somewhere inside us a line of thought that gives us comfort, perhaps this is the result of someone praying for us?

I find that one way to test this again involves the telephone. Listening to someone on the telephone can, I think, help you to listen more intently and with more focus. It works particularly well when what is at stake, what is under discussion, is important, for example if you are asking someone about the results of their biopsy or whether or not they still love you. If there is any pause in replying, I believe you can tell quite clearly from the quality of the silence what they are thinking.

Coincidence

A mind-before-matter universe is also a mind-over-matter universe. Here all matter has been precipitated out of the great cosmic mind, and objects and events are manipulated by unembodied intelligence. As we have seen, we may be prompted by unembodied intelligence communicating directly with our minds, but the cosmos may also prompt us by manipulating the physical world around us. If we live in a universe that is not indifferent to

us, a cosmos that cares about our highest hopes and deepest fears and interacts with us, we should expect it to rearrange events to try to guide us, to usher us down a certain path. In what follows we will examine different ways in which this happens, but one very important way is, of course, meaningful coincidence.

Coincidences can seem relatively trivial. You are driving along a road and in a short space of time three Silver Shadow Rolls Royces pass in the other direction. A likely explanation is just that you are driving in the vicinity of a vintage car rally! But maybe you are driving along feeling very lonely, despairing that you will ever have a long-lasting relationship and a song comes on the radio that reminds you of someone you met in a bar with a group of friends a few months earlier. This song came on the jukebox, your eyes met, there was a connection, but you've never followed it up – until now, because the cosmos is prompting you to do so, perhaps you will make that call.

Carl Gustav Jung gave the example of treating a patient who suffered from living in the straitjacket of an overly rational, perhaps even cynical world-view. She had had a dream about a beautiful golden scarab beetle, but she was refusing to consider Jung's explanations as to its mystical meaning. Just then Jung heard a gentle tapping on the window. It was a golden beetle very like a scarab, and Jung was able to open the window, cup the beetle in his hand and offer it to her, saying, 'Here is your scarab.'³⁰

2. THE HERMETIC LAW – AS ABOVE, SO BELOW

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care.
(Matthew 10:29)

Everything in the cosmos is connected, and as we have seen, not just by gravity. According to the ancient wisdom everything is connected by value – by values we may like to think of as inimically human but which

ultimately derive from the great cosmic mind.³¹

3. THE LAW OF THE TRANSIENCE OF EVERYTHING

In a mind-before-matter universe, matter may be seen as like foam on the waves of the mind, the shadow of a mirage, always on the point of non-being.

What do sacred texts and inspired writers say about this?

We the most fleeting of all beings experience everything just once, only once and no more, we live our lives forever taking leave and we shall fade as our memories do.

Nothing is as good as it seemed that it would be, all things are at their best at the beginning, shades of the prison house begin to close, things fall apart, the centre cannot hold, the sunlight on the garden hardens and grows cold. (Phrase by phrase this sentence is composed from six sources: Rilke, *Duino Elegies*, 9 and 8; George Eliot, *Silas Marner*; Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*; William Wordsworth, *Intimations of Immortality*; Yeats, *The Second Coming*; Louis MacNeice, *Sunlight on the Garden*.)

And we *will* lose our way and die and lose our loved ones and humanity will become extinct. Earth will cease to support life, the cosmos will implode, its stunning beauty and almost infinite complexity will crumble – and it will be true to say that none of this will matter a jot.

This vision, which we touched on earlier, is the vision of the end of time that Satan, the god of opposition, is working towards. Satan's aim is to squeeze all spirit out of the universe and make it a place of dead matter, and today's proponents of atheistic materialism are unwittingly helping in that project.³²

This brings us to the next law . . .

4. THE LAW OF THE COSMIC WAR BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL

Not only is it in the nature of matter to crumble and fall part, not only do all material things tend to slide towards their own dissolution, but there are conscious forces in the universe, Satanic forces that want to accelerate this process.

‘What’s this war in the heart of nature? Why does nature vie with itself, the land contend with the sea?’ These remarkable lines are to be heard at the beginning of *The Thin Red Line*, the film directed by Terrence Malick and released in 1998. They describe a principle that operates in the universe at every level. We naturally think of armies ranged against each other on a battlefield, hosts of good and bad angels or of human armies as in Malick’s film, but this principle is also woven tightly into small, personal things, even into apparently mundane, trivial things. As Rudolf Steiner says, the demonic operates even at a subatomic level. The very best that happens is only a particle different from the very worst, containing all the potential of its opposite. Every good thing that happens contains the seeds of its destruction and vice versa. At every moment something good and wonderful has reached its peak and is beginning to decline, while something else has reached its lowest point and begins to ascend.

And we are at risk of being swayed as the forces of evil sweep through our mental space, our unconscious. This is what St Peter means when he talks about a prowling lion seeking whom he may devour. Satan is roaming inside us. (1 Peter 5:8)

For want of a nail the battle is lost. Every victory is a pyrrhic victory. Every act of heroism involves betrayal. Every pang of hunger also contains a hunger for death.

Because of Satan’s overshadowing there is a part of us that is tired and wants to give up, wants to be all eaten by that lion. We have inside us a longing not only for rest but for oblivion.

5. THE LAW OF EQUAL AND OPPOSITE VALUE

For every action there is an equal and opposite action – this, Newton’s

third law of motion, was formulated to account for the behaviour of physical objects, but in the mind-before-matter universe, the extraordinary, remarkable, the staggering thing is that it *also holds true in terms of value*. History shows that whenever anyone tries to act according to an impulse of pure good, an impulse of pure evil rises up to oppose them. Jesus, Joan of Arc, Gandhi, Martin Luther King. Is there ever a way round this problem?

This is a mystery and a dilemma we will return to shortly – and to the way round it proposed in ancient wisdom.³³

6. THE LAW OF THE TRICKINESS OF THE UNIVERSE

The virtue of the devil is in the loins. (St Jerome – *Commentary on the Book of Job*³⁴)

Nature is as incomprehensibly appalling as it is lovely and Bountiful (Meister Eckhart³⁵)

One of the key esoteric teachings is that there is a trickiness at the heart of the cosmos. The human condition is constituted in such a way, that:

It is credible because it is absurd

It is certain because it is impossible

(Tertullian, *On the flesh of Christ*, 5.4)

In the cosmos this quality of trickiness pertains and comes into play where human happiness, fulfilment and peace of mind are at issue.

The more we want happiness, the more we push onwards to the heights, the more our roots push downwards.³⁶

If we sometimes succeed in overcoming the force of circumstances to

find happiness, nature at once shifts the battleground in our hearts until they desire something else. The trickiness in the universe finds a matching perversity in human nature.

We are tempted.

Mystical and esoteric teaching sometimes describes our interaction with higher intelligence in terms of its playing a game with us. Human will and human intelligence, even human love is drawn out of us precisely because the cosmos is engaging us in a game. It is ‘gaming us’ to use the modern idiom, and good gaming involves feints, bluffs and misdirection.

As an ancient Greek saying has it, ‘the dice of the gods is always loaded’. We are, of course, up against a vastly superior player, who will always have the advantage over us. But . . .

Krishna, Indian incarnation of the Christ principle, says ‘I am the cleverness in the dice’ (*Bhagavad Gita*, 10.36). The comfort we are asked to take from this is that we can trust that somewhere behind all the games-playing, however cruel it may seem at the time lies a benevolent and loving intention.³⁷

Ibn Arabi is not as often quoted as Rumi, but he deserves to be. He attributed this saying to God:

I was a hidden treasure and I desired to be known. (*The Hadith of the Hidden Treasure*)

Life is a *glorious* game, Ibn Arabi is saying. Let’s go on a treasure hunt!

7. THE LAW OF THE RESPONSIBILITY TO CHOOSE

We don’t have any choice whether or not we play this game. The greatest thinker on this cosmic law is an atheist, Jean-Paul Sartre, who said:

We are condemned to be free.³⁸

This freedom may well frighten us, as Sartre often shows in his fiction. We may want to shift the blame, shirk responsibility and shy away from it, but we must choose in the end – even if the choice is not to choose.

In the spiritual view of the universe there are dimensions to this law of the responsibility to choose which must remain closed to those who wholly embrace the atheistic view. What we choose will form not only our lives but our lives between lives and also perhaps our future lives.

8. THE LAW OF KARMA

You will be done by as you do.

Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us – The Lord’s Prayer describes the law of Karma at work. What is being described here is a sort of hydraulic principle. Forgive others and we create a space, like a vacuum that pulls forgiveness down on us too.

9. THE LAW OF INTENTION

Because we are all connected in mental space, thoughts, even unexpressed ones have effects.

This is why Jesus says, ‘But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.’³⁹

In the mind-before-matter universe it is true to say that if two people perform exactly the same action in exactly the same circumstances but one has hidden bad intentions and the other has equally hidden good intentions, then two very different sets of effects will ripple out from their actions. The law of karma, then, applies to intentions as well as actions.

If a man speaks or acts with an evil thought, pain follows him as the wheel follows the foot of the ox that draws the carriage. (*Dhammapada*, chapter 1, saying i)

And in the world we live in a thought can be a form of touching.

As you read this I am touching you.

By the way you think of those you know, you can help them, harm them or heal them.

10. THE LAW OF THE SPIRAL

Your choices carry a momentum whether you intend it or not.

According to our choices, we are swept on an upward spiral of evolution or a downward one.

To everyone who has, more will be given, whereas he who has nothing will be deprived of even the little he has.
(Matthew 25:29)

If you choose well, a momentum will carry you upwards on a spiral which is part of the great onward rush of human evolving, part of the spiral of evolution of the whole cosmos.

11. THE LAW OF THE WAY

Yet most of the time we are not aware of the great cosmic plan. We feel lost and look for a way.

The bright way appears dark

The way that goes forward appears to retreat

(*Tao Te Chin*, chapter 41 (40))

There is no way.

The way is made by walking.

(Antonio Machado, Spanish nineteenth/twentieth-century poet, a poet channelling the spirit of Tao in *Proverbios y cantares* in *Compos de Castilla*, 1912)

The greatest sayings on the law of the Way come in Taoism, but the same idea arose in the West in the legends of the Grail.

The Grail Castle, for example, cannot be found by the knights who seek it directly.

Sometimes we can't progress directly. We need to make a knight's move.

12. THE LAW OF HEAVEN THROUGH HELL

Good lies on the other side of bad, desire the other side of disgust, happiness the other side of misery, life through death and Hell the other side of Heaven.

This is another curious feature of the human condition that could so easily have been otherwise, and the fact that it is constructed in this very fashion is further evidence that the cosmos is directed at us.⁴⁰

As the well-known Sufi proverb has it, 'When the heart weeps for what it has lost, the spirit laughs for what it has found', for as we have seen, the earth, Heaven and Hell are interpenetrating realms.⁴¹

13. THE LAW OF ASKING

There will be times in life when without supernatural help we *are* lost.

When our way leads through Hell, when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we may realize we need divine help.

Recently I went to the funeral of a much loved relative, which brought home to me that in the face of such a death we become achingly conscious of our helplessness, the constrictions the human condition places on our hopes for happiness. Of course we tend to look for

otherworldly comfort when – sometimes only when – the world has nothing to give.

The Bible describes angels as delivering messages, comforting and helping, and the Psalms also give this explicit promise: ‘He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thy dash thy foot against a stone.’⁴²

The Neo-Platonist philosopher Plotinus also wrote about how prayer works: Prayer attains its ends by a community of feeling between certain parts of the universe, which lie as it were on the same stretched-out cord, so that if the cord is twitched at its lower end on earth, it is felt in the heavens above.⁴³

Throughout history people have prayed for help, and it is full of examples of prayers answered. When I visit churches or cathedrals in France and Italy and see tokens of thanks for prayers answered stacked up around altars, often dedicated to the Virgin Mary, I find it a moving sight.

Nevertheless, as the ancient Greeks said, ‘a god is never a constant presence’.

There will be days when you will look for me and not find me. (John 7:34)

The wind blows where it will and you hear the sound of it but you do not know whence it comes and whither it goes. (John 3:8)

Sometimes prayers don’t seem to be answered. Sometimes it is hard to know how to pray.

It’s a precious and little known secret that you can ask your guardian angel to talk to someone else’s guardian angel. If you have a meeting planned and you are worried it isn’t going to go well, that the person you are meeting is not sympathetic, is not going to see the good in what you propose, ask your guardian angel to talk to the other person’s angel.

Pope Pius XI recommended this little secret.⁴⁴

14. THE LAW OF LETTING GO

The cost of anything worth having is the loss of something it hurts to lose.

To sacrifice is to live according to this law consciously.

In this way we may stop going round in circles, repeating mistakes which will otherwise drag us down so that we become stuck in unthinking and unhealthy habits. To sacrifice is to decide to wake up to this.⁴⁵

15. THE LAW OF THE OK CORRAL

Beyond a certain point there is no return.

That point must be reached.

There is wisdom in the stories we tell ourselves. Stories – including great plays, novels, films – mirror the interior narrative of our lives. As we have seen, the cosmic mind has constituted and constructed the human condition to prompt, tempt and test humanity so that it is educated and evolving and this process works on an individual level, not just a group level. The cosmos has devised tests for each of us, tailored to test our individual strengths and weaknesses.

When Alfred Hitchcock introduces us to a character who suffers from vertigo, for instance, we know on some level that at the climax of the story this character will have to overcome vertigo in order to save a child or seize the treasure, escape or otherwise triumph – and on some other level we know, too, that life is like that.

The thing we most fear will come to us . . . as will our deepest joys.

16. THE LAW OF CIRCULARITY

An important part of the wisdom in the universal structure of stories is what I sometimes think of as the *Lord Jim* Principal after Joseph Conrad's novel, published in 1900. Jim is a pleasant, good-natured young man who is working as crew on a ship that sinks. He is in those few terrible

moments a coward, deserting the ship and allowing passengers to drown. Then for many years he travels the globe, as if pursued by the Furies. Eventually he ends up on a remote island where he is adopted as leader – ‘lord’ – of a tribe. When their village is attacked by pirates Lord Jim faces another challenge to his courage, another call to try to save others who depend on him, and finally, having ducked out of life’s challenges again and again he puts his life on the line and finds rest and redemption.

There is a circularity in life. If the same test comes round and round, the cosmos is trying to tell you something. As Robert Frost said: ‘Our very life depends on everything’s recurring till we answer from within.’⁴⁶

If we fail to surge upwards on the spirit of evolution, if we try to duck out of our destiny it will come round to meet us again in a different form.

If you fail to make the right choice, the pressure to make it will come round again and next time the choice that confronts you will be harder.

There is a 1970 novel called *The Goalkeeper’s Fear of the Penalty* by the Austrian writer Peter Handke made into a film by Wim Wenders two years later. I love that title and it prompts me to think about another phrase, ‘The goalkeeper’s love of the penalty’. A dreadful position to be in, a thankless task, you might say to yourself. *But the goalkeeper doesn’t have to be there.* He is there in the goal mouth because he wants to be. He needs challenges in his life. We all have a deep, deep need to be tested.

According to ancient wisdom there is a sense in which we chose the tests that we face before we were born and now we draw our challenges out of the universe.

Notions of destiny distinguish the spiritual view of life from the atheistic one. In the ancient spiritual view our lives are pre-ordained to the extent that there are certain great events, great turning points that we will inevitably be ushered towards. We are free to react to these as we will.

The experience of falling in love can reveal to us the operation of the supernatural in our lives. If we fall in love and *know* that this is meant to be, we are experiencing something that cannot possibly be true in the universe of the atheists, where all notions of destiny are a delusion.

Again we feel that our meeting, our coming together, our falling in love is meant to be, we have to choose between accepting the opinions of

others or trusting in the authenticity of our own experience.

17. THE LAW OF FAITH

You know how if you look at someone with the eye of love, you can sometimes bring out their better qualities? In this way your faith in them is repaid.

According to the law of faith you can look at the world in the same way with the same results.

18. THE LAW OF REBIRTH

And the cosmos also makes this promise to you: there is a law running contrary to the law of entropy you see at work all around you, a secret spirit of renewal – and you too can be transformed, transfigured by it.

19. THE LAW OF THE WORK

Because of the way you are connected with everyone and everything, your transfiguration will help transfigure the whole cosmos.

The human condition is structured so that we can choose to participate consciously in this transfiguration, using esoteric and alchemical techniques to co-operate with spiritual powers. In the West this is sometimes called the Work. We will return to these techniques and examine them in the final section.

20. THE LAW OF GRACE

We all sometimes experience moments of grace, unbidden moments of peace and happiness that may suddenly come over us even in the most troubled times, when we feel at home in the world, when we are suddenly just there in the moment, and we appreciate the world in its beauty and

loveliness. We know that it and we are meant to be, and in the words of the Virgin Mary and the Beatles, that we must just let it be:

The spirit of the Sun who returned to earth
Still returns to plant sun seeds in us
So that in due time the whole cosmos will become sun-
like
And in the meantime
The heroine will win the race
The hero will squeeze under the portcullis before it
clangs shut
The cavalry will arrive in time
And the lovers will be reunited

And to quote Mother Julian of Norwich:

All shall be well and all shall be well and all manner of
things shall be well.⁴⁷

And we live in a time when the cosmos is fundamentally changing in its nature, in its animal, vegetable and mineral dimensions, according to a great cosmic plan and in due time and if we work at it. Then, as Isaiah has it:

The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down
with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling
together; and a little child will lead them.⁴⁸

And as the secret initiatory lore of the ancient Greeks has it:

The sacred rivers will flow upwards.⁴⁹

If any of this sounds implausible, it's worth remembering that none of this is true and none of these laws accurately reflect human experience if we live in the universe described by modern, mechanical and materialistic

science. On the other hand, if any of these laws resonate with you, then you live in a very different universe – and should live in a very different way.

The Holy and Mystical Wisdom

We have been looking at what mystics tell us about the way the cosmos is, the laws according to which a mind-before-matter universe seems to run.

So how to live in this universe?

Earlier attempts to isolate and codify a perennial philosophy, a wisdom common to all religions have tended to come up with collections of sayings that are rather bland and platitudinous. By contrast what follows contains advice that is in many instances outrageous to common sense, decency and above all reason. I have ordered the laws that follow according what seems to me to be their internal logic, both in terms of how they naturally unfold into one another conceptually and how the spiritual life naturally unfolds.

1. BE BRAVE!

Fortune and love favour the brave. (Ovid, poet and initiate of the ancient Mystery Schools, *Ars Amatoria*, 1.608)

Readiness for Dread is to say Yes to the inwardness of things. (Heidegger, *Existence and Being*, Postscript)

The road ahead is painful and fraught with danger but you must take it or you will die without having lived. You must risk what you value most or every little thing of lasting value will be lost.

You have a fear of the bad, the false, of misery and loneliness – but also of the good, the true, happiness, loving and being loved.

These fears will grow unless confronted, unless you go to meet them half way.⁵⁰

2. BE A HERETIC!

The letter killeth but the spirit giveth life. (2 Corinthians 3:6)

Those who live by the rules, live little, with death 'chiding them for moderate little men. So far and no farther, is that it? You call that living? (Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*, p598, 1972)

Think the unthinkable, discard received categories, think upside down and inside out.

One of my favourite sayings is this by Schopenhauer: 'As soon as you put a thought into words, it ceases to be true.' Wittgenstein famously put the contrary, positivist view when he said: 'The world is everything that is the case.' The tendency today is to go along with Wittgenstein and think that everything in a thought is concentrated in the words used to express it, that that thought is nothing but words, or perhaps nothing but words with peripheral associations of imagery. But from the mystical point of view, thoughts may be living conscious beings, gods and angels weaving through our mental space. According to the most elevated teachings of the Veda: 'It is not thought we should want to know but the thinker.'⁵¹

We should attend to this conscious element immanent in the cosmos, and as for our thoughts, we should aim to recognize them as living beings. Though we may often want or need to cage them in words, we should be aware that this is in some way a deadening process – to be handled lightly, skilfully, sensitively. The Zen tradition has many deft sayings on this subject:

If your thinking road is not blocked, whatever you think is

like entangling ghost.⁵²

The non existence of a thought proves that thought correct.⁵³

Eliminate both the real and the unreal.⁵⁴

Likewise, Blaise Pascal said:

The last step of reason is to recognize that there is an infinite number of things beyond reason.⁵⁵

Here you are being advised to watch for the many different hidden doors by which spirit may enter your life, doors often hidden in the most unexpected places.

Seek the good in bad, seek the sublime in trash and genius in madness.

Now, gods, stand up for bastards! (*King Lear*, 1.2)

3. DO NOT LET YOURSELF BECOME DOGMATIC

‘Sell certainty,’ said Rumi, ‘buy bewilderment.’⁵⁶

‘The man who wishes himself always in the right,’ said the canny and uncanny John Tauler, ‘will never be at peace with himself. He will have a barren sullen and wandering mind and he will prey upon himself.’^{57 58}

4. CONTINUALLY PUSH BACK THE BOUNDARIES OF CONSCIOUSNESS BUT

KEEP ALIVE A SENSE OF MYSTERY

‘I don’t know what I may appear to the world, but to myself I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the sea shore, and diverting myself now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean lay all undiscovered before me.’ Newton wrote this shortly before he died. He knew that we advance and evolve as a species when we concentrate on what we don’t know rather than on what we do.

As long as the mysteries of the universe resist final analysis and dissection by thought, they call for another response. If we contemplate them at length and resist the temptation to try to square them away or account for them in a meretricious way, these mysteries will draw out a particular response. They will draw out inspiration. We will return to this.⁵⁹

5. BEWARE OF THE LAW OF ENTROPY AT WORK IN EVERYTHING

– because that will help you to see even the smallest impulses of the spirit, like a tender shoot pushing through the desert sands.

Like Oedipus, his story told by Sophocles, we ‘weep and walk through endless ways of thought’.⁶⁰ Rilke asked: ‘How is it possible to live when the very elements of this life are completely incomprehensible to us, when we are continually inadequate and loving and uncertain in resolution and incapable of facing death?’⁶¹

We are repeatedly tempted to give up and settle for less. ‘All that is most mysterious,’ said Proust, ‘the beauty we desire we console ourselves for never possessing by demanding pleasure.’⁶²

‘It is not poisoning to do without something one really wants,’ says Doris Lessing, a follower of Gurdjieff, ‘what’s terrible is to pretend that the second rate is first rate, to pretend you don’t need love when you do.’⁶³ Novelists perhaps describe this slide best. Compare Lessing with

this from E. M. Forster. ‘You give up trying to understand yourself and join the armies of the benign pleasant and pious folk who have yielded to the only enemy that matters, the enemy within. They have sinned against passion and truth and as the years pass they are censured, their pleasures and their piety show cracks, their wit becomes cynicism, their unselfishness hypocrisy, they feel and produce discomfort whatever they do.’⁶⁴

In the esoteric account of human psychology, we have a wound inside us which is made by contact with a higher reality. St John of the Cross called it a gift, ‘a gentle cautery’. (‘In the Living Flame of Love’, 1591) A divine discontent slowly but relentlessly bleeds from this wound, reminding us of what in our ‘heart of hearts’ we long for. It should never be allowed to heal, because it is telling us what our higher Self wants from life.

But the temptation is that after many disappointments and failures it feels easier to give in. We let mediocrity grow over this wound like a protective carapace.

And that is why . . . We have left undone those things which we ought to have done and we have done those things which we ought not to have done and there is no health in us.

We need to confess and . . .

6. LOOK FOR THE OPERATIONS OF THE SUPERNATURAL IN YOUR LIFE

Be silent, still and solitary – pray.

Many illuminating things have been written about the power of silence, solitude and prayer in solitude:

The man who in his work finds silence, and who sees that silence is work, this man sees the Light and in all his works finds peace. (*Bhagavad Gita*, 4.18)

He who can be alone and rest alone and is never weary of

his great work. He can live in joy, master of himself, by the edge of the forest of his desires. (*The Dhammapada*, chapter 21, 305)

More than all things love silence . . . from our very silence is born something that draws us into deeper silence. If you practise this, inexpressible light will dawn upon you. (Isaac, Bishop of Nineveh, *Instructions*)

For me the greatest writer on solitude is Rilke:

Only the individual who is solitary is brought like a thing under the deep laws . . . Solitude is not easy to bear and to almost everyone there comes hours when they would gladly exchange it for some kinds of communion however banal and cheap, for the appearance of some slight harmony with the easily available but perhaps these are just the hours when solitude grows for its growing is painful like the growing of boys and sad like the beginning of spring.⁶⁵

What then are the benefits of prayerful, watchful solitude? I think Rilke is saying that if we immerse ourselves in solitude we may become aware of the spiritual laws of the universe and become aware too of how they are acting upon us.

Basil the Great writes:

Just as when Sunbeam falls on transparent bodies they themselves become brilliant too and shed further fresh brightness, so souls wherein the spirit dwells and which are illuminated by the spirit, themselves send forth their grace to others.⁶⁶

Marilynne Robinson writes: ‘Sometimes the visionary aspect of any particular day comes to you in the memory of it, or it opens to you over

time.⁶⁷ Visions, then, can come to us in different ways. They are not always immediate and overwhelming, and she is saying that long-term inner attentiveness yields surprising joys and riches. Rudolf Steiner said that if you persist with a conscious spiritual practice over twenty-one days, it will begin to work its way into your 'etheric body', your soul, and creates a permanent change there, so that your living being is in itself becoming prayerful.⁶⁸ You continue to pray even when you are not consciously and actively doing so. This marks an important stage in the accomplishment of the Work.

Some times of day are more propitious for furthering the Work than others. We saw earlier that in sleep our vegetable or etheric body partially emerges from our physical body, and that it is then easier for angels to talk to us, spiritual being to spiritual being. This is why if we are attentive when we awake, if we have a few quiet, solitary moments, we will know what we have to do.⁶⁹

7. ACT ACCORDING TO THE DIRECTION OF THE SPIRITUAL FLOW

There are lots of examples of people in history, including Joan of Arc and Napoleon, who were unstoppable, who carried all before them and seemed invulnerable, until suddenly it was as if whatever invisible forces had been supporting and protecting them deserted them. Then it was possible to knock them down with a feather. As I suggested earlier, we may see this in our own lives. Sometimes everything we touch turns to gold, whilst at other times it turns to lead.

Sometimes endurance and persistence and never giving up are great virtues. At other times we are better off hiding under the blanket and not going out in the morning. Sometimes the more we reach for something, the more we just push it away, and we need to be quiet and still and wait to see what the cosmos wants us to do.

The rule is that we must attend to the flow of spiritual influence, remain watchful and alert to the tide in our affairs, to its changes in

direction. Compare these two observations:

‘If one is truly ready within oneself,’ said travel writer and mystic Laurence van der Post, ‘and prepared to confirm one’s readiness without question to the deed that follows naturally on it, one finds life and circumstances surprisingly armed and ready at one’s side.’⁷⁰

‘The highest value takes no action but has no reason for acting this way,’ said the Chinese sage Lao Tzu. ‘One who is good at defeating the enemy doesn’t engage him. This is called matching heaven.’⁷¹

These esoteric teachers may seem to be offering contradictory advice, but the contradiction *is* only apparent. Sometimes the flow of the spirit runs in the same direction as the flow of events in the Outworld. At other times the spirit runs in a contrary direction. We should try to be sensitive to this.⁷²

There is a time to seize the moment, to go with the flow, and a time to do nothing.

There is a time to live at one with your circumstances, for acceptance, and the time to try to change them.

There are times to use the greatest concentration of your mental powers to work things out, and times to empty your mind and wait for inspiration.

There is a time to be totally open-minded, and a time to set yourself severe limits.

There is a time to expend your energy, to rejoice in it, and a time to be sparing with it, because there is a time when expending energy will increase it, and the time when it will deplete it.

There is a time to respect tradition, and a time to discard it.

There is a time to aspire to the highest, and a time to cultivate your garden.

There is a time to appreciate the beauty of things in all its transience, and a time to put aside present pleasures for future, deeper joys.

There is a time for balance and harmony, and a time for chaos and excess.⁷³

There is a time to revere death, and a time to cock a snook at it.

There is a time for work, and a time for rest.

There is a time for solitude and silence, and a time to take what you

have found to other people.

The most highly refined philosophy on following the flow *is* Taoism, and since his death it's emerged that Andy Warhol had a well-developed interest in esoteric philosophy, and I think that in some of his sayings he reveals himself as a modern Taoist master:

Sometimes people let the same problem make them miserable for years when they could just say 'So what'? That's one of my favourite sayings 'So what?'

And I always go after the easiest thing, because if it's the easiest, for me it's usually the best.⁷⁴

8. ASK FOR DIVINE HELP

Knock and it shall be opened. (Matthew 7:7)

The message of the world religions is that we cannot ultimately transform ourselves or our own lives by our own efforts and that there *is* a peace the world cannot give. We need to ask for supernatural help.

Whilst you can train the animal part of yourself, discipline it like a dog or a horse, you cannot heal your whole being, your depths, your soul, your physiology, your body, just by thinking about it.

Key to living in a supernatural universe is praying to God and asking the angels for that help and guidance.

But if you think you hear a voice, how do you know it's a force for the good?

After all, Jesus said:

Do not think I have come to bring peace, I have come to set woman against mother and man against father. (Matthew 10:34)

And:

He who is near me is near the fire. (*Gospel of Thomas*, saying 82)

I am going to spit you out of my mouth because you are neither hot nor cold, you are lukewarm. (*Revelation*, 3:15–7)

Is the implication here that it is better to be bad than lukewarm? *Will* spirit ever recommend us to do dark and dangerous things?

An early Church tradition, often depicted in medieval church art and sculpture is that each of us have not only a guardian angel but an evil angel.⁷⁵

The Tibetan Book of the Dead asserts that every individual stands between a Good Genius and a Bad Genius, competing to proffer advice. After death:

The Good Genius, who was born simultaneously with you, will now come and count out your good deeds with white pebbles and the Evil Genius who was also born simultaneously with you will come and count out your evil deeds with black pebbles . . . Then the Lord of Death will say: ‘I will consult the Mirror of Karma, wherein every good and evil deed is reflected.’⁷⁶

One of the wonderful things about getting to know Lorna Byrne is that because she has direct and remarkably detailed experience of spiritual reality, past, present and future, she can offer an authoritative commentary on teachings and lore from other earlier traditions, often confirming them, sometimes refining them or showing them in a new light. She routinely sees the evil being that lurks near every human being in the shadows and takes any opportunity to come closer and try to lure individuals down the dark path. However, she says that this being does not deserve to be called an angel.

So if you do hear a voice telling you what to do, how do you know if it’s a good voice?. First, you should ‘know them by their fruits’. If the

voice is telling you to hurt or to harm, if the voice is hateful you should know this is probably the prompting of ‘the other side’.

Pascal thought that we do know in our heart of hearts which the right choice is among the choices presented to us: ‘There is just enough light for those who want to believe, and just enough shadow for those who do not want to believe’⁷⁷ – another of the extraordinarily delicate balances according to which the human condition is constructed. Our guardian angel is intimately connected with us before birth, during our lifetime and afterwards – and it is *constantly* connected to us. The other being that doesn’t deserve the name of angel is not, unless we invite it to be so.

We can get to know our guardian angel. As we have already touched on, we can ask for signs.

Sometimes I’ve found that if I am asking for the answer to a question, I will meet someone who says something that gives me my answer. For example, I am worried my daughter is being drawn into a business arrangement with someone I think is a bit dodgy. But believing that if I say anything she will take this interference badly, I am minded to say nothing. Shortly afterwards I bump into an old friend who says she has just seen my daughter who is a bit sad she hasn’t seen me for a while.

When you ask for help or for a sign, the most important thing is for you to ask sincerely and with good intention – and with an undivided heart. As Kabir, the fifteenth-century saint, claimed by Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims alike, said: ‘As the tree is to the seed, so all diseases are in the asking.’

There may be a time to compromise outwardly but never compromise inwardly.

Probity gives us strength. In the words of Sir Galahad, ‘My strength is as the strength of ten because my heart is pure.’⁷⁸

9. SEARCH THE OUTER WORLD, INCLUDING THE STARS AND PLANETS, FOR SIGNS OF THE DIVINE HELP AND

PROMPTING

The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth thy handiwork. (Psalm 19:1)

Raise the stone and you shall find me, cleave the wood and I am there. (Oxyrhynchus papyrus I, 10. One of the non-canonical sayings of Jesus, quoted in *Are These the Words of Jesus?*, Ian Wilson)

St Bernard of Clairvaux, who wrote the Rule of the Knights Templar said: 'I have no masters but the beeches and the oaks.'⁷⁹

So we are to look for signs without as well as within. But what exactly are we looking for?

According to esoteric philosophy the creative cosmic principles that weave through us also weave through the material world and create our experience, give it direction. The material world is therefore there for us and meant for us. It is there to be decoded. Karl von Eckarhausen, writing in the 1790s, was one of the first authors to openly publish inner group teachings from secret communities of mystics. He wrote 'By the perception of the outer, which is the symbol of the interior, we may be enabled to approach the interior spiritual truths . . .'⁸⁰ What von Eckarhausen is saying is that if the physical universe is directed towards us and therefore an expression of divine intentions towards us, it is in a sense a symbol or alludes to symbols; we may interpret these symbols in order to discover the divine intentions in them. We will return to the esoteric understanding of symbols later.

For now, how can we begin to *read* the inner significance in the outer?

We have already seen that there is a circularity in life. If the same test comes round and round, the cosmos is trying to tell us something.

Similarly, we have already seen that life sometimes tries to talk to us through coincidences, as Jung has taught us. As we enter a thicket of coincidences, as they become more frequent, we know that its message is

becoming more urgent.

When everyone believed in astrology, they believed in it as a living spiritual philosophy and in the ancient world people were on some level aware of the great spiritual beings connected to the planets and the constellations. They *felt* these influences forming their experience. The Emperor Julian wrote about the capacity of starlight raying down upon him to send him into a trance state of higher consciousness.⁸¹

Dante was another great visionary immersed in esoteric philosophy. In the *Commedia* he gives an account of how a natural sense of awe inspired by the stars was increased many times as he emerged into higher heavens. He then *saw* how great spiritual beings, the angels, are connected to the planets and stars.⁸²

10. DON'T LOOK TO THE OBJECTS OF EXPERIENCE, BUT TO EXPERIENCE ITSELF

Every moment some form grows perfect in the hand or face. Some tone on the hills or the sea is choicer than the rest; some mood of passion or insight or intellectual excitement is irresistibly real and attractive to us – for that moment only. To burn always with this hard gemlike flame to maintain this ecstasy is success in life. (Walter Pater, *The Renaissance*, Conclusion, 1873)

Allow every impression and every germ of feeling to grow to completion wholly in yourself and in the darkness in the unutterable unconscious inaccessible to your understanding and await with deep humility and patience the hour birth of a new clarity. (Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*, Letter to Kappus, 23rd April 1903)

He who binds to himself a joy does the winged life destroy.

But he who kisses the joy as it flies lives in eternity's sunrise. (*Eternity*, William Blake)

According to writers steeped in esoteric philosophy – such as Blake, Walter Pater (Wilde's mentor) and Rilke – we should not waste our lives pursuing the material objects of worldly success. As we have seen, in mind-before-matter philosophy the greatest miracle of creation is not any material object or objects but human consciousness, and that is its focus. Accordingly, the aim of life, in the mind-before-matter account, is less to do with accumulating the objects of experience than with the quality of experience itself.⁸³

11. LOOK NOT FOR THE REWARDS OF WORK BUT FIND JOY IN THE WORK ITSELF

Krishna said: 'Always do your work but do not claim its reward . . . The man of harmony surrenders the rewards of his work and finds peace.'⁸⁴

Rudolf Steiner said: 'Devoted love for an action . . . that really is freedom.'⁸⁵

12. KEEP BY RENOUNCING AND LETTING GO

He who would save his life will lose it. (Luke 9:24)

And anyone who has bought up a child knows that it is often true to say that the only way to keep a love is by letting it go – and the same is sometimes true in romantic love too.

13. PROCESS EVERYTHING IN YOUR DEPTHS

Out of the depths I have called unto thee. (Psalm 130:1)

A commentary on this passage in the Psalms in *The Zohar* asserts ‘it is incumbent on anyone praying to the Holy King to pray from the depths of the soul, for only then will the heart be entirely directed to God and the mind entirely bent on prayer.’⁸⁶

‘Good work comes from the depths,’ said Rilke. ‘All other work is dead.’⁸⁷

Strive to make yours an individual relationship with every moment, above all in prayer. Your responses to your experiences in prayer will then show the same depth of emotion – and carry the same power.⁸⁸

Sufi mystics wrote poetry addressed to God charged with all the intensity of erotic human love, an impulse which spread northwards into Europe, inspiring Dante and the Troubadours. In *The Secret History of the World* I try to show how understanding of sensual love, and understanding our love of God grew entwined over the course of history. Both look for intensity of feeling, both ask you to throw yourself blindly into the happiness of loving, to put the best part of yourself at risk, to love more than you can ever hope to be loved in return.

Sometimes, when you fall in love all your repressed hopes of happiness start resurfacing. You may sometimes begin to feel an infinite tenderness, a spontaneous elation you haven’t felt since you were small. You are vulnerable and may be in mortal danger then.

Love is where cruelty and kindness and where goodness and evil converge.

It is one of life’s great tests – and one of its great secrets.

14. DO AS YOU WOULD BE DONE BY

. . . because you will be!

There are, of course, two meanings of the word ‘law’, and two types of law. When we talk of natural laws or the laws of physics we mean descriptions of patterns of cause and effect. But when we talk about moral or judicial laws we mean rules seeking to regulate behaviour.

In the mind-before-matter view there are moral laws which are *also* laws of cause and effect. Act badly and you will be punished by God or by other supernatural beings and according to some providential law of cause and effect.

On this view, values are not a human invention but inhere in the cosmos, woven into its construction, part of its causal nexus, its very soul.

Immanuel Kant said: ‘The two things that fill my mind with ever increasing wonder are the starry heavens above me and the moral law with in me.’ I think the implication here is that they are connected. Morality need not be a dispiriting list of don’ts. It can be, should be a description of a mysterious way in which the universe works in response to our highest hopes and fears, even at its furthest reaches.⁸⁹

Great novelists like George Eliot show that doing good has a microscopic aspect to it as well as a macroscopic one:

The growing of good in the world partly depends on unhistoric acts and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been is half owing to the number who have lived faithfully a hidden life.⁹⁰

15. CULTIVATE YOUR MORAL IMAGINATION

Purged by suffering, humanized by it, Lear cries out, ‘Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel.’ (*King Lear*, 3.4)

To be indifferent to life in others undermines one’s own life. On the other hand, to be kind requires intelligence and imagination. Nothing exercises and stretches intelligence and imagination as much as kindness.

As we have seen, in a universe in which all share a mental space, kind, loving thoughts help another human being directly, just as unkind and angry ones may harm. And as we shall see shortly, imagination has magical properties.

16. BE AWARE OF YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES FOR THE GROUP, FAMILY, TRIBE, NATION

Personal self-affirmation is not an isolated act which originates in the individual being. It arises in participation with communal acts of affirmation – affirmation of family, soul-group or nation – and also as part of a universal act of self-affirmation.⁹¹

17. ACT IN CONCERT WITH KINDRED SPIRITS

We are the bees of the invisible.

We are the shepherds of being.⁹²

I was glad to hear from a friend of mine, an esoterically minded Freemason, that he is a member of a Lodge called the Living Stones, that part of their spiritual practice is that wherever they are in the country, however scattered and far apart, they stop what they are doing at midday and consciously commune in spirit.⁹³

18. ACT WITH RIGHT – THAT IS TO SAY, LOVING – INTENTION

A kind act performed with love is a hundredfold better than one performed without.

Krishna says:

A gift is pure when it is given from the heart to the right person at the right time and at the right place and when we expect nothing in return. He who offers to me with only a leaf or flower fruit or even a little water, I accept that offering when it is offered by a pure, loving and devoted heart. (*Bhagavad Gita*, 9.26)

There is a story about a painter who was asked how to paint a perfect picture. She replied, 'First make yourself perfect, and then paint.' In the same way that the very individual and personal genius of a Picasso communicate themselves to his every brushstroke in a way that experts can identify, so also in a mind-before-matter universe, the same is true of every single action that any of us takes.⁹⁴

19. SACRIFICE WHAT YOU VALUE

Every crown is a crown of thorns.

The costs of anything worth having is the loss of something it costs to lose.

You have to renounce so many things to have just one thing.

James Baldwin, the American novelist makes a telling observation: 'You have, in order to live, to make so many difficult and dangerous choices that the one thing you are really trying to save is what you lose and what you are trying to save is your ability to touch another human being and be touched by that person.'⁹⁵

The more you develop spiritually, the higher the level you attain, the greater the responsibilities you will be asked to carry and the greater, the more dangerous the sacrifices you will be asked to make. This is the true *noblesse oblige*, the true meaning of chivalry.

The spiritual life is a hard life. The way is not always warm and

fluffy. Many great spiritual leaders, many highly spiritual leaders have had hard lives and found personal relationships hard. They have sacrificed much but . . .

. . . by choosing we affirm the values we see inherent in the cosmos, we say Yes, there is a moral and spiritual order in the cosmos and I vow to live by it.

20. FACE YOUR OWN TEST WHILE YOU STILL HAVE THE CHANCE

Sometimes we need the experience of harshness to assuage our pain.

And sometimes we know we are beginning a descent into Hell.

Recognize when life is ushering you towards one of life's great turning points, be alert as opposite extremes of value – good and bad, beauty and ugliness – begin to converge.

Be brave then and true. When happiness is most at stake then the universe is at its most misleading. As Dostoyevsky said:

The devil struggles with God and the battleground is the hearts of men.⁹⁶

What appears shameful to the mind is sheer beauty to the heart.⁹⁷

Great mystics and esoteric philosophers have always commended heightened awareness of death. This is partly because there is an awful lot we can *only* do now while we are still in our fleshly bodies. We have the opportunity to choose consciously and freely to touch the lives of others, even though this opportunity may be fraught with danger. Reparation, the atonement, even conscious free-choosing is harder in between lives. Some say it is impossible.

21. WALK DOWN INTO HELL,

CONFIDENT THAT HEAVEN LIES THE OTHER SIDE

Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. (Psalm 23:4)

‘I fight for far more than mere hope of winning,’ says Cyrano de Bergerac in the closing lines of Rostand’s play. ‘Better by far to know that the fight is totally, irreparably in vain. I know my enemies will get me in the end, but I’ll fight on till then and there is one thing that always goes with me, like a diamond in the ash – my panache.’⁹⁸

Often in my life I have found that the one thing that saves is the thing that appears most to threaten. In peace and war I have found that frequently naked and alarmed one has to go down into what one fears and in that process from somewhere beyond all conscious expectation comes as a saving flicker of light and energy that, even if it does not produce the courage of a hero, it at any rate enables a trembling mortal to take one step further. (Laurens van der Post, *The Lost World of the Kalahari*, *The Swamp of Despond*, p171)

Perhaps we should bear our sorrows with greater confidence for they are the moments when something unknown enters into us. (Rilke letter to Kappus of 12th August 1904)

Another adventurer, Ernest Hemingway put it with characteristic pith:

We are all bitched from the start and you especially have to be hurt like hell before you can write seriously. But when you get the damned hurt, use it – don’t cheat with it.⁹⁹

As in creative writing, so in life!

22. USE THE POWER OF SYMBOLS AND CEREMONY

There is a little known Black Madonna in Fleet Street in London that I sometimes visit in the lunch hour. Lao Tzu wrote of the darkness within darkness, the gateway to all understanding, and what radiates from the Black Madonna is *that* darkness. She is the mystery at the heart of existence, part Isis, part Nephthys, dark sister of Isis. She speaks to us here in the prayer Thunder Perfect Mind, one of the earliest Christian texts found at Nag Hammadi:

For I am the first and the last
I am the honoured one and the scorned one
I am the whore and the holy one
I am the wife and the virgin
I am the barren one
And many are my sons
I am the silence that is incomprehensible
I am the utterance of my name.¹⁰⁰

Our urban and rural landscapes are full of symbols placed there by initiates and mystics. Kindred spirits have left signs of encouragement, beacons of fellow feeling, fountains of the spirit in which we may refresh ourselves.

Symbols may sometimes mark out the power in a divine landscape and they can also help us to an awareness of the way that a geographical space is also a shared mental space – and that we share it too with spiritual beings. Sacred symbols have a dual function. They work on us and they also work on angels.

Cleopatra's Needle on the banks of the Thames is a prayer in stone and a call to prayer, but it's also a call to a great spiritual being, known as St Michael in the Judeo-Christian tradition, to come down to earth. On

13th September 1878 its twin pillar was erected in Central Park, New York, simultaneously and at an astrologically propitious time calculated by Freemasons. The raising of these twin columns marked a new era in the history of the world.

The great writer on esoteric symbolism in the twentieth century was the rogue Egyptologist René Schwaller de Lubicz (friend of Matisse and of Fulcanelli, the great alchemical writer of the twentieth century and sometimes even said to be him). Schwaller de Lubicz explained that the ancient Egyptians understood that humankind is the crown of creation, that anatomically modern humans have evolved out of animal life by incorporating the evolutionary impulses of the other species. There is something of the lion in us, the cat, the dog, the bull, the eagle. Looking at a symbol of an eagle, for example, in a pyramid text, can help us become conscious of the eagle spirit working through us. When we see a depiction of a bird symbol, it activates in us our innate knowledge of flying and perhaps even our memory of it at earlier stages in our own evolution, before we became anatomically modern humans.^{[101](#)}

And the eagle spirit, the cosmic principle of the eagle, one of the great forces that made the universe, also presents itself to us through the symbol and may quite consciously speak to us.^{[102](#)}

A symbol acts as the link between our rational intelligence and the intelligence that is today sometimes called surrational. We routinely understand things that happen to us at an unconscious, intuitive level, whilst our head trails along behind, trying to catch up. But contemplating a symbol like this can help this catching-up process, because it presents itself to us partly as an intellectual puzzle. The symbol is in fact working on us on many levels, stirring energies deep within us, directing us and helping us to evolve, to become more conscious – and so, as we are about to see, helping us to move nearer completion of the Work.

A symbolic act that you might make in a ceremony may help direct the great, creative forces of the universe, so that this act has a far greater effect than that which might be brought about by the mere knocking of atom against atom.

23. CULTIVATE IMAGINATION AS A WAY OF CONNECTING WITH AND COMMUNING WITH SPIRITUAL REALMS AND BEINGS

Some poets like Goethe, Novalis, Blake, Keats and Coleridge seem to have a higher order of imagination. They are poets of whom we are likely to say that they are ‘inspired’. There is wisdom in this description, because these are some of the poets who used esoteric techniques to achieve the higher state of consciousness known as Inspiration by people ‘in the know’.

Through Inspiration we may become conscious of what we otherwise experience during sleep then forget when we awake. In deep sleep each one of us becomes a being of light among beings of light, merging with them and learning from them. Then in waking life this experience of living beings may be reduced to thoughts.¹⁰³

In the atheistic world-view, imagination is to be distrusted and tested. It’s associated with fantasy and delusion. In the esoteric world-view, where the material world is seen as an emanation of mind, mental qualities are seen differently. Our love derives ultimately from God’s love and our imagination from His imagination. On this view Imagination can become a faculty of perceiving spiritual realms. It can help us enter a higher reality. William Blake wrote: ‘This world of Imagination is the world of eternity; it is the divine bosom into which we shall all go after the death of the Vegetated body.’¹⁰⁴

24. OPEN THE HEART AS AN ORGAN OF PERCEPTION

‘You can only see truly with the heart. What is essential is invisible to the

eye.’ So says the fox to the Prince in *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry.^{[105](#)}

What the fox is telling the prince is that the heart is the organ of perception of life’s values – of love, happiness, misery. In a universe in which values have been intrinsic since the beginning, rather than having been imposed at a late stage by human moralists, seeing with the heart is grasping the very essence of things.

25. LOVE YOUR TRUE SELF

We love others as much or as little as we love ourselves.

We have faith in the potentialities of others only to the degree with which we have experienced the reality of growth in ourselves, the strength of our own power of reason and love.

The *Gospel of St Thomas* has this stern and surprising saying: ‘That which you have within you will save you if you bring it out from yourselves, that which you have within you will kill you if you do not.’^{[106](#)}

26. LOOK AT OTHERS WITH THE EYE OF FAITH

Strive to see the potential for good, for growth in everything and everybody and you will be rewarded.

27. LOVE OTHERS

Love your neighbour as yourself. (Mark 12:31)

Love him as if one day you may come to hate him. Hate him as if one day you may come to love him. There is no consolation so sweet for the loss of a friend as that which comes from our knowing that we have held nothing back.

(Greek sage Chiro, quoted by Montaigne, II.8.287)

There are natures in which if they love us we are conscious of having a sort of consecration or baptism. (*Middlemarch*, chapter LXXVII, 1871–2)

‘Love,’ says the Italian novelist Cesare Pavese, ‘reveals us in our nakedness our misery our vulnerability our nothingness. In love we are reconciled to the radical unloveliness of those we love. By the act of touch we accept our neighbours’ doubts and smells and sores and imperfections, as we hope to be accepted, forgiven and loved.’¹⁰⁷

‘What a human being possesses deep within of the lost, of the tragic, of the blinding wonder found again nowhere but in bed,’ said Georges Bataille. ‘The essence of sex is assenting to live up to the point of death.’¹⁰⁸

These sayings are getting dark, aren’t they?

Baudelaire wrote in his provocative *The Intimate Journals*, published after his death in 1867: ‘The sole supreme, sensual pleasure of love, lies in the certainty of doing evil.’ Now Baudelaire has long been one of my heroes since my teens, louche and genial companion of my heavy-drinking days, and surely one of the good guys. So what on earth does he mean by this provocative statement? He means to tease, certainly, but he is, I think we all sense, don’t we? A good man? He was certainly a man steeped in esoteric philosophy. So what is he saying?

I found a clue reading Baudelaire’s contemporary Henry David Thoreau. He said: ‘Experience is in the fingers and the head. The heart is inexperienced.’ And Thoreau is right, isn’t he? Our hearts are innocent. When we understand love properly, then we also understand many of the puzzling and difficult, paradoxical qualities of esoteric philosophy. We understand why it involves higher states of consciousness and tests and trials. Why? *Because it is in the end a philosophy of love.* The point Baudelaire is surely making is that love is always surprising, reckless, dangerous, beyond any conventional morality. Love stories typically involve breaking conventions or taboos. Love is radical and subversive.

Above all it doesn’t do what you want it to do. For example, as

Rabindranath Tagore said: 'Love is a gift that cannot be given. It only waits to be accepted.'

This wild wisdom is subversive and paradoxical because that is what love is like.

28. SO BE GRACIOUS

Don't behave conventionally. Don't ask for your pound of flesh or to get your due reward. Be gracious and you step outside that law of cause and effect and tit-for-tat by which the cosmos slides into entropy. When God gives us moments of grace, of happiness, moments that come to us unbidden and which are far and away beyond what we deserve, he is also suggesting we behave in the same way.

29. LOVE YOUR ENEMY

We are locked in conflict and our relationships with others are fraught with difficulties but, looked at from a cosmic perspective we are all connected in mental space and at the deepest depths united in a great cosmic mind. After death in the spiritual realms we will no longer be isolated by walls of matter.

Esoteric philosophy opens up dimensions in our relationship with others that might otherwise remain hidden. We should love our enemy because just as we have a deep need to be tested in life we have a deep need for those who will betray us.

We have seen that in the spiritual realms there are laws operating very differently to the ones that are often thought to govern the physical world. This is nowhere more true than in the case of love. If I give someone a physical object, the sum of my possessions is diminished, but if I give love, my own store of love increases.

We arrive, finally at the solution to the dilemma and mystery we looked at earlier, posed by the spiritual law of equal and opposite value. According to this law if we try to do any deed which is purely good, an equal evil force will rise up to meet us.

The solution, we now see, is that we should not try to be good, but to be loving.

As Saint John Chrysostom has it: ‘Sooner would grass endure the application of fire than the devil the flame of love.’¹⁰⁹

30. LOVE THE DEAD

Rudolf Steiner gives exercises for communing with the dead. Some involve imagining down to the smallest detail an activity you shared in life – perhaps eating breakfast together. So you might imagine sitting at a particular table. Imagine the knots in the wood, the construction of the table, the feel of its surface, the homemade bread you broke together. Imagine the kitchen in which you used to meet. Then, he says ‘turn your whole soul-life in the direction of these thoughts’. You are in effect building a hut for your loved one to enter.¹¹⁰

In the ancient world cultic practices helped beings from the spirit realms to manifest themselves in the material world. Because molecules of smoke are easier for an unembodied being to move than larger, heavier objects, a god might be encouraged to show his face in the clouds of smoke arising from a sacrifice. Similarly, beautiful music, like Mozart’s Requiem, can by its complex body of living, harmonious vibrations create in the air a shape, a form for a supernatural being to inhabit.

I’m reminded a comment made about another divinely inspired composer: ‘When Bach plays the organ even God comes to mass.’ (Saying attributed to French twentieth-century French cubist painter Amédée J. Ozenfant)

31. LOVE GOD

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. (Mark 12:30)

32. LOVE THE WORLD

. . . and love your neighbour as yourself – because at a deep, divine level you and your neighbour are one. As the *Bhagavad Gita* proclaims: ‘He sees in himself the heart of all beings and sees all beings in his heart.’¹¹¹

St John Chrysostom said: ‘Imagine one single person loved and loving genuinely as he ought to love, why he will so live on earth as if it were Heaven.’¹¹² When we truly love, when we act with loving intention, we transform the very fabric of the world.

Sometimes, caught up in the ecstasies of love, we can feel our whole being vibrate as if the atoms of our material bodies are dancing free of their fixed positions then settling down again in a better place – and the same may be true of the matter of the universe that surrounds us. This is what spiritually minded alchemists believe.¹¹³

33. PARTICIPATE IN THE ALCHEMICAL WORK

A great vision of the material cosmos created and sustained by higher beings is continually replenished and revived in new language by mystics and esoteric philosophers age after age, generation after generation. As a result it is always there to remind us of our origins – and to tell us where we should be going.

In this mind-before-matter history the material universe was created by an immortal being for the benefit of human kind and when this universe has served its purpose, human beings will help spiritualize and transform it. Our destiny, then, and the destiny of our world will surge beyond our present physical manifestation.¹¹⁴

Highly evolved individuals are already working on this spiritualizing process. In Christian esoteric and Hermetic traditions it is called ‘the Work’. Indeed there is a saying in occult circles, ‘Inflame yourself with prayer.’ This saying shows awareness that when we pray we are aiming to

change our material being.

Esoteric traditions across the world talk about this transforming process, which involves first transforming one's own body by psychosomatic processes.¹¹⁵

In order to do this, it is necessary to call upon supernatural powers. As we are transformed, we may also acquire supernatural powers of our own, starting, as we have seen, with what are sometimes called the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. The Work continues through several stages described by alchemists until further progress enables very holy people to fly, walk on water, bi-locate and perform other supernatural feats.¹¹⁶

Holy people *work* with the aim of not only transforming their own bodies but transforming the material world beyond their own bodies. We are all familiar with the concept of psychosomatic changes that long-term mental states can bring about in our bodies. Again in the esoteric and mystical view we live in a psychosomatic universe, so that by our mental states we can bring about long-term, deep-seated changes in the material texture of the cosmos as a whole.

This is exactly the model that esoteric philosophy proposes. In *The Secret History of the World* I wrote: 'The deepest springs of our mental life are also the deepest springs of the physical world, because *all chemistry is psychochemistry* and the ways in which the physical content of the universe responds to the human psyche are described by deeper and more profound laws than the laws of material science.' These are the laws considered in this book.¹¹⁷

One of the most mysterious and haunting of all religious symbols is the Green Man, sprouting vegetation from the orifices in his head, being enclosed in vegetation and absorbed in it. This is another image that cannot be understood apart from mind-before-matter philosophy.

We saw earlier how the cosmos should be seen as *cradling* human consciousness. In fact it is a series of cradles. Creation, according to both science and Genesis, started with the creation of matter, then the plant kingdom, then the animal kingdom and finally anatomically modern humans. Human consciousness is therefore – in esoteric philosophy – cradled in animal consciousness, which is cradled in turn in plant consciousness, which is cradled finally in material consciousness.¹¹⁸

In esoteric spiritual practice human consciousness is called upon to work first on animal consciousness, taming it and disciplining it. The next and crucial stage, the first really *esoteric* stage, is to use this transformed animal consciousness to work on the plant consciousness. In esoteric philosophy, not only have we evolved from plants – this much esoteric philosophy shares with the scientific account – but *we have retained plant nature within us*.

The creation of the plant kingdom was the creation of life, creating the cradle that made animal life and then human life possible. This plant element in the cosmos can therefore be said to be its ‘life principle’ and it is through our own plant nature that we are connected to all living things. This is what the Green Man symbolizes. By working consciously on our plant dimension – what is sometimes called our soul or etheric body – we can transform it and help transform all plant life, the universe’s soul-dimension. And having transformed it we will be able to use newly acquired faculties to work on the final cradle, matter itself.

But, again, we cannot do this without asking for supernatural help. In *The Secret History of the World* I show how the great author and agency of the spiritualizing process has traditionally been conceived of as the Sun God. In the middle of the deepest, darkest night of history and the human soul, at the great turning point when matter was at its densest, when the human spirit was in danger of being snuffed out altogether, the Sun God returned and planted in each of us a seed of his sun nature.

Because we live in materialistic times, it is tempting to see paintings of the Transfiguration of Christ, most notably the Isenheim Altarpiece by Matthias Grünewald, as merely symbolic of psychological states – but that is not at all what the artists intended. As I say, the Transfiguration marked a turning point, a new era in the development of the Work. When Jesus Christ was transfigured, a great new influx of creative, spiritual power was unleashed into the cosmos.

Because we all have this seed of his sun-nature inside us, we too may be transfigured. As Meister Eckhart so beautifully phrased it: ‘Pear seeds grow into pear trees, nuts into nut trees, and God seed into God.’¹¹⁹

And the Work will not be complete until every atom in the cosmos has been transformed and spiritualized.

A great flourishing of alchemy took place at the dawn of the scientific age. Like material science it was inspired by an impulse to try to think about spiritual and supernatural phenomena systematically.

There were more books on alchemy published in the seventeenth century than before or since, including works by Dr Dee and Elias Ashmole, along with reprints of the works of Roger Bacon, Paracelsus and others. The alchemical process described in the *Chymical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreutz*, published in 1616, gives step-by-step instructions on how to use mind to move matter and ultimately transfigure it. At this level knowledge of the spiritual structure of the cosmos becomes a working knowledge – not solely scientific but engineering too.¹²⁰

Alchemy we may say, is a science of love, a practical mysticism.

We tend to associate the Work with alchemy's strange, even troubling imagery, but we may also recognize it in something much more familiar – the Lord's Prayer . . .

This prayer follows a downward descent, describing the transfiguring impulse working its way down into the world and into us.

Our Father which art *in Heaven* . . .

Hallowed be thy *name* . . . thy name is the Word, the Christ principle, sent down to help us.

Thy kingdom *come* . . . come down and infuse our world with the spiritual principles of Heaven. This verse looks forward to the New Jerusalem, when all the earth will move into a new spiritualized, less materially dense phase.

Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven . . . the faculty of will lies deep within us, in the region of the groin, in the root chakra. Here we ask for the heavenly transforming impulse to sink down into these depths and transform our will.¹²¹

The descent is now reversed, as these impulses now rise up . . .

Give us this day our daily *bread* . . . The bread here is first, the bread we need for sustenance, but it is also the bread of spiritual sustenance, the Christ principle that works in love to transform our hearts.

Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us . . . This verse shows us consciously co-operating with the process of transformation. We are here using our transformed will, using too our

newly transformed heart, an organ of perception and a power to love. Loving spiritual streams are moving up from the heart to the head to transform our thinking process. This verse is about understanding the divine and spiritual processes in the world and consciously choosing to work with them.

When the heart-streams flow up to the head and around the pineal gland we begin to become aware of the operations of the supernatural.

We should also become conscious of the different ways evil works in the world. Lead us not into temptation – help us not to be tempted by the Venusian Lucifer – and deliver us from evil – from Satan, the spirit of opposition that lives behind Saturn.¹²²

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever, Amen – the prayer ends on a spiritual triumph, as the process of transformation rises up from the seat of the will, through the heart, then through the head until it bursts through the crown.

Esoteric spiritual practice, including deep prayer, sometimes involves working to move the soul and spirit partly out of your body as it does in sleep, but here in full consciousness. When our soul or vegetable self emerges from the material body as a result of spiritual practice, love may stream into us like sunshine into trees.

As Hermes Trismegistus says: ‘Divide your stone into four elements and re-join them as one, and you will have the whole magisterium.’¹²³

Or to put another way:

Know your inner plant!¹²⁴

It would be wrong to assume that Newton’s study of alchemy was a hobby he pursued after his serious work was done. In fact he worked tirelessly on alchemy for over twenty-five years, concentrating on what he thought of as the active vegetative spirit through which divine intention shapes and illumines matter, hoping to pin it down and measure it.

His extensive writings on the subject include not only his obsessive notes detailing the progress of his experiments, but what is still the most comprehensive survey of alchemy ever written.

Having stretched his mind to encompass the entire material universe and, in what is perhaps still humankind’s single biggest intellectual leap and supreme mathematical achievement, devised a theory to account for it

all, he thought, ‘There’s something missing.’ If this is to be a theory of everything, surely there must be something in it that relates the movement of matter to our own destiny? Newton believed that God had left messages hidden in the Bible and ancient monuments that we will be able to decipher when we have developed our faculty of intelligence to the degree He planned for us. Newton worked obsessively trying to crack these codes. And in this study of alchemy he believed he was engaged in an intelligence-extending interaction with a higher intelligence.

It’s the same activity we are engaged in here.

34. BE AWARE OF THE GREAT, COSMIC GOALS OF EVOLUTION

Plato said every true thing we learn we are in fact remembering, and the Therapeutiae, a mystical and esoteric group who lived in Palestine around the time of Jesus, were said to have maintained and nurtured a living memory of the whole of human history.

When a man can know the true world story
In myths and in the form of poems
Then will its whole deformed being
Vanish before one single secret word.

*Novalis*¹²⁵

35. WORK TOWARDS THE COSMIC GOALS BY INCLUDING THE COSMOS IN YOUR PRAYERS

By living by these rules you are working towards a time when laws of nature with an apparent indifference to human happiness will be

superseded.

You are helping the world change its habits. (Rupert Sheldrake, *The Science Delusion*, chapter 2)

36. FIND YOUR DESTINY

Each of us must play our part.

Lorna Byrne often uses this simple phrase. The beauty of it is, I think, that all of us know intuitively what she means.

The experience of falling in love can reveal to us very clearly the operation of the supernatural in our lives. If you fall in love and know that this is meant to be, you are experiencing something that cannot possibly be true in the universe of the atheists, where all notions of destiny are a delusion. If you do feel that your meeting, your coming together, your falling in love is meant to be, then once more you have to choose between believing and trusting in the authenticity of your own experience or accepting the opinions of academics with an ideological axe to grind.

37. TUNE INTO COSMIC CONSCIOUSNESS – HOPE FOR MYSTICAL EXPERIENCES

In Sufism when someone ‘wakes up’ and rises to the highest degree of sainthood, what he then sees with his spiritual eye and his physical eyes are the same thing.

38. BE ALERT FOR THE ARRIVAL OF THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT – CULTIVATE

THEM

Grace makes you irresistible, grace makes you invulnerable, and as the Sufis say, your eyes shine like those of any drunken lover.

39. WATCH YOURSELF TRANSFORM, GROW HOLY AND FULL OF SUPERNATURAL POWER – WORK ON THIS

Like an industrious bee love gathers the sweetness from every flower, it deposits delight in the soul of him who loves, making the difficulties light and easy showing virtue to be easy but vice to be bitter. (Eirenaeus Philaletes, *The Secret of the Immortal Liquor*, 1683¹²⁶)

40. BE AWARE THAT YOU AND THE WHOLE COSMOS ARE BEING TRANSFORMED BY LOVE

And when we do make the right choice, when we do the right thing freely and lovingly, we feel it in our depths a blessing, a deep peace spreading through our being.

We are caught up in a material universe and in large measure our lives are shaped by its principle of entropy. We tire, slow down, decay and roll down the hill that leads us to dust. But by interacting consciously with the unembodied intelligence that lies behind the material world we may

experience a wonderful influx of reviving energy. We may be reborn.
Painful is rebirth again and again.
You must keep surpassing yourself or you will die.
You must die in order to be reborn.

41. UP THEN NOBLE SOUL

Up then, noble soul! Put on thy jumping shoes and . . .
Gracious one, play . . .
The universe is an empty shell wherein your mind
 frolics infinitely (From the *Vigyen Bhairov Tantra*)
I come from brilliancy
I return to brilliancy
What is this?
(Zen Master Honish in *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones*, edited by
 Paul Reps, 1957)

Closing Invocation

Alchemists know that thinking is a death process. We humans borrow from the life-forces that animate us in order to think, as the Moon borrows light from the Sun. We are sickly animals, more prone to illness than other species. And it is generally true to say that the more we think, the more we are distanced from life, the more experience thins and loses colour. I am talking now of the sort of thinking that used to be taught in Oxford philosophy tutorials.

We have been trying to engage in a form of *living* thinking that participates in a hope that the whole cosmos has for happiness, for beauty, truth and love, a form of thinking that suffuses not only human life, but animal life, plant life and the very rocks and stones that support us on our journey.

I have tried to think about ideas, ‘the things that really are’, not in a desiccating way, but in a way that is permeated with true spiritual feeling.

I hope, in short, that I have shared with you some of what Dr Dee called ‘memorable mystagogy’.

As I write I am also addressing my old philosophy tutor; I’m my eighteen-year-old self again yearning for the spiritual life but this time I’m ready for him. I can say, ‘You know what, religious belief *can* be reasonable. There is a version of religious faith that doesn’t crumble into nothingness at the touch of logic. Your certainty is a completely inappropriate response to the amount and type of evidence available.’

If I had become a clergyman I would have found myself in a pulpit preaching. But that is not my way now . . . I believe that in this area of endeavour we move forward only by inner dialogue.

I think living, esoteric philosophy can offer a way out of materialism

and that mysticism has an important historic role to play. Now is the time to make more public, to invite more people to share the experience.

I'd like to end by asking you to join with me in a prayer. It risks causing offence, but I am going to risk it.

We give thanks to you, Isis, for lifting your veil a little
today
Little Krishna, thank you for letting us come out to play
Thank you, Osiris, for dying for us with us and for
leading us up into the light
Zarathustra, please intercede for and help us to fight fire
with fire
Jove, favour us in our brave undertaking¹²⁷
Elijah, help us when we have special work to do
St Michael, help us to put our shoulder to the great
cosmic wheel and to push open the great cosmic
door
Thank you, Jesus Christ, for planting the seed of your
Sun nature in us today – for giving us our daily
bread
Blessed Francis, God's jester, help us to take the lessons
of the Gospels seriously
St Joan, intercede for us and help us to expel those
perfidious armies who would occupy our mental
space
All the heavenly beings, Saints and Mystics we have
had in mind today, please pray for us, help us to
put our seven league boots on
To go out into the world
And be brilliant.

GLOSSARY

Many movements and personalities cited in this book receive fuller treatment in my previous books, so where appropriate in this glossary I have added to the short sentence of explanation page references to these passages. (TSHOTW *The Secret History of the World*, TSH *The Sacred History*)

Alchemy – the ancient science of spiritualizing matter. TSHOTW 359–62, 413–4, 457–63, 524–5, TSH 221, 259–60, 273–282, 337–339

Anti-Christ – a powerful being alluded to in the Epistles of John and who intends to try to prevent the descent of the Heavenly Jerusalem. In *Stairways to Heaven* and *Angels at my Fingertips* Lorna Byrne writes some of the personalities gathering to oppose him. TSHOTW 553–577, TSH 432

Apuleius – second-century Latin-writing Numidian whose *The Golden Ass* parodies a Mystery School, initiation and in the process yields fascinating details. TSHOTW 198, 278, TSH 327–8

Ashmole, Elias – seventeenth-century British initiate, cabalist, Freemason and museum founder. TSHOTW 454–5, 454–7, 472, TSH 339, 377

astral body – in Hindu- and Buddhist-influenced theosophy the body that carries animal consciousnesses. TSHOTW 85–8

Autobiography of a Yogi by Paramahansa Yogananda – twentieth-century bestselling memoir featuring a full account of the supernatural phenomena that may accompany spiritual advancement. TSHOTW 247, 423

Baal Shem Tov – the eighteenth-century Ukrainian wonder-worker and cabalistic sage, a founder of Hasidic Judaism who began an impulse to popularize esoteric knowledge that also flowed through Madame Blavatsky and Rudolf Steiner.

Bach, J. S. – German composer whose ability to write music of genius which also contains Kabbalah-like coded messages may indicate the operations of superhuman intelligence. TSHOTW 57, 234

Bacon, Francis – sixteenth-century London philosopher who shared occult interests, inspiration and perhaps mental space with Shakespeare. TSHOTW 393–5, 404–5, 450–1, 548–9

Bacon, Roger – thirteenth-century Oxford-based alchemist and scientist. TSHOTW 360–2, TSH 250, 326, 338

Basil the Great – fourth-century Turkish bishop and theologian.

Baudelaire, Charles – nineteenth-century French poet, part of the great French occult revival.

Béla Tarr – visionary Hungarian film director, whose *Werckmeister Harmonies*, for example, dramatized mystical and esoteric ideas, including on the harmony of the spheres.

Joseph Beuys – twentieth-century German artist influenced by shamanism and Rudolf Steiner.

Bhavad Gita, the – ancient Sanskrit scripture containing a

revelation of Lord Krishna. TSHOTW

Blake, William – eighteenth/nineteenth-century London poet, visionary and cabalist. TSHOTW 467, 491, 495, 530

bodhisattva – in Buddhism a being who has attained significant spiritual control over matter, excarnation and incarnation. TSH

Boehme, Jacob – sixteenth/seventeenth-century Bohemian mystic and writer. TSHOTW 23, 76–77, 80, 111, 114, 130–1, 426–8, TSH

Bohr, Nils – Danish scientist, one of the great scientists of the twentieth century, whose ideas show remarkable affinity with ancient spiritual wisdom. TSHOTW 550

Borges, Jorge Luis – twentieth-century Argentinian writer whose work contains vivid depictions of a mind-before-matter universes, replete with paradox.

Bowie, David – English rock star with a well-developed interest in the occult.

Byrne, Lorna – twentieth-century Irish visionary and mystic. TSHOTW 515, TSH

Cathars – twelfth–fourteenth-century mystical movement in France and Italy with connections to the Knights Templar and, according to Rudolf Steiner, an important role in protecting the future.

Christian Rosenkreuz – the founder of the Rosicrucian brotherhood, commonly assumed to be a legendary figure. TSHOTW 355–6

Catherine of Siena – fourteenth-century Italian saint, miracle-worker and political operator.

Ceylan, Nuri Bilge – visionary Turkish film director – at the time of writing, *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia* is his mystical masterpiece.

Chopra, Deepak – twentieth-century pioneering writer on the synergy between ancient ideas of spiritual healing and modern, cutting-edge science.

Cicero – First-century BC Roman philosopher and initiate. The esoteric dimension to his thought is routinely overlooked. TSHOTW 16, 259, 265, 272, 280–1

Cloud of Unknowing – fourteenth-century English mystical guide to deep prayer.

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor – nineteenth-century poet, cabalist and esoteric scholar, whose ideas on imagination and the occult are akin to Sufi ideas. TSHOTW 496

Conrad, Joseph – nineteenth/twentieth-century Polish-British modernist writer, influenced by Baudelaire and Dostoyevsky in his depiction of dark forces rising up through the human mind.

Corbin, Henry – twentieth-century leading French scholar of Sufism and explainer of it to non-Muslim countries. TSHOTW 525

Dante – Durante degli Alighieri – thirteenth/fourteenth century, Florentine, the great initiate-poet of the Middle Ages, whose *Divine Comedy* is in part informed by his initiation into a lay order attached to the Knights Templar by occultist Brunetto Latini. TSHOTW 347–9, 363, 366–7, 390–2

Dhammapada, collected sayings of the Buddha in verse form.

Dee, Dr John – sixteenth-century London philosopher, able to bend the world to his will until the spirit left him. TSHOTW 399, 418,

420–3, 438, 489

Dostoyevsky, Fyodor – nineteenth-century Russian novelist, visionary and prophet of the Antichrist. TSHOTW 517–9

Dylan, Bob – the songwriting genius of the twentieth century, influenced by the Kabbalah and hermeticism. TSHOTW 35–6, 493

Eckhart, Meister – thirteenth/fourteenth-century German theologian whose paradoxical way of thinking shows remarkable affinity with Zen. TSHOTW 188, 406–8, 409–10, 413

Elijah – OT prophet, human being who carries the soul of an angel, teacher to cabalists Jacob Boehme and Lorna Byrne.

Eliot, George – nineteenth-century English free-thinking novelist whose exploration of esoteric ideas finds most focused fictional expression in *The Lifted Veil*.

Eliot, T. S. – American-English twentieth-century poet, whose occult influences include Ouspensky.

Eirenaeus Philalethes – seventeenth century, pen name used by Welsh clergyman Thomas Vaughan in the publication of alchemical treatises.

Emmerich, Anne Catherine – German eighteenth/nineteenth-century beatified mystic, visionary and stigmatist.

esoteric – the secret, inner group teachings of the world religions.

etheric body – in Hindu- and Buddhist influenced theosophy the body that animates matter, sometimes also called the life principle. TSHOTW 75–6

Euripides – fifth-century BC Greek playwright and initiate of a Mystery School. TSHOTW

Fox, Matthew – twentieth/twenty-first-century American writer and theologian of Creation Theology.

Francis of Assisi – twelfth/thirteenth-century saint, and introducer into Christianity of a Buddhist impulse. Has a mission to the dead.

Frost, Robert – twentieth-century American poet whose explorations of ‘the road less travelled’ have been an inspiration to many curious about esoteric philosophy and alternative spirituality.

Fulcanelli – famous twentieth-century alchemist, apparently based in France, author of a *Mysteries of the Cathedrals and Dwellings of the Philosophers*.

Gnosticism – a portmanteau term to cover schools of thought emphasizing direct mystical experience from second century BC to today.

Goethe, Johann Wolfgang – eighteenth/nineteenth-century German writer and philosopher steeped in esoteric philosophy, including alchemy. He wrote about his supernatural powers. TSHOTW

Gospel of Thomas – discovered in 1945 at Nag Hammadi, this gospel comes from the time and place as the four gospels of the New Testament and contains what is clearly the original, uncorrupted versions of gospel sayings.

Grail, the Holy – nexus of power to transform and spiritualize matter, existing across several dimensions.

Green Man, the – image of Osiris, the god leading humankind down into vegetable matter and being enclosed in it.

Grünewald, Matthias – fifteenth/sixteenth-century German philosopher, showing a remarkably esoteric understanding of transfiguration. SHOTW plate section

Gurdjieff, George Ivanovich – Armenian-French, one of the most influential esoteric teachers of the twentieth century.

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich – German idealist philosopher, proponent of history as the story human spiritual evolution. TSH

Heidegger, Martin – eighteenth/nineteenth-century German idealist philosopher whose career showed the dangers of idealistic schools of thought when untrammelled by common sense.

Hermes Trismegistus – legendary source of Egyptian esoteric and occult wisdom Hermeticism, depicted on the floor of Siena cathedral.

Hildegard of Bingen – twelfth-century German mystic, visionary, composer, herbal healer. TSH

Hume, David – eighteenth-century Scottish philosopher and Freemason.

Ibn Arabi – twelfth-century Moorish Spaniard. TSH

Isis – Egyptian goddess with an essential role in the evolution of the human condition. TSHOTW

Jenkins, David – twentieth-century English Christian-atheist bishop. TSH

Jerome, Saint – fourth/fifth-century Italian teacher and translator of the Bible into Latin, traditionally a cabalist. TSHOTW 362

Joan of Arc – fifteenth-century visionary, friend of Gilles de Rais,

the model for Bluebeard.

Joel – Old Testament prophet, one of the twelve ‘minor prophets’.

John, Saint – author of the Fourth gospel. In esoteric lore John relates his experience of initiation in the Book of Revelation. TSHOTW

John of the Cross – Spanish sixteenth-century mystic.

John Chrysostom – Greco-Syrian fourth-century saint.

Julian, Mother of Norwich – fourteenth/fifteenth-century English mystic.

Jung, Carl Gustav – nineteenth/twentieth-century psychologist, visionary and latterly mystic. TSH

hadith – commentary on the Koran, traditionally ascribed to Muhammad.

Isaiah – OT prophet, in whose teachings early ideas of grace arose.

Kabbalah – the main stream of Jewish mysticism and esoteric philosophy.

Kant, Immanuel – eighteenth-century German philosopher, transcendental idealist. TSH

Keating, Fr Thomas – twentieth-century American monk, teacher of contemplative prayer.

King, Martin Luther – twentieth-century American spiritual leader. Lorna Byrne writes about a previous incarnation of King’s in *Stairways to Heaven*.

Knights Templar – twelfth–fourteenth-century order of warrior monks and initiates. TSHOTW TSH TSHOD

Krishna – Hindu sun deity, prefiguring Jesus Christ in many respects.

Lawrence, D. H. – twentieth-century English novelist.

Lessing, Doris – English-African novelist and follower of Gurdjieff.

Lewis, C. S. – twentieth-century Oxford don and member of a circle of writers influenced by occult ideas and philosophy.

Malick, Terrence – American writer and director of films on mystical themes.

Mary Magdalene – in esoteric lore, sister of Lazarus, journeyed to France, preserving and spreading secret knowledge. TSHOTW

Mondrian, Piet – Dutch modernist painter whose theosophical leanings are generally swept under the carpet by the artistic establishment.

Mother Meera – twentieth-century Indian/German, avatar of the Divine Mother.

Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus – eighteenth-century Austrian composer and mystical Freemason, who wrote music for performances in lodges, including his sublime Masonic funeral music K479/477a.

Nag Hammadi – town in Egypt, site of discovery of a cache of gnostic documents in 1945.

Newton, Isaac – seventeenth/eighteenth-century English scientist and alchemist. TSHOTW

Novalis – eighteenth-century German poet and mystic, said by Rudolph Steiner to be a reincarnation of the painter Raphael.

Osiris – Egyptian sun god, prefiguring Jesus Christ in many respects. TSHOTW

Ovid – first-century BC/first-century AD poet and initiate. TSHOTW

Ouspensky, P. D. – twentieth-century Russian teacher of esoteric philosophy.

Neo-Platonism – emerging into exoteric history starting in third century, this stream of philosophy with an esoteric dimension.

panpsychism – the theory that consciousness and intelligence pervade the whole universe and are inherent in all matter, an ancient way of thinking that is finding new supporters in cutting-edge cosmologists, philosophers of science and physicists.

Paracelsus – fifteenth/sixteenth-century Swiss-Austrian alchemist, magician and healer. One of his books was discovered in the tomb of Christian Rosenkreuz.

Pascal, Blaise – seventeenth-century French mathematician and mystic. TSHOTW 449

Pater, Walter – nineteenth-century English writer with an esoteric perspective, influential on Oscar Wilde.

Pennington, Fr Basil – twentieth-century Trappist monk, theologian and teacher of contemplative prayer.

Picasso, Pablo – eighteenth/nineteenth-century Spanish painter and sculptor, a modern demigod. TSHOTW

Pius XI – Italian-born pope 1922–39, dispenser of secret teachings.
TSH

Plato – fourth century BC, the fountainhead of academic idealism. He took the way that everyone had experienced life up to that point and expressed that for the first time in history as a comprehensive, abstract philosophy. TSHOTW

Psalms of David – a book of the Old Testament, the psalms believed by occultists, including Valentine Tomberg, to have magical properties.

Pullman, Philip – Oxford novelist, strongly against organized religion but whose fiction is saturated with esoteric lore and underpinned by the principles of a mind-before-matter universe.

Pythagoras – Samos-born sixth/fifth-century BC philosopher and founder of a Mystery School. TSHOTW

Raphael, Saint – Archangel associated with healing. TSH

Raphael (Raffaello Sanzio da Urbino) – Italian painter, said by Rudolf Steiner to have been present at times during life of Jesus in a previous incarnation. TSHOTW

Rilke, Rainer Maria – nineteenth/twentieth-century Bohemian-Austrian poet of angels and letter writer. TSHOTW TSH

Rimbaud, Arthur – nineteenth-century poet and explorer of higher and lower states of consciousness. TSHOTW 528

Robinson, Marilynne – twentieth-century novelist, acclaimed despite her religious and mystical themes.

Rostand, Edmund – nineteenth/twentieth-century French poet,

dramatist and hermeticist who staged a drama according the phases of the moon.

Rosenkreuz, Christian – fourteenth/fifteenth-century German founder of the Rosicrucian brotherhood. TSHOTW 412–3, 438–9, 486 TSH 273–282

Rosicrucian brotherhood TSHOTW TSH

Rumi, Jalal ad-Din Muhammad – thirteenth-century Persian, Sufi poet. TSHOTW

St Exupéry, Antoine de – twentieth-century French writer of fiction and memoirs on esoteric themes.

St Martin, Louis Claude de, the Unknown Philosopher – eighteenth-century cabalistic mystic, some of whose secret teachings are published in TSHOTW.

Schopenhauer, Arthur – nineteenth-century German philosopher, influential on Wagner and Nietzsche, who introduced Buddhist philosophical ideas into the Western mainstream. TSHOTW

Schwaller de Lubicz, René – nineteenth/twentieth-century French Egyptologist and occultist, sometimes thought to be the secret identity of Fulcanelli. TSHOTW

Shakespeare, William – sixteenth/seventeenth-century poet and playwright who wove into his writing influences from Apuleius, Kabbalah, Sufism and Rosicrucianism. TSHOTW TSH

Sheldrake, Rupert – twentieth-century English botanist and philosopher of science, proponent of morphic resonance. TSH

Sinnett, A. P. – nineteenth/twentieth-century English theosophist,

author of *Esoteric Buddhism*, criticized by Rudolf Steiner.

Socrates – fifth-century BC philosopher, advised throughout his life by his private and personal daemon. TSHOTW 257, 266–7, 270 TSH

Sophocles – fifth-century Greek dramatist and initiate.

Steiner, Rudolf – nineteenth/twentieth-century scholar of Goethe, Freemason, Theosophist, founder of Anthroposophy, occultist, architect, visionary. With Jung the greatest spiritual teacher of the twentieth century.

Sufism – the main form of esoteric Islam. TSHOTW

Tauler, Johannes – fourteenth-century mystic, initiated by the mysterious layman from the Oberland. TSHOTW 410–3

Teresa of Avila – sixteenth-century Spanish mystic, writer on the Third Eye. TSHOTW 431–3, 546

Tertullian – second/third-century Carthaginian theologian. TSHOTW 322–3

Tao Te Ching – Chinese Taoist scripture.

Tagore, Rabindranath – nineteenth/twentieth-century Bengali writer and mystic theosopher.

Theosophical Society – co-founded by Madame Blavatsky and prominent Freemason Henry Steel Olcott. TSH

Thoreau, Henry – nineteenth-century Transcendentalist philosopher, environmentalist and progenitor of ‘civil disobedience’.

Tomberg, Valentine – twentieth-century Estonian-Russian mystic,

initiated by Rudolf Steiner, later a convert to Catholicism, author of *Meditations on the Tarot*. TSHOTW

Sartre, Jean-Paul – twentieth-century heroic French philosopher who risked madness by sincerely trying to live according to atheism.

Tarkovsky, Andrei – twentieth-century Russian film director and mystic.

Townshend, Peter – twentieth-century English musician, composer for The Who, Baba-lover and mystic transfiguration.

Troubadours – eleventh–thirteenth-century Provençal poets of courtly love, whose verse was encoded with esoteric ideas. TSHOTW 370–3, 386–7

Upanishads – ancient Sanskrit scriptures, traditionally dated to 800 BC.

Van der Post, Laurens – twentieth-century Afrikaner-English traveller, mystic and mentor to Prince Charles.

Von Eckartshausen, Karl – eighteenth-century German Catholic, writer on the Inner Church and its esoteric and occult teachings. TSHOTW 262, 409–10

Warhol, Andy – twentieth-century Polish-American artist.

Weerasethakul, Apichatpong – Thai film director giving cinematic expression to esoteric, Buddhist ideas, such as *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*.

Weil, Simone – French twentieth-century mystic and philosopher.

Wheeler, Charles – twentieth-century English physicist.

Wenders, Wim – twentieth-century German film director and author.

Wilhelm, Bro W. L. – nineteenth/twentieth-century Freemason and writer on esoterica.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig van – twentieth-century Austrian-English philosopher whose journey took him from logical positivism to mysticism.

Wordsworth, William – eighteenth/nineteenth-century English Romantic poet and mystic. TSHOTW 496–7

Zarathustra – legendary founder of Zoroastrianism. TSHOTW

Zohar, the – literally the Book of Splendour, the most important book of cabalistic philosophy.

Zen – method of inducing instant enlightenment by bringing together contradictory ideas. TSHOTW 323–5

ENDNOTES

¹ In 1981 I embarked on an ambitious project with two inspiring teachers on spiritual practice, Trappist monk, theologian and teacher of the Centring Prayer Dom M. Basil Pennington and senior Episcopalian priest and theologian Alan Jones, a pioneering thinker on the role of imagination in spiritual practice. The plan was to gather together in one volume the most important and illuminating Christian writings since the finalizing of the canon of the New Testament, published in 1985 as *The Living Testament* by Harper and Row in the US and as *The Christian Testament since the Bible* by Penguin in the UK. As would be the case many years later with *The Secret History of the World*, it proved necessary to cut vast amounts of wonderful material. The process of selection went through several increasingly radical stages before a final text was sent to press, but it struck me at the time that we had excluded many of the passages that would speak most directly to the sensibilities and consciousness of a modern audience, passages that had been written by lone mystics with whom the Church has had a wary relationship and indeed by many who had been condemned as heretics. Could it be, I wondered, that what people really want to hear from tradition is the voices that have been hidden or condemned – the stone that has been rejected? This question helped point me down a path to secret teachings.

² John Esposito, professor of International Studies and Islamic Studies at Georgetown University, has repeatedly spoken with approval of her insights into world crises. Tariq Ramadan, professor of Contemporary Islamic Studies in the Faculty of Oriental Studies at St Antony's College, Oxford, nominated *Angels in My Hair* as his book of the year in American

Foreign Policy magazine.

³ Rabbi Israel Eliezer, eighteenth-century Ukrainian-born mystic, kabbalist and founder of Hasidic Judaism.

⁴ *Julius Caesar*, 4.3

⁵ ‘There is nothing more inventive than suffering.’ Gregory of Nazienzen from his funeral oration for his father.

⁶ *Cloud of Unknowing*, chapter 34

⁷ *Letter to Marcella*

⁸ Quoted by his son, Hans Bohr, in *Niels Bohr: His Life and Work as Seen by His Friends and Colleagues*, 1967.

⁹ Joel 2.28

¹⁰ As described in the *Bhagavad Gita*, chapter 11.

¹¹ Raymond of Capua, *The Life of Catherine of Siena*, transl. Conleth Kearns, 1980, p92

¹² I have been unable to trace the source of this well-known Meister Eckhart saying. It might be better classified as ‘school of Eckhart’.

¹³ *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*

¹⁴ David Jenkins later denied he used this phrase, while continuing to maintain that the resurrected Christ had no physical body.

¹⁵ Recently a teenager wrote to me to tell me her parents were always dragging her around great art galleries – the Louvre, the National Gallery

and so on – and that she had always found it all dull. But reading *The Secret History of the World* helped her to decode the great paintings of the Western tradition for the first time. The Creation, the life of Moses, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus only make sense, only come alive in the context of mind-before-matter philosophy.

¹⁶ Hegel.

¹⁷ London 2012, published in the US as *Science Set Free*.

¹⁸ Nobel prize for Physiology or Medicine awarded to Eric Kandel, Arvid Carlsson and Paul Greengard.

¹⁹ Norman Doidge, *The Brain's Way of Healing*, 2015

²⁰ Sufi teachers have always insisted that direct, personal experience is crucial. Rumi said, 'He who has not tasted does not know.' (*Mathnawi* II: Prologue) Ibn Arabi, an Islamic mystic whose great but unacknowledged influence on Christendom included inspiring Dante, wrote, 'Your heart is the only thing whose inner structure you can hope to know through introspection. If you know your heart, if you regard it with your spiritual eye, watching how it is constantly changing and transforming through many different states and modes . . . you can see in this the Absolute transmuting moment by moment in all the myriad forms of the world.' (*The Futuhat*, part 4, chapter 68)

²¹ Basilides, a pupil of St Peter's, called the human being 'an encampment of different spirits'. Ibn Arabi, a spiritual master of the Sufis, said, 'Angels are the powers hidden in the organs and faculties of Man.' The Kabbalistic Midrash Talpiyot says that in the human body 'there are a number of souls, one for each organ'. Quoted in *The Kabbalistic Tradition* edited by Alan Unterman 2008.

²² A modern expression of this line of thought is to be found in *The Man Without Qualities* by Robert Musil, a writer steeped in esoteric

philosophy: ‘The difference between a normal person and an insane one is that the normal person has all the diseases of the mind while the madman has only one.’ It’s often been said that the gods of Greece and Rome and the Norse gods live in a world unbounded by Christian morality. These gods are monomaniacs, madly pursuing the impulses they embody, one might say, to the point of psychopathy. The ancient wisdom teaches that all these impulses weave through us – the lust of Venus, the warlike qualities of Mars, the wisdom of Odin and Athena – and they are all intertwined in us in a way that means they modify one another, hold one another in check and form a sort of balance that we call the human being and the human personality, a glorious thing, the crown of creation – as long as it remains in balance.

[23](#) 27th January 2012

[24](#) Quoted in his obituary, *Daily Telegraph*, 15th April 1908.

[25](#) We are going to consider how esoteric philosophy works itself out as lived, human experience, a philosophy of life and personal spiritual practice. I have no interest in the claims made for the different mind-before-matter philosophies to be the first and original one. What interests me is what they have in common, even though they have different cultural flavourings. So for me Hermeticism is Egyptian-flavoured mind-before-matter philosophy, Kabbalah is Jewish-flavoured, Neo-Platonism is Greek-flavoured, Sufism is Islam-flavoured, Rosicrucianism is Christian-flavoured and of course Hindu and Buddhist mind-before-matter philosophy have their own flavours too. But if you can disregard the flavours and focus on what they have in common, that is in itself and as far as it goes a reason for believing it to be true, and mystics in all times and places have experienced the same things. I have recently been struck by the fact that Lorna Byrne, though an Irish Catholic, has a distinctly Kabbalistic flavour to her teachings, not only in her phrasing, such as ‘the Other Side’ for the powers of evil and her description of her encounter with ‘the Most Righteous Man in the World’, but also in that her main teacher is Elijah, as is the case with great sages of the Kabbalah, such as

Rabbi Isaac Luria and the Baal Shem Tov.

[26](#) Sermon 4, True Hearing

[27](#) Thomas Mann gives profound expression to the transpersonal nature of dreaming in what he called his Hermetic masterpiece *The Magic Mountain*: ‘I know it’s not out of our single selves we dream. We dream anonymously and communally if each after his fashion. The great soul of which we are a part dreams through us.’ Part V, Snow

[28](#) *The Science Delusion*, chapter 9, 2012

[29](#) Author’s conversation with Rupert Sheldrake, 2011.

[30](#) *Synchronicity, An Acausal Connecting Principle*, 1952 (Collected Works, vol. 8)

[31](#) The French mystic Simone Weil said something profound about one of the curious ways we are connected. She pointed to the fact that one person may sometimes understand the spiritual plight of a person better than that individual understands it him or herself. Talking about a crime of violence she said: ‘the innocent victim who suffers the violence knows a truth about the perpetrator which he may not know. The evil which the victim suffers is really in the perpetrator, but the latter may not be sensible of the fact. It is the innocent victim who can feel Hell.’ *Gravity and Grace* p64, 1947

[32](#) For an account of esoteric traditions regarding the imminent birth of the Anti-Christ, see the postscript to *The Secret History of the World*.

[33](#) Gurdjieff said, ‘Everything in the universe has a place in a scale.’ He didn’t mean this in a narrow, mechanical sense – balanced like a seesaw – but *balanced in terms of value*. The occurrence of any property now causes the appearance of another, its opposite. The growth of knowledge in one area leads to the growth of ignorance in another, refinement in one

sphere is the opposite of vulgarity in another, freedom in one relation gives birth to slavery in another. This is a necessary and irresistible law. Quoted in many collections of Gurdjieff's sayings, and also in P. D. Ouspensky's *In Search of the Miraculous*, chapter 7, 1947.

³⁴ Compare: The lust of the goat is the bounty of God – William Blake, *Proverbs of Hell*.

³⁵ Quoted in *The Perennial Philosophy*, Aldous Huxley, 1945.

³⁶ 'The horrible truth is that wicked people are capable of love.' E. M. Forster, *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, chapter 7, 1905

³⁷ In a recent article in the *Guardian* (2.10.2015) Jonathan Franzen said of writing novels, 'The task is to develop a set of characters whom I can love enough to put them through torments which without love would simply be cruel.'

³⁸ *Existentialism and Humanism*, p29

³⁹ Matthew 5:28 NIV

⁴⁰ We in the West may easily imagine this law is a characteristically Judeo-Christian concept, but the Buddha said, 'Leave the path to the left and take the right-hand path. Go on for a little and you will see a dense forest. Go on for a while and you will see a swamp. Go a little further and you will find a steep cliff. Go for a bit and you will see a beautiful land.' *Samyutta-Nikaya* 3.106

⁴¹ Dante writes in the *Commedia* of Fra Alberigo, whose spirit is actually in Hell while his body is still alive on earth in the form of a fat and apparently jolly friar. Canto 33

⁴² *Psalm xci*, 11

⁴³ *Ennead*, iv, 4,4

⁴⁴ Georges Huber, *Mon ange machera devant toi*, 1970

⁴⁵ ‘Without sacrifice nothing can be attained. A man will renounce any pleasure you like but he will not give up his suffering.’ Gurdjieff quoted widely, including in P. D. Ouspensky’s *In Search of the Miraculous*, 1949.

⁴⁶ *Mountain Interval*, 27, line 149–50

⁴⁷ Mother Julian of Norwich was a fourteenth/fifteenth-century anchoress and author of *The Revelation of Divine Love*, this famous passage coming from chapter 31. Like many mystics, including the Baal Shem Tov and Lorna Byrne, she suffered from poor health, briefly died from a medical point of view and during this time she was given a tour of the heavens.

⁴⁸ Isaiah 11.6

⁴⁹ Euripides, *Medea* line 409

⁵⁰ Perhaps it takes an Englishman, a typically dour Northerner, to focus on the joys of the long haul: ‘Happiness includes chiefly the idea of satisfaction after full, honest effort. No one can possibly be satisfied and no one can be happy who feels that in some paramount affairs he has failed to take up the challenge of life.’ (Arnold Bennett, *A Home in Heaven*)

⁵¹ *Kaushitaki Upanishad* 3.8

⁵² *Eloquent Silence*, Nyogen Senzuki’s Gateless Gate, p43

⁵³ *Ch’an and Zen Teaching* by Lu K’uan Yu (London, 1962)

⁵⁴ *The Dharma Treasure of the Altar Sutr of the Sixth Patriarch*

[55](#) *Pensées*, Submission and the Use of reason, pensée 188

[56](#) *The Masnavi iv*, story 2

[57](#) *Sermon 15*

[58](#) History shows there is a temptation to which we who are spiritual explorers are particularly susceptible: that we draw implications from these experiences and turn them into dogma. In this area of faith and religious belief, certainty is in my view a completely inappropriate response to the amount and the nature of the evidence available. Don't let your thoughts ossify and grow rigid. Don't even try to make sure. Nothing is more certain than that any new understanding of human nature or the human condition, including and perhaps especially any scientific theory, will soon be superseded.

[59](#) What Goethe called being happy to 'walk in mysteries' (*Conversations with Eckermann*, 1836) John Keats called 'negative capability', which he defined as when 'a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason' (letter to brothers George and Thomas, 1817). Poets like Goethe, Coleridge, Novalis and Keats, wise in the ways of esoteric philosophy, do not rush to impose a pattern on experiences. They prefer instead to stay receptive and let consciousness expand. They keep scanning their mental space to see if it yields anything that lies outside the bounds of what is currently understood.

[60](#) *Oedipus Rex* line 71–2

[61](#) Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*, Letter to Kappus, 14th May 1904

[62](#) *In Search of Lost Time*, Within a Budding Grove, chapter 3, 1919

[63](#) *The Golden Notebook*, p215, 1962

[64](#) *Room With a View, 1908*

[65](#) Letter to Kappus, 23rd December 1907

[66](#) *Homily on the Holy Spirit*

[67](#) *Gilead* p103–4, 2004

[68](#) For comparison the Baal Shem Tov says that if you follow his meditative practice for forty days, you will receive a visit from Elijah.

[69](#) As the well-known ancient Greek proverb has it: While the fisher sleeps, the net takes fish.

[70](#) *The Lost World of the Kalahari*, p72, 1958

[71](#) *Tao Te Ching*, chapter 68

[72](#) ‘Outworld’ was the name the seventeenth-century German mystic Jacob Boehme gave to the material realm to set against the inner ‘things that really are’. It’s also interesting to note in this context how the meaning of the word ‘realism’ has changed. Until materialistic science began to assert itself as the dominant philosophy in the eighteenth century, it was a belief that ideas are the ultimate reality.

[73](#) If there is a time to be quiet and still when fasting, solitude, mortification and meditation can help open us to intuition, and there is also a time when the way to inspiration is through sensual excess and derangement of the senses. Baudelaire and Rimbaud were both students of Sufism and supreme poets of visionary derangement.

[74](#) *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol: from A to B and back again*, chapter 7, p112, and chapter 5, p83, 1975

[75](#) *The Shepherd of Hermas* is the earliest surviving Christian text outside the Bible. It contains a reference to the opposing angels.

[76](#) *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* ii, 1

[77](#) *Pensées*, thought number 430

[78](#) Alfred Tennyson, the nineteenth-century poet who more than any other writer popularized the quest for the Grail, gave a clear and explicit statement of the mind-before-matter belief in 1869. He also repeatedly described his mystical experiences – ‘the surest of the sure, the weirdest of the weird’ – and had significant, otherworldly dreams, including Priam, king of Troy, appearing to him. He understood such mystical experiences and dreams as higher states of consciousness.

[79](#) Quoted in William of Thierry’s life of St Bernard *Vita prima* 1.4.23 PL 185–240

[80](#) *The Cloud upon the Sanctuary* (NOTE ii, 10)

[81](#) E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, p24, 1951

[82](#) For an account of Dante’s esoteric beliefs and initiatic experiences, see *The Secret History of Dante*.

[83](#) Esoteric teachers can expand our horizons, our ideas of how far our experience may stretch in the mental space that we all share with all things, bodied and unembodied. Chaim Vital said of his master, the sixteenth-century Kabbalistic sage Rabbi Isaac Luria, that he could understand the language of the birds, the communion between trees, plants and angels as well as angelic conversations. He could see souls leaving the body at the time of death and could himself speak to the souls of the righteous departed. He could see who had had previous incarnations and who had been born on earth for the first time. He could see what people were thinking from their foreheads – sometimes even before these

thoughts had entered their heads. He could see what people had dreamt. As well as discovering what people had done from their smell, he could also see what they intended to do in the future. He was aware of all that was happening anywhere on earth. He often received instructions on important matters from Elijah.

[84](#) *Bhagavad Gita* 2.47, 5.12

[85](#) *Philosophy of Freedom*, 1894

[86](#) *Zohar The Book of Splendour*; readings edited by Gershom G. Scholem, p81, 1977

[87](#) Letter to Kappus, 17th February 1903

[88](#) *In Angels at my Fingertips*, her new book, Lorna Byrne writes about how a deep, contemplative prayer aids the process of spiritualizing, separating the soul from the physical body, the *separatio* of the alchemists. We saw earlier how Lorna can see the soul moving partially out of the body in sleep. What she sees in the case of deep prayer is different. She actually sees a process of intertwining of soul and of body which makes the latter lighter and more full of life. We will return to this process later in ancient wisdom concerning the Transfiguration.

[89](#) *Critique of Pure Reason*, conclusion, 1744

[90](#) *Middlemarch*, closing lines

[91](#) In some esoteric thought we may be bound to another individual through eternity, so that we are able to see and love each other in many different aspects of their being over different incarnations, and we may also be bound together with many others as part of a social group. This may account for the *recognition* we sometimes experience upon meeting someone for the first time.

⁹² The first line comes from Rilke's letter 13th November 1925 to Witold Halewicz. He continues: 'We wildly collect the honey of the visible to store it in the great hive of the invisible.' The second line is from Heidegger's *Letter on Humanism*, 1947.

⁹³ *Lodge of Living Stones No 4957, The ceremony of initiation and commentary* by W. L. Wilmhurst 1867–39. Privately published, 1953.

⁹⁴ I can't remember where I read this story!

⁹⁵ Quoted by Andrea Dworkin in *Intercourse*.

⁹⁶ *The Brothers Karamazov*, Book 3, chapter 3

⁹⁷ *The Brothers Karamazov*, chapter 14

⁹⁸ Edmund Rostand is mostly known in the English-speaking world for *Cyrano de Bergerac*, his romance of alchemical transformation, but it's also interesting to note that his immersion in esoteric lore was so deep that he would only allow some of his drama to be performed when the positions of the sun and moon were propitious.

⁹⁹ Quoted in Arnold Turnbull's *Scott Fitzgerald*, 1962.

¹⁰⁰ This incantatory poem has proved hard to date. Scholars put it at fourth century BC at the latest. It invites comparison with the inscription on the base of the statue of Isis in Sais recorded by Plutarch: 'I am all that has been and is and shall be; and no mortal has ever lifted my mantle.'

¹⁰¹ For a fuller exposition of these ideas, see *Esoterism and Symbol* by R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz, 1960. For a parallel in esoteric Hinduism see *The Secrets and Significance of Idol Worship of the Hindus*, Swami Hariharananda Giri, 1984: '. . . beastliness is impressed on and latent in us because we had so many births as beasts earlier.'

[102](#) ‘By the complete Lunar and Solar magic of the Elements, the Hieroglyph of this Messenger speaks to us very distinctly and we should examine it carefully and listen to what it says.’ Dr John Dee, *The Hieroglyphic Monad*, 1564.

[103](#) The eighteenth-century French magus Louis Claude de Saint Martin said that ‘all mystics come from the same country’, and Henri Corbin, the expert on Sufi mysticism, called it the *mundus imaginalis*. He described an otherworldly country, a spiritual realm that is in its own way as real as the material realm, and he averred that it has certain geographical features we can visit and certain inhabitants we may meet. Mystics and visionaries from all times and places have visited them. Corbin said that in order to enter the *mundus imaginalis* we need to develop what he called the faculty of ‘active imagination’. (1972 lecture *Mundus Imaginalis* – full text available on haenrycorbinproject.blogspot.com)

[104](#) *Vision of the Last Judgment*, E555. The ‘Vegetated body’ is Blake’s phrase for what is elsewhere in esoteric philosophy called the etheric body. It carries the life principle, animating matter and is to be distinguished from the astral body which carries animal consciousness. Christian theology has been hazy about this distinction since 666 AD, using the terms ‘soul’ and ‘spirit’ to describe them interchangeably, which causes no end of confusion!

[105](#) Chapter 21, 1943

[106](#) *Gospel of Thomas*, saying 70

[107](#) *The Burning Brand Diaries 1935–50*, March 25th, 1950

[108](#) Quoted in the front matter of *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir, 1949.

[109](#) *Homilies on 1st Corinthians*

[110](#) Spiritual exercises that involve the occult process of ‘building a hut’ include *The Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola*, sixteenth century, and *Knowledge of Higher Worlds and How to Attain it* by Rudolph Steiner, chapter 6, 1904.

[111](#) *Bhagavad Gita* 6.22

[112](#) *The Third Testament*

[113](#) Tolstoy noted that in the state of love there is something more important and special than in all other connections. A happy baby, he writes, is full of love. We respond to that baby in a way that is full of love and a sense of the joys in life springs up in us. In *On Life and essays on religion*, he goes on to write about the way that the love that is in a baby has been created in it by the love that is in the universe. Love brings us into life, and that love existed before the birth and then once we are born becomes a local outpouring of a cosmic love. He asserts that we have all experienced at least once, usually in early childhood before we become sullied by falsehoods, a blissful feeling of tenderness which makes us want to love everybody, the dog, the horse and the grass, a bliss that makes one wish that it should be well with all, that all will be happy. This comes with a feeling that we would do anything to make everyone happy for ever. We are then experiencing the love of which human beings’ life consists. Of course we may later lose some or all of that love, and that, says Tolstoy, is what causes suffering. On the other hand, to the extent that you or I act lovingly in the world and add to the love that is in the universe, we help to transform it. And after we have died we will in a sense live on in a love that continues to transform and transfigure the universe. This, he says, is a form of immortality. When you die your love continues to act upon the world, perhaps even with far greater force than it did in your lifetime. He gives Jesus Christ as an example, though Tolstoy was no conventional Christian. He says of himself that he, Tolstoy, has much more love in his life because of Jesus Christ’s loving acts in his life, and this is a paradigm. In *War and Peace* Tolstoy was concerned to show the interaction between individuals and the wider world. Perhaps no other

novelist conveys so well the role of the individual in world events, and some of his most inspired writing on this subject appears in the essays published in English in 1934 as *On life and essays on religion*.

[114](#) The early and final chapters of the Bible give an account of eras in the history of the world before and after it was fixed in the forms familiar to us. See *The Secret History of the World*.

[115](#) ‘Thus after some effort we obtain the white vestments brilliant as the snow.’ Dr Dee *Monas Hieroglyphica, Theorem XX*, 1564 in the Weiser edition of 2000.

[116](#) In Theosophical circles western alchemical terms have been matched with their oriental counterparts, as in this quote from the *Mahatma letters to A. P. Sinnett*, 1923, ‘The Philosopher’s Stone is the elevated principle in us, which some of us may attain in this lifetime, called *Buddhi*.’

[117](#) ‘We require a theory of human motives which will allow of our conceiving them, simultaneously, both supernatural causes coming from without and also as integrated parts in the working of the agents’ minds.’ F. M. Cornford, *Thucydides Mythohistoricus*, London, 1907

[118](#) Some people naturally baulk at the idea of matter being intelligent or having consciousness. This is perhaps partly because of a mistaken assumption about the origins of our consciousness. Our consciousness, our intelligence, is in effect borrowed from cosmic consciousness. Cosmic consciousness flows through us, giving the form we have and enabling us to function as we do. Cosmic consciousness also flows through and forms rocks and stones, and gives them a function.

[119](#) *The Book of Benedictus: Nobleman and Discernment*

[120](#) Because of modern mental habits and sensibilities, because of modern consciousness, a text like *The Chymical Wedding* is hard for us to absorb. Its piling up of bizarre imagery seems too complex, obscure, too baroque.

We are inclined to give up trying to make sense of it. In *The Sacred History* I have written a new version that, I hope, is more suited to modern sensibility and consciousness.

[121](#) ‘The will lies above the loins, as it were at the base of the spinal column.’ D. H. Lawrence, *Twilight in Italy*, 1916 p43. Lawrence had studied Theosophical authors including Blavatsky, Besant and James M. Pryse.

[122](#) On Venus as Lucifer, the Morning Star in *The Secret History of the World*.

[123](#) *Hermitis Trismegisit Tractatus vere Aureus. De Lapidis philosophici screto cum Scholiis Dominici Gnosti*, 1610. Quoted in *Meditations on the Tarot* by Valentine Tomberg, 1985

[124](#) When we are doing well, we work with the stars and the planets, that is to say with the intentions of the great cosmic mind. As Ibn Arabi said: ‘I am His hearing with which He hears, His sight with which He sees, His foot with which He walks.’ *The Futuhat al-Makkiyya* – chapter on love. Each part of our bodies can give us an ‘immediate tasting’ of a different dimension of living spiritual experience, and the gods of the planets work through different parts of our bodies. Some great esoteric teachers have had a practical working knowledge of occult physiology, knowing how to work on one part, then another and how to call upon the great spiritual beings connected with those parts for help in this process. In esoteric astrology the patterns of the stars and planets participate in all the principles of evolution – biological, historical and personal. Different traditions give accounts of the complex mechanisms, the interplay of unembodied beings and subtle energies by which these laws are brought into play, for instance by operation of subtle energies – *pranas* in Hinduism and Buddhism, etheric and astral forces in Theosophy, and Boehme’s *lubet* or desire. These mechanisms are also described, from other angles and using different, though parallel, symbols, by the formulations of esoteric astrologers and alchemists.

[125](#) When Figures and Numeric Shapes, II 1801

[126](#) This author was highly influential on Isaac Newton's study of alchemy.

[127](#) *Aeneid* IX line 625, source of *Annuit Coeptis* on the dollar bill.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Jonathan Black – real name Mark Booth – was born in Cambridge, UK, and educated at Oriel College, Oxford, where he read Philosophy and Theology. He works in publishing and publishes many bestselling authors and cultural icons. He also publishes many prominent authors in the MBS and ‘alternative history’ fields, including Graham Hancock, Lorna Byrne, Mooji and Rupert Sheldrake.

As an author he has sold over half a million books in the English language and his work has been translated into twenty-one languages. *The Secret History of the World* was a *New York Times* bestseller.

Booth has given lectures and interviews at the Royal Academy, Maastricht University and the Marion Institute in Massachusetts. He has been widely interviewed on radio and TV, including BBC Radio 4’s *Today* and *Coast to Coast* in the US. He has written articles for the *Independent on Sunday*, English National Opera, Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre and *Mind Body Spirit*.