

# EYE OF THE HEART

*A Spiritual Journey  
into the Imaginal Realm*

CYNTHIA BOURGEAULT



SHAMBHALA  
*Boulder*  
2020

Shambhala Publications, Inc.  
4720 Walnut Street  
Boulder, Colorado 80301  
[www.shambhala.com](http://www.shambhala.com)

© 2020 by Cynthia Bourgeault

*Interior design:* Claudine Mansour Design

*Illustrations:* Andrew Breitenberg

**All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.**

*One*

## INTRODUCING THE IMAGINAL

SO WHERE DO I begin to tell the story? How to introduce you to my neighborhood? It is all too easy when exploring topics as inherently elusive as the imaginal to hide out in mental maneuvers. Is the imaginal the same as the Platonic “intelligible universe?” The Hindu subtle levels of consciousness, or the bardo realms of Tibetan Buddhism? Maybe yes, maybe no, but in any case that’s not what I’m about here. If there’s one thing I’ve learned from these two-and-a-half decades of imaginal bushwhacking, it’s that the imaginal realm is entered only through the heart. How you get there is where you’ll arrive. And so by whatever route our exploration leads us, it will need to stay close to the heart.

Fortunately, that is not really so difficult with the imaginal realm, for the heart really is its native ground. And when all the intellectual abstractions have been stripped away, and it is allowed to speak in its own native tongue, what it speaks of, with surprising simplicity and directness, is beauty, hope, and a mysteriously deeper order of coherence and aliveness flowing through this earthly terrain connecting it to the infinite wellsprings of cosmic creativity and abundance. Instead of the isolation and anomie so often conveyed in our post-modern cosmological roadmaps (where we are simply an insignificant

planet in an insignificant galaxy in a random “big bang” among a ceaseless cacophony of big bangs), it speaks of the preciousness of our human particularity and the exigency of our human contribution (tiny though it may be) to that vast, dynamic web of cosmic interbeing, which can be seen, in toto, as the heart of God. It calls us to a renewed sense of dignity, accountability, belongingness, cosmic intimacy, and love. That is why I am writing this book, and for no other reason. Our hearts get this language already. With only a bit of a shove—and perhaps a slightly new roadmap—our heads may be able to get it too. Pray to God, while there is still time.

So perhaps “where to begin” in a more heartfelt way might be with that striking image furnished by Jesus himself: “In my Father’s house are many mansions.” Picture the imaginal realm as one such mansion, belonging mostly to the Western spiritual tradition and deeply related to the Western experience of the heart of God. It is perhaps not a high mansion and certainly not a universal one (since many spiritual traditions seem to get on perfectly well without it). But within its own domain, i.e., the Western mystical and esoteric tradition, it is a pivotal one. Something important happens here.

Please don’t think of it as a *place*. I know it’s nearly impossible for the Western mind not to go there. We did the same thing with heaven and hell, didn’t we? Turned them into miniature planets, complete with fiery furnaces or pearly gates. But a realm is not fundamentally a place; it is more like a set of governing conventions that make possible a certain kind of manifestation. In our own earth realm we are subject to many such governing conventions (we call them “laws.”) Gravity holds our feet to the ground. Time flows in one direction only. We cannot walk through walls, be in two places at once, or wish ourselves ten pounds lighter. There are a lot of laws (forty-eight of them, Gurdjieff postulated), making our earth

plane a fairly dense and determinate place. There are other realms that are lighter and a few that are denser. We will meet some of these in due course. For now it's important to keep reminding ourselves that from a metaphysical perspective, realm has less to do with physical location than with density. In fact, virtually all spiritual teachers in all traditions have insisted that the "higher" (i.e., less dense) realms are not somewhere else but *within*—already coiled inside us as subtler and yet more intensely alive bandwidths of experience and perception. The reason we do not typically notice them is that the laws governing any realm are generally too coarse to allow the penetration of those finer vibrations emanating from the next realm "up" into its normal sphere of operations. As St. Paul reminds us, we do indeed "see through a glass darkly."

But why do we call it "imaginal?" I admit that the whole issue is problematic. The term itself has its immediate provenance in Islamic mysticism, where it denotes a subtle and fluid "intermediate" realm suspended midway between form and formlessness. But the idea itself—or archetype, actually—is a mainstay of the Western tradition of *sophia perennis*, or "perennial wisdom," with roots going all the way back to Plato.<sup>1</sup> Within this wider tradition it is typically understood to be a boundary zone separating the denser causality of our earth plane from the finer causalities that lie "above" us in the angelic and logocentric worlds. Put more simply, it sits on the dividing line between the visible and invisible worlds—or, according to the older, pre-Einsteinian metaphysics, between the "spiritual" and "material" worlds.

It is called "imaginal" because, while it is invisible to the physical eye, it is still clearly perceptible through the eye of the heart, which is in fact what the word *imagination* specifically implies in its original Islamic context: *direct perception through the eye of the heart, not through mental reflection or fantasy*. Of

course, in the modern West we now view the interior landscape through the filter of Wordsworthian romanticism and hear the word *imagination* as suggesting something personal, subjective, illusory, or "made up"—which is of course exactly the opposite of what the term is actually intended to convey.

I know this causes a lot of unnecessary confusion, but once you get used to the real metaphysical meaning of the term, it sheds a lot of light not only on the Islamic mystical tradition but on the Christian mystical tradition as well. I am quite certain, for example, that this direct noetic seeing is what St. Paul had in mind by the term *faith* (as in "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.") But in our own diminished age even faith has now gone dark and tends to be understood as a "blind" leap into the dark rather than a luminous perception of the invisible golden thread. Small wonder that the imaginal has all but dropped off the contemporary metaphysical roadmap.

I spoke of the imaginal realm a few paragraphs ago as a "boundary realm," but it is actually more of a confluence, for the word *boundary* suggests a separation while what is really at stake in this realm is an active flowing together. "Where the two seas meet" is a beautiful Sufi metaphor to convey the essence of what actually goes on here. The imaginal is a meeting ground, a kind of cosmic intertidal zone—and as in all intertidal zones, nourishment and metamorphosis furnish the principal order of business here. In this realm the fruits of our human striving—both conscious and unconscious—are offered up to the whole. From this realm, in turn, we receive blessing, inspiration, guidance, and vivifying force, which are ours to share and bestow here below. Like a Sufi dervish, we receive and bestow, receive and bestow, as we turn and are turned within the greater cosmic dance.

In its traditional metaphysical positioning this connective

work of the imaginal realm does not come immediately to the fore because of the strong underlying metaphysical bias toward “substance ontology,” i.e., the assumption that matter and spirit are qualitatively different items, distinct and fundamentally irreconcilable in nature. Viewed through this lens, the imaginal and “material” realms perch on either side of a fundamental ontological divide—or as they say here in Maine, “You can’t get there from here.” But in a post-Einsteinian era it is no longer possible to think that way; the old metaphysical maps must be redrawn to a new baseline in which *energy*, not substance is the coin of the realm.

Esotericist Valentin Tomberg is thinking along these lines in his *Meditations on the Tarot* when he invites us to reimagine the Great Chain of Being as a single energetic continuum:

Modern science has come to understand that matter is only condensed energy. . . . Sooner or later science will discover that what it calls “energy” is only condensed psychic force—which discovery will lead in the end to the establishment of the fact that psychic force is the “condensation,” pure and simple, of consciousness, i.e., spirit.<sup>2</sup>

“Psychic force” here refers to the subtler energies that science does not yet know how to measure but that have demonstrable effect in the physical world—for example, the energies of attention, will, prayer, and love. It is the transmission of these energies that furnishes the supreme business of the imaginal world. In this updated and much more dynamic revisioning, the imaginal can be roughly situated at the junction between the “psychic energy” and “physical energy” bandwidths, where its pivotal positioning in the transmission chain comes much more into focus.

At the risk of overloading the circuits in this very preliminary

introduction, I would add that the Jesuit mystic and scientist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin is describing essentially these same two energetic bandwidths with his terms *radial energy* and *tangential energy*.<sup>3</sup> The latter is the physical energy that keeps our world chugging along on its axis; the former is the finer and more purposeful energy that draws the world forward toward its evolutionary destiny. Radial energy is released and generated specifically through the interplay with tangential energy, and it is for Teilhard explicitly *counterentropic*. This is a very good point to remember, even at this early stage.

Impressionistically, the imaginal penetrates this denser world in much the same way as the fragrance of perfume penetrates an entire room, subtly enlivening and harmonizing. My favorite image to begin to access this admittedly mind-bending notion still comes by way of a striking vignette in Isak Dinesen’s *Out of Africa*, in which she recounts how she once came upon a beautiful snake moving through the grass, its skin glistening with subtle, variegated colors. She raved so much about that snakeskin that one of her house servants killed the snake, skinned it, and made it into a belt for her. But to her dismay, the once glistening skin is now merely dull and gray, because all along the beauty had lain not in the physical skin, but in the quality of the aliveness. The imaginal is that quality of aliveness moving through this realm, interpenetrating, cohering, filling things with the fragrance of implicit meaning whose lines do not converge in this world alone but at a point beyond. As the Gospel of Thomas describes it:

I am the light shining upon all things,  
I am the sum of everything, for from me  
Everything has come, and toward me  
Everything returns. Pick up a stone and there I am,  
Split a piece of wood and you will find me there.<sup>4</sup>

Experientially, received within one's own quiet subjectivity, it appears as an allusive aliveness, a meaning presenting itself in "glimpses and visions," a foretaste—or aftertaste—of a reality half-forgotten but still strangely familiar, of an intensity and beauty and coherence that seems to match the actual pattern of our hearts if only we could stand to live there.

### *Is It Real?*

I cannot emphasize strongly enough that the word *imaginal* does not mean "imaginary." That unfortunate but all-too-understandable confusion was created by Henry Corbin, the noted Islamic scholar, when he introduced the term *mundus imaginalis* to name that intermediate, invisible realm of causality that figures so prominently in mystical Islamic cosmology. But in so doing, Corbin was drawing on a highly technical and quintessentially Islamic notion of imagination as itself being one of those higher and more subtle energies, possessing will, objectivity, and creative agency. To our modern Western ears, the word *imaginal* may indeed seem to suggest some private or subjective inner landscape, "make believe" or fanciful by nature. But while it is typically associated with the world of dreams, visions, and prophecy, i.e., a more subtle form, the imaginal is always understood within traditional metaphysics to be *objectively real* and in fact comprising "an ontological reality entirely superior to that of mere possibility."<sup>5</sup> It designates a sphere that is not less real but *more real* than our so-called "objective reality" and whose generative energy can (and does) change the course of events in this world. Small though it may appear to be, it is mighty, as those who try to swim against it will readily attest.

Walter Wink, one of the few contemporary mainstream Christian theologians who have been bold enough to venture

appreciatively into the terrain of the imaginal, describes how this "generative" causality played out in the events following the resurrection. His comments below offer a clear window into both of these key points: imaginal reality is "objective," and it carries real force:

It is a prejudice of modern thought that events happen only in the outer world. What Christians regard as the most significant event in human history happened, according to the gospels, in the psychic realm, and it altered external history irrevocably. Ascension was an "objective" event, if you will, but it took place in the imaginal realm, at the substratum of human existence where the most fundamental changes in consciousness take place. The ascension was a "fact" on the imaginal plane, not just an assertion of faith. It irreversibly altered the nature of the disciples' consciousness.<sup>6</sup>

One need only to read the Book of Acts to sense the breadth and power of this change in the disciples' consciousness and to grasp the implications of what Wink is saying here. It is true that not all constructions are illusions. However and wherever these disciples came to it, they emerged from the post-resurrection events infused with a clear and high sense of purpose, resolve, empowerment, and above all, the unshakable confidence that their Lord was still present with them—which at the imaginal level is undisputedly true. With their oars planted firmly in that kingdom, they moved forward to change the world. This is exactly what Corbin was trying to convey by the word *imagination*, understood in the traditional sense. Imaginal reality is a valid construction which, by changing consciousness in its inner ground, changes the nature of reality in the outer world.

And of course, from the opposite end of the spectrum, that's exactly the headwind that Johnny and I were encountering in our Jonah syndrome: the imaginal realm as causal, purposive, and fiercely determined in regard to this one. From the outside it made no sense whatsoever why two adventurous and ostensibly available people should not be able to escape together for a winter's odyssey in the Caribbean. But the force of the interrealmic disharmony shook the sails and toppled the radar. The message was loud and clear.

Because of this demonstrated capacity to affect outcome in this world, the imaginal realm has long been associated with the world of dreams, prophecy, and oracles. To attuned hearts, it does indeed seem to send "messages," as it surely did for the disciples, for Jonah, and for Johnny and me. That is why it often is equated with the "subtle" level of consciousness in contemporary roadmaps such as those promulgated by philosopher Ken Wilber.<sup>7</sup> There is truth here, to be sure, but remember that these "levels of consciousness" maps are all essentially "upper left quadrant" metaphysics, to use Wilber'speak—or in other words, geared to the individual interior journey and individual transformation. Properly understood through its own Western filter, the imaginal realm is *collective and evolutionary*; its ultimate purpose is to guide, shape, nourish, and, where necessary, offer course corrections to our entire planetary and interplanetary unfolding. As an objectively verifiable realm interpenetrating our earth plane and operating at a twice-higher frequency of spiritual intensity and coherence, it is a life within a life, and its laws, interpenetrating our own, provide the inner template by which the outer unfolding can proceed rightly.

Therefore, it is also and primarily supremely the realm of *cosmic assistance*. It is the "place" from which saints, teachers, masters, and all manner of abler souls reach out across the

apparent divide between the worlds to support or where necessary modify earthly outcomes in tandem with willing and attuned hearts here below.

And that point, perhaps underemphasized in the traditional roadmaps, turns out to be the linchpin.

*Two*

WORLDS WITHIN  
WORLDS

*The Ray of Creation*

Gurdjieff actually makes use of *two* cosmic maps, and to situate the imaginal sphere of operations within his teaching, you have to overlay them.

The first, and probably more widely known of these (because of its close tie-in with the enneagram and the Law of Seven) is his Ray of Creation, which, as I have mentioned already, is the Gurdjieffian version of the Great Chain of Being. In most respects this follows the standard processional model of traditional *sophia perennis* metaphysics, with progressively denser and colder kingdoms emerging out of that initial fiery explosion of the divine will-to-form, which sets the whole thing in motion. The counterentropic trajectory is not at first clearly visible.

What is immediately interesting about this map, however, is that the entire ray is located within the *physical* universe—although of course, the word *physical* here must be expanded to the widest and wildest reaches of our cosmological imagination. Gurdjieff's "Megalocosmos," the vast celestial canvas on which his map is drawn, stretches even beyond the fourteen billion years of our present "universe story," reaching back into that implicitly endless matrix from which big bangs emerge like virtual particles. It is on the grandest possible cosmic scale that his vision plays out.

So too, the realms on this ray are not named by spiritual or theological names, as is typical of *sophia perennis* metaphysics. You will not find here logocentric realms, angelic realms, heaven and hell realms—or for that matter, imaginal realms. Instead, you will find actual interplanetary locations, named in an order that some of you may find strangely familiar: *dominus* (Holy Absolute), *siderum* (all galaxies), *lactera* (Milky Way, our galaxy), *sol* (our sun), *fatum* (fate, our own solar system or

sphere of planetary influence), *mixtus orbis* (“mixed realm,” our planet earth), *regina coeli* (queen of the heavens, the moon), or *do, si,<sup>4</sup> la, sol, fa, mi, re, do*

Wait a minute! Isn’t that our modern Western musical scale?

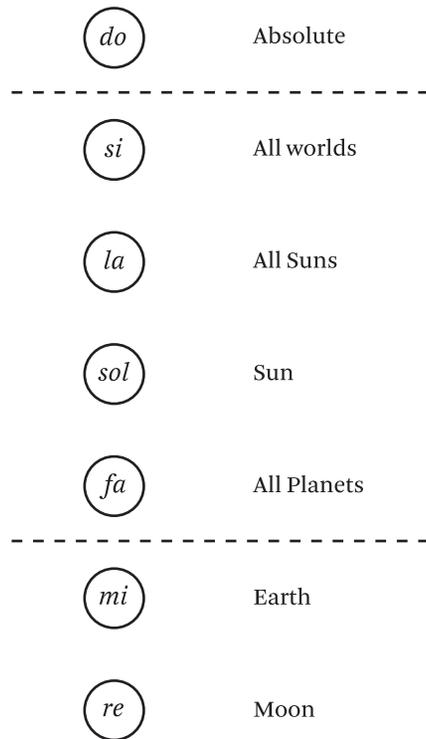
Indeed, it is. And this is where the second fascinating feature of the Ray of Creation comes in. According to Gurdjieff, our modern major scale actually preserves in the names of its notes and the arrangement of its intervals a vestigial memory of an ancient esoteric teaching about the “cosmic solfeggio” (as contemporary Gurdjieff commentator James Moore wittily dubs it), not only in the way in which the created order originally came into existence but also in the way in which *energy is continuously transmitted and replenished along the Ray of Creation*. That knowledge is still there, hidden in plain sight in the musical scale, to be dug out by those so inclined; its articulation dovetails precisely with what in the Gurdjieff Work is known as the Law of Seven, the Law of World Maintenance.

This is not the place to get sidetracked into a lengthy discussion of the Law of Seven. Those of you who wish to can read more about it in my book *The Holy Trinity and the Law of Three* as well as in any number of Gurdjieffian textbooks.<sup>5</sup> But from the point of view of imaginal exchange, it does yield up one very interesting piece of data, again a stable feature of the Law of Seven. If you look at the schematic below, you notice those two lines cutting across the map, between *do* and *si* near the top and between *fa* and *mi* closer to the bottom. These correspond to the “hesitation” points on the ray—half steps on the musical scale—where a new infusion of energy, or a different *kind* of energy, must be introduced in order to keep the whole ray flowing on trajectory. Otherwise the whole thing will veer off track or be halted at a threshold it cannot cross. In Gurdjieffian terminologies, these are the “shock” points, the

places where the entire progression is the most vulnerable, but equally, the most permeable.

In the case of the higher (*do-si*) shock point, that bridging energy is provided by the will of the Holy Absolute, still close enough to ground zero to easily span the descending gap. In the latter case, as we will see shortly, the shock point falls right between *fa*, the traditional endpoint of the so-called subtle realms, and *mi*, the beginning of those “dense material realms.” And this is exactly the place where traditional metaphysics and I (see my discussion of Gurdjieff’s second map, following shortly) locate the imaginal realm. In other words, the *mi-fa* shock point falls right in the middle of the imaginal intertidal zone. In and of itself, if you ponder it deeply, this realization will tell you most everything you need to know about the primary cosmic function of the imaginal realm and our specific human contribution to this sphere of operations. But since these ideas may be very new to some of you not previously familiar with Gurdjieffian metaphysics, rest assured that I will circle back in chapter 3 and unpack them much more systematically.

I like this first map because it is *real*. Not only does it accord with a more contemporary understanding of the relationship between matter and energy, it also situates the whole unfolding *here* (admittedly a huge and vast “here”) rather than in some mirage-like “spiritual” realm that floats “above” our visible solar system like a huge celestial theme park. It calls us to order, to a path of transformation that does not lead us away from materiality but straight into it and through it. Particularly when we enter those two lowest realms, *mi* and *re*, we are talking about our *actual* earth and our *actual* moon, and we are discussing planetary evolution along lines strikingly parallel to Teilhard de Chardin’s. Nor will Gurdjieff let us off the hook here. For him, the major vehicle mediating that *mi-fa*



*Gurdjieff's Ray of Creation*

Adapted from P. D. Ouspensky,  
*In Search of the Miraculous: Fragments of an Unknown Teaching*  
 (London: Harcourt, Inc., 1949), 82.

shock is the *biosphere*—yes, organic life on earth!—and its ultimate recipient is the *moon*, not our eternal souls. And yes, our conscious attention and willing participation will certainly make a huge difference in how our contribution is mediated and in which realm it is received. But willingly or unwillingly the tribute is exacted, and it is paid in the coin of *this* realm, in flesh and blood. Our inner work exists within the Megalocosmos and for the sake of the Megalocosmos, not the other way around; it is important never to forget this.

*The Worlds*

If the Ray of Creation is exterior and cosmic in its orientation, Gurdjieff's second map, his diagram of the worlds, is more interior. In Teilhardian terms, it describes the "within of things." You might think of it impressionistically as a "ray of being" running roughly parallel to the Ray of Creation while offering its own distinctive counterpoint. But again, bear in mind that these worlds (or "levels of consciousness," as we might be inclined to re-label them in the terminology of our own times) are not just interior or subjective experiences, but actual *spheres of causality*. In Gurdjieffian cosmology, the yang of it never quite drops out of sight.

As I mentioned earlier, from an external perspective the Gurdjieffian system seems to follow the classic sophia perennis model in that the worlds become progressively denser as one proceeds along the ray. A distinctive feature of this system, however, is that for Gurdjieff densification is not simply a matter of increasing "materiality" per se; it is rather that each realm comes under progressively more cosmic laws, i.e., constructal givens, that restrict its freedom and determine its outcomes. The higher "up" the ray, the fewer the cosmic laws. Our own world, near the bottom of the chain, operates under

	SCALE	LATIN NAME	COSMOLOGICAL LOCUS
2 <sup>nd</sup> shock	do	<i>Dominus</i>	Holy Absolute; pre-big bang, "eternal cosmic inflation"
	⋮		
	si	<i>Siderum</i> (All Stars)	The sum potential of all galaxies, all big-bangs, all universes, now and forever
	la	<i>Lactera</i> (Milky Way)	Our galactic system
1 <sup>st</sup> shock	sol	<i>Sol</i> (Sun)	The center, or "Holy Absolute" of our own solar system
	fa	<i>Fatum</i> (Fate)	The planets of our solar system
	⋮		
	mi	<i>Mixtus Orbis</i> (Mixed Realm)	Our planet Earth
	re	<i>Regina Coelis</i> (Queen of Heaven)	The moon (youngest and most unstable element of the Ray)
	do <sub>2</sub>	<i>Dominus<sub>2</sub></i>	The black hole at the end of the octave, occasioned by the implosion of our sun, which ends the development along this Ray, collapsing all back beneath the event horizon

*The Ray of Creation:  
A Contemporary Cosmological Interpretation*

forty-eight laws (hence Gurdjieff’s reference to it as “World 48”), which makes it a significantly dense and mechanical place. The imaginal, in its traditional positioning just “above” ours, is subject to twenty-four laws and hence is significantly more fluid and powerful. From there, the ray takes us back by successive halves to three, the primordial Trinity, and then to World 1, the undivided Holy Absolute. At each upward plateau there are fewer laws, but they are more binding.

I want to sketch these worlds for you as I have come to understand them. Rather than merely summarizing the attributes ascribed to them in the standard Gurdjieff/Ouspensky version<sup>6</sup> I will expand and occasionally completely redraw them. Some of these associations may be new to you (a few of them surprised me as well!). And while this “scenic route” may take us a little out of the way, I hope you will find the time well spent—if for no other reason than to reawaken a sense of wonder at “the scale of the thing,” the utter vastness of the playing field upon which this cosmic drama unfolds. On a more practical level, these small thumbnails will serve as the functional basis for many otherwise “out of nowhere” connections I will be making from time to time in this book. You may find yourself referring back to them frequently, as I myself have already begun to do.

⊙ World 1

World 1 is the Holy Absolute. The Godhead. The “inaccessible light,” the holy impenetrable, ineffable, unknowable monad before “God took perceptivity and divisibility,” as Jacob Boehme describes it.<sup>7</sup>

Of course, this is one of those giant forks in the road where the mystical traditions of the Christian East and Christian West split theologically. For the Western theological mind—with a

few notable exceptions—there is no “Godhead behind God.” The Trinity is the full, total irreducible expression of the whole of divinity. The mystics of both branches, of course, have always smiled serenely at this. They know better.

This world corresponds with *do* on the Ray of Creation, or *dominus*—the Holy Absolute.

 World 3

World 3 is the primordial ternary, whereby the Godhead—ever indivisible and unmanifest—brings himself into “perceptivity and divisibility,” i.e., a “manipulable” inner configuration that will support “the impressure of nothing into something” (again, Boehme’s words),<sup>8</sup> thus launching the long march toward outward manifestation. For both Boehme and Gurdjieff, this fundamental reconfiguration of the inner monadic ground inexorably requires threeness, and what will emerge many worlds later as the theological doctrine of Trinity is in fact merely a distant echo of this more primordial upwelling of the Law of Three, rightly named by Gurdjieff as the “Law of World Creation.” Indeed, following a brilliant lead handed to us by Boehme, we can say that it is only in this realm that one can properly begin to invoke the term “consciousness” (*con-scientia*, meaning “with-knowing”), because until there is a “with,” there can be no “with-knowing” but only the bare, inscrutable will of the monad (which Boehme calls “scientia”). Consciousness is not the fundamental ground of all being. It is rather the first manifestation—which occurs in World 3—of perceptivity and divisibility. The two are joined at the hip.

This world corresponds with *si* on the Ray of Creation, or *siderum*—all the stars, all the galaxies, all possibilities, infinite possibilities.

 World 6

This world launches the inaugural leap into outward manifestation, that first declension in Valentin Tomberg’s spectrum of energy, where consciousness “condenses” into “psychic force” and begins to move as an actual energy stream, creating, animating, and shaping the created order. On traditional metaphysical maps it corresponds to what is known in the East as the “causal” and in the West as the “logoic.”<sup>9</sup> By whatever name, it is primordial substantiality, the highest and most powerful expression of the pure creative *eros* that brings all things into being. It is the world that quivers into life when Teilhard writes, “The physical structure of the universe is love,” or when he remarks, equally astoundingly, “Love is nothing more than the impressure, left in the heart of the creature, of the physical convergence of the universe.”<sup>10</sup> Eros as logoic force, pure generativity, the blue of the flame in the heart of the monad. For J. G. Bennett, this is the demiurgic world from which the entire created order emerges. In the Gospel of John, this is “the Word.” For that other John, my crazy, wild-hearted Greek, it is the *Zoi*, the pure life force, tugging against his entrails like a force 8 wind. The big bang is here; this is where our universe story begins. And while opinions may vary on this point, my own take is that it is the highest realm that can be directly touched and borne while still in human form. It is beyond personal; it is itself the great intertidal zone between the unmanifest and the primordial manifest. I would call it the true logoic realm: pure spirit, pure causality, pure eros moving untempered by any sort of human mediation like the wild, roving spirit font it can only be.

This world corresponds with *la* on the Ray of Creation, or *lactera*—the Milky Way, our galaxy; the place where it is all unfolding for us.

 World 12

World 12 is the Christic. I know this ascription may surprise some of you who are used to seeing “Christ Consciousness” positioned higher, as one of the nondual realms at the very top of the Great Chain of Being. I do not believe this is so. Even World 6, to my way of thinking, is already situated solidly within the causal or logoc bandwidth (*not* in the true nondual, which from a cosmological perspective denotes the unmanifest realms.)

We have just seen above that World 6 bridges the gap between the manifest and unmanifest, and as its processional offspring, World 12 would necessarily be subsumed within its overarching causality. Moreover, I concur with the ever-cage-rattling Bernadette Roberts in her insistence that “logos” and “Christ” are not the same, but rather, Christic is the “middle ground” (or mandorla, to give it its plane geometry name) that emerges in the overlapping zone between the human Jesus and the fiery divine logos<sup>11</sup> between Worlds 24 and 6, if you want to put it that way, and that is a very good way to picture World 12. It is the world of fully incarnate and embodied love, the fullest of what bodhisattva consciousness can look like in form. It is the endpoint of the personal realms. And it is the world, I believe, in which we must locate what Teilhard envisions as the Omega Point, where all things are summed up in Christ—because this is the last world in which such a summation has any relevance. Beyond, all is summed up in logos. It is the *consummatum est* of a particularly rich and luminous outspeaking of the word *love*, emerging from the fires of eros to its transfigured fullness as agape. I will fill in some of these pieces in chapter 7.<sup>12</sup>

This world corresponds to *sol* on the Ray of Creation, or

the sun—the center of our solar system. From here emerges warmth, light, and cosmic ordering.

 World 24

World 24 is the “Kingdom of Heaven” as Jesus put it and supremely the home range of the imaginal. It is the world of *presence*, where the outer forms of physical materiality are illuminated from within by the light that pours from World 12 and above, and where human consciousness—awake, three-centered, and having passed that first conscious shock point (which it supremely tends and mediates)—fully inhabits this physical world, takes instructions reliably from the higher realms, and participates fully in the required cosmic exchange. This is the world of conscious man or woman—“man number four” in Gurdjieffian terminology—who is living awake and willing right there at the junction point where the “the two seas meet,” infusing the staleness of the lower worlds with the vivifying energy of his or her authentic presence.

This world corresponds to *fa* on the Ray of Creation, or *fatum*—our immediate solar system.

 World 48

This is the “world” as we know it and transmit it through the best of human culture. It is the world of philosophy, ethics, and religion; the world of intellectual striving and cleverness and of industry, curiosity, science, technology, and the arts—in other words, the first fruits of civilization as best we know them. It is the world of high rationality. The world of high egoic functioning and self-reflective consciousness. The world that Teilhard mostly had in mind when he described the “noosphere.” But for all its giftedness, it still falls just below

that first conscious shock line; hence, it is still, in Gurdjieffian terms, preconscious and “asleep.” It is Prospero’s castle, entrancing and seductive, but ultimately a mirage.

This world corresponds to *mi* on the Ray of Creation, or the *mixtus orbis*. At its best, it symbolizes the fullest flourishing of the biosphere, the “Eden” of the Ray of Creation.



### World 96

The thickening deepens. World 96 is the “formatory” world, as Gurdjieff calls it, where everything operates on autopilot, in clichés and thought bites; stale, conditioned, habitual. There’s not even any real thinking that goes on here, as there is in World 48; it’s all recycled opinions and stereotypes. In Gurdjieffian terms, this is the world of personality, the world of “not-I”; of all that is artificially acquired and that obscures our real essence. It is monochrome, repetitive, and boring—uncreative, stony, and inanimate; the lowest world in which human consciousness can even barely hold its shape.

This world corresponds to *re* on the Ray of Creation, or *regina coeli*—the moon; pure geosphere, not yet able to support organic life; the youngest and most unstable element in the chain.



### World 192

World 192 represents the hell realms. It is the world of the deeply disordered, anguished, and psychotic, the spawning ground of evil and the demonic, where consciousness has lost all spaciousness and congeals toward an unbearable density. The bardo realms—craving, wrath, pride, envy, and desire; obsession fixated to a deadly bullseye-turned-wormhole. Here self-reflective consciousness turns on itself like a rabid dog

biting its master. This is the final outpost before consciousness collapses into outer darkness—or simply goes comatose. Cosmically, it is the collective pain body of humanity and of the planet itself.

This world does not correspond to any point on the Ray of Creation, but I envision it as the endpoint—the bottom *do*—at which the entire octave has run its course and simply implodes.

Below World 192, one can no longer properly speak of “consciousness.” The Gurdjieffian maps continue on farther—to an endpoint at 12,288—but by then we are well into the domain of inorganic chemistry. Some rudimentary sentiency continues to exist into realms 384 and below, but these are at the level of biological cellular function and not yet at the threshold of anything measured along this second map, which as we are working with it here could be described as comprising the “ray of consciousness.”

Three

## THE GREAT EXCHANGE

*Blessed is the Lion whom the man devours,  
for that lion will become man. But cursed is the man whom  
the lion devours, for that lion will become man.*

—GOSPEL OF THOMAS, LOGION 7

### *Tools for the Journey*

This new way of framing the picture significantly shifts our understanding of spiritual practice. While traditional religious teaching has typically pictured our spiritual task as freeing ourselves from the lower realms in order to secure our placement in a higher one, through the lens of imaginal exchange this turns out to be at best a partial truth. It is indeed fair to say that if I wish to be a conscious participant in the greater cosmic

exchange while still physically living in World 48, I must realize my citizenship in World 24, for that is where authentic human consciousness actually begins. But this realization is not in order to “leave” this world, but rather to *fully occupy it*; to stand awake and present in that *mi-fa* gap and there make my offering to the greater cosmic ecology.

According to Gurdjieff, the two vehicles par excellence for actualizing this inner transformation are *conscious labor* and *intentional suffering*. I have spoken about them in many other places in my writing, but for those of you who are unfamiliar with this duo, at least a brief introduction is in order here. Conscious labor is basically any intentional effort that moves against the grain of entropy, i.e., against that pervasive tendency of human consciousness to slip into autopilot. It means summoning the power of conscious attention (in our era perhaps more widely known as “mindfulness”) to swim upstream against that pervasive lunar undertow drawing us toward stale, repetitive, mechanical patterns, the siren call of World 96. In the words of the Khwajagan, the Central Asian Masters of Wisdom, whose teachings were near and dear to Gurdjieff’s heart, “Be present with every breath; do not let your attention wander for the space of a single breath.”<sup>6</sup> Or in a passage from Maurice Nicoll, near and dear to Rafe’s heart, the work amounts to “a continual inner effort, a continual altering of the mind, of the habitual ways of thought, of the habitual ways of taking everything, of habitual reactions.”<sup>7</sup> Whether the effort is as modest as simply noticing a negative emotion rather than blindly reacting or as heroic as struggling with an addiction, it is not the scale of the undertaking but the honesty of the struggle that reverses the direction of flow.

If conscious labor increases our capacity to stay present, intentional suffering radically increases the heartfulness of that presence. Operating in a slightly different quadrant of the

human psyche but with a parallel strategy of reversing the direction of flow, intentional suffering goes head-to-head with that well-habituated pattern (again, one of the constructal givens of World 48 and below) to move toward pleasure and away from pain. It invites us to step up to the plate and willingly carry a piece of that universal suffering, which seems to be our common lot as sentient beings in a very dense and dark corner of the universe. The size of the piece does not matter. It can be as small (though not easy!) as “bearing another human being’s unpleasant manifestations,” as Gurdjieff was fond of reminding people. It can be as vast as “greater love has no man than to lay down his life for his neighbor.”

What does matter, however, is that the suffering must be *intentional*, i.e., conscious, clear, and impartial. He is not talking about the useless and completely avoidable suffering caused by the frustration of our neurotic programs and illusions, what one of my Buddhist friends picturesquely describes as “squeezing the cactus.” Gurdjieff himself called it “stupid suffering.” This is simply the laws of Worlds 96 and 192 playing out, and it is of no redemptive value whatsoever to the wider cosmic ecology. To qualify as upwardly transformative work, the offering must be *pure* (free of personal gain or self-interest); it must be *spacious* (nonurgent and unattached to outcome); and it must be *generous* (offered on behalf of the larger whole). Then it does its work very well.

To my way of looking at it, intentional suffering is a very high practice. I believe it does not fundamentally belong to World 24 but emanates from a yet higher world, from World 12, where it bears the energy of the Christic or bodhisattva consciousness, the fully awakened heart that knows we are all in this together and that there is in fact no “other.” When undertaken rightly, it is always implicitly paschal. At the upper end its vibrational field begins to resonate with the energy

of World 6, where universal suffering metamorphizes into a causal principle—“pain is the ground of motion,” as Jacob Boehme bluntly put it<sup>8</sup>—and the sufferings of the created order meet their uncreated prototype in the suffering of God. And do not think that this is just sentimental suffering over the misery we humans inflict on ourselves and one another through the misuse of our freedom. It is that, but it is far more than that; it is in the end a kind of primordial cosmic constant, the necessary cost of the “impressure of nothing into something,” which is borne directly in the marrow of the divine heart as World 1 allows itself to be drawn and quartered so that all other worlds may come into being. Gurdjieff would speak of this allusively from time to time, most openly in his fourth Obligolnian Striving,<sup>9</sup> where he averred that our real human task was “to pay as quickly as possible for one’s arising and individuality in order afterward to be free to lighten as much as possible the sorrow of our Common Father.” The words are simple, but when you catch the deep love and cosmic sadness flowing through them, there is no response other than tears. This is the Omega Point of the path of intentional suffering; from here we can go no further.

Conscious labor and intentional suffering are not so much separate practices as twin pillars of what amounts to essentially a single spiritual obligation (Gurdjieff called it our “being-Partkdolg-duty”). They dovetail well with the classic spiritual practices of mindfulness and surrender (conscious labor equates to mindfulness, and intentional suffering, seen through the paschal lens, is quintessentially surrender). Together they position us well to live here in World 48 under the laws of World 24—or in other words, under the sway of imaginal causality. And this would in fact be a very good way to make sense of Jesus’s admonition to be “in this world but not of it.” As we work with these tools, we gradually develop the

willingness and capacity to sacrifice our self-actualization under the laws of “the lower forty-eight” in order that the raw materials of our surrendered will and personal drama can instead be transformed into something of imperishably finer substantiality. That is the authentic possibility set before us and at the same time our most difficult challenge.

*Four*

IMAGINAL  
CAUSALITY

*Chiasm*

Because of this fundamentally spatial aspect of imaginal causality, the bits and pieces inside the frame do not usually hook up in a linear fashion. More often they appear as simultaneous, overlapping resonances or patterns, caught by the heart rather than the mind, speaking in the language of resonance, or “correspondences” as the poet Baudelaire called them, announcing their logic by the strength of the connectivity they establish between them. Typically, this manifests from our earth-plane perspective as a series of meaningful coincidences or a striking synchronicity, and these features are indeed the primary hallmark of imaginal causality at play.

But while this impression is technically correct—coincidence and synchronicity do indeed feature prominently in imaginal causality—the overall picture we get from the description tends to be misleading, for to our usual way of hearing these words, they seem to depict random, extraordinary, or exceptional (even weird) events, and this part is manifestly *not* true. When the higher-vibrational laws of the imaginal realm

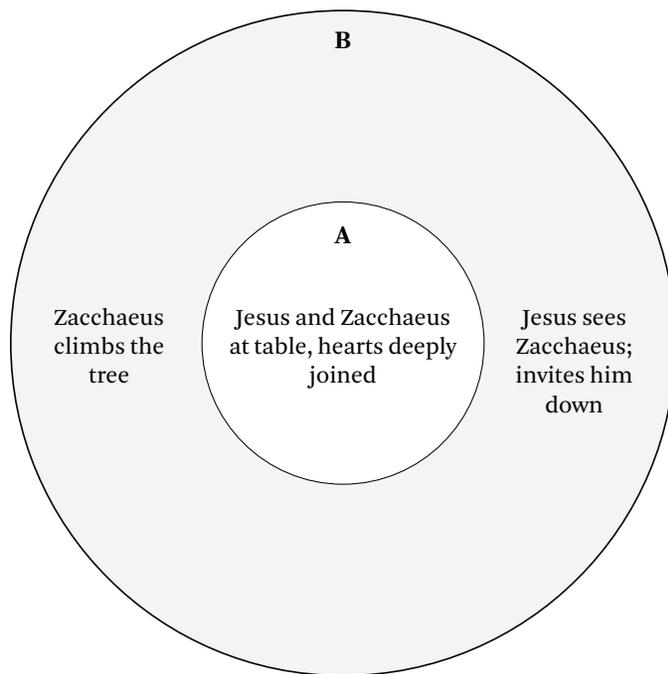
bleed through into this earth plane, they can and do strike us as extraordinary, but they really are not; they are simply following the rigorous constructal logic of that higher realm, a different and more subtle way of making connections. There is always an underlying pattern.

So I would like to begin this exploration of imaginal causality with a closer look at this underlying pattern. And I would propose even more specifically that we begin by focusing on a particular kind of pattern—known as chiasm—which seems to factor mightily in the imaginal delivery systems and thus gives us a very good starting point for beginning to learn this new way of making connections. While it may be stretching things to say that imaginal causality is inherently chiasmic, it does seem to have a strong proclivity in this direction, and a closer inspection of two of its most well-loved specimens gives us an excellent opportunity to see how the whole system works. If nothing else, it moves us swiftly beyond the impression that imaginal interaction with our own world is merely by means of extraneous “signs and wonders”; the whole field is very tightly interwoven.

Chiasm is a traditional literary form, but the design principle is equally applicable in music and the visual arts. It consists of paired events arranged symmetrically around a center core. The simplest form is B, A, B', with A representing the center and B the symmetrical wings. The next more complicated level is C, B, A, B', C', and the sequence continues on from there. You can see the basic pattern; it's essentially a stone thrown into a pond with concentric circles fanning out around it.

Chiasm is a whole different way of ordering causality and a good way of illustrating it might be by means of a familiar gospel story: the tale of Zacchaeus the tax collector up in a tree (Luke 19:1–7). In this brief incident, Zacchaeus, who is quite

a short man and can't see over the crowd, runs on ahead and climbs a sycamore tree to catch a glimpse of Jesus as he enters town. Jesus spots him there and immediately calls out, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." Linear causality allows us two options for why this happens: (1) Zacchaeus's climbing a tree causes Jesus to spot him there and invite him for a private audience or (2) Jesus's prior, prescient knowledge that it is appointed for him to spend time with Zacchaeus causes the man to climb the tree. You can play it either way, but in imaginal causality a third option presents itself; namely, that there is a clear, necessary, and *already imaginably existent reality* of their two hearts deeply joined; that is A, the center. Around that, the Bs happen synchronously and



*Jesus and Zacchaeus in Chiastic Form*

effortlessly: Zacchaeus climbs the tree and Jesus spots him there and invites him down. Both men play their parts flawlessly, like subject and countersubject in a Bach fugue, woven together as a single harmonic whole around a unified, purposive core. That is what the world looks like under the lens of imaginal causality.

Perhaps my most comprehensive introduction to chiasm as a foundational principle of imaginal design came via a book that changed my life: *The Good Wine*, by my longtime monastic mentor at the New Camaldoli Hermitage in Big Sur, California, Bruno Barnhart.<sup>4</sup> First published in 1993, it is a complex, brilliant, imaginal reconstruction of the Gospel of John on the basis of chiasm. The book takes off from an earlier scholarly study of chiasm in the Gospel of John, *The Genius of John* by Peter Ellis—but it takes off like a rocket blasting into outer space! While Ellis's work still colors largely within the lines of established Old Testament historical/critical methodology, Bruno dives deep into the cave of his heart to come up with his own profoundly mystical commentary, a biblical Prospero's castle blown to cosmic proportions.

I want to hunker down with this text for a bit here, not only because time spent with the Gospel of John is never time mispent, but because it gives us a chance to look more closely at some of the distinctive features of imaginal causality as it plays out beneath the narrative surface of this world. On the linear level, the Gospel of John consists of twenty-one chapters leading us sequentially through the earthly ministry of Jesus, his crucifixion, resurrection, and post-resurrection appearances. Beneath the linear sequence, however, Bruno detects a complex, seven-ringed chiasmatic structure through which the gospel proves to be allusively telling a *second* story: of Jesus as the Lord and cornerstone of the New Creation. Those seven rings correspond to a highly configured re-creation of the original

seven days of the Genesis story, and as those formerly sequential narrative segments fall into a whole new symmetrical configuration and begin speaking to each other from within this new configuration, they cumulatively resonate with the message that in Jesus the earth has been foundationally reborn and placed under a new headship.

Chiastic construction begins, of course, with finding the center, and Bruno unhesitatingly locates it in that short, mysterious vignette in John 6:16–21 where Jesus suddenly appears to his disciples walking upon the water:

When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, got into a boat, and started across the lake to Capernaum. It was now dark and Jesus had not yet come to them. The lake became rough because a strong wind was blowing. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the lake and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. But he said to them, “It is I; do not be afraid.” Then they wanted to take him into the boat and the boat reached the land toward which they were going.

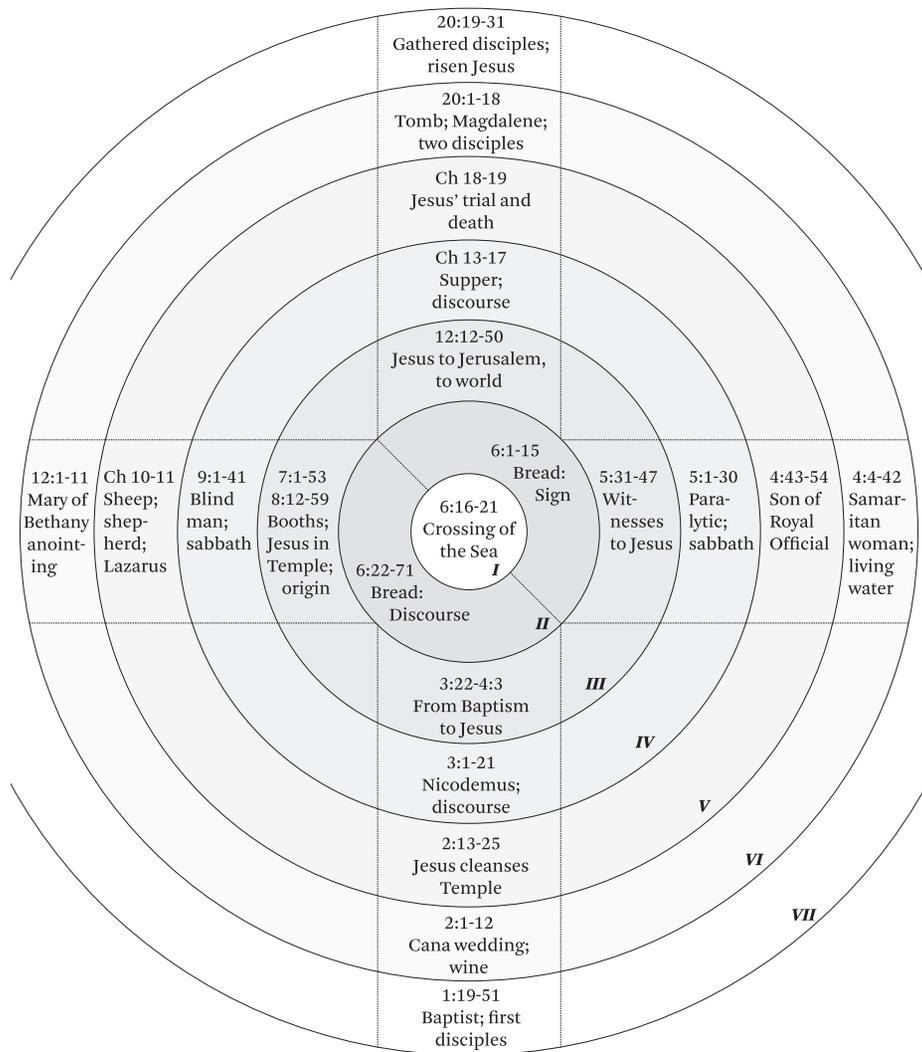
In his selection of this passage as chiastic center, he is following Peter Ellis, but for a very different reason: for Ellis the passage evokes the historical Exodus; for Bruno it resonates with the primordial watery chaos at that dawn of creation. This powerfully concentrated archetypal image thus furnishes the Rosetta stone for the entire New Creation mandala, and this is exactly what a chiastic center does and why it is in fact the center. It is almost always a brief, iconic wormhole into the imaginal epicenter that will in fact be driving the causality as things ring out into time.

With his center established and Rosetta stone in hand, it is not a difficult leap (at least for a mind like Bruno’s) to establish

the seven concentric rings and reallocate the narrative material accordingly. The full results of this process are packed into the diagram on page 72, but what is most interesting to me is the new groupings that emerge and the new conversations that flow from them. Day 4, for example, unfolds around the theme of “You are the light of the world” (since the fourth day of creation in the Genesis account features the establishment of the sun and the moon) and brings together Nicodemus (John 3–1:21), the man born blind (John 9:1–41) and Jesus’s own Farewell Discourse (John 13–17) in a conversation about teaching, empowerment, and the true source of vision. Day 5, whose theme is “life” (this is the day in Genesis when the biosphere emerged in all its creaturely splendor), features a fascinating symmetrical grouping of the raising to life of the centurion’s son (John 4:43–5:4), the raising of Lazarus (John 10–11), and Jesus’s own passion (John 18–19). Particularly lovely to me is his Day 6, which manages to clump together the four feminine pericopes—the wedding at Cana (John 2:1–12) the woman at the well (John 4:4–42), the anointing at Bethany (John 12:1–11), and Mary Magdalene in the garden in (John 20:1–18)—in a single, symphonic infusion of the feminine energy, celebrating, in Bruno’s words, that “the feminine principle in the world is the inexhaustible source of creative realizations of the Father’s glory.”<sup>5</sup> Through this rapturous chiastic inter-enfolding, passages widely separated from each other in the linear narrative come into spontaneous, synchronous dialogue, reverberating like bells in a bell rack. The resulting music is simply, well, *elegant!*<sup>6</sup>

### *Resonance*

In imaginal causality the meaning is generated in the richness of the interplay. One can speak, properly, about a “tapestry of



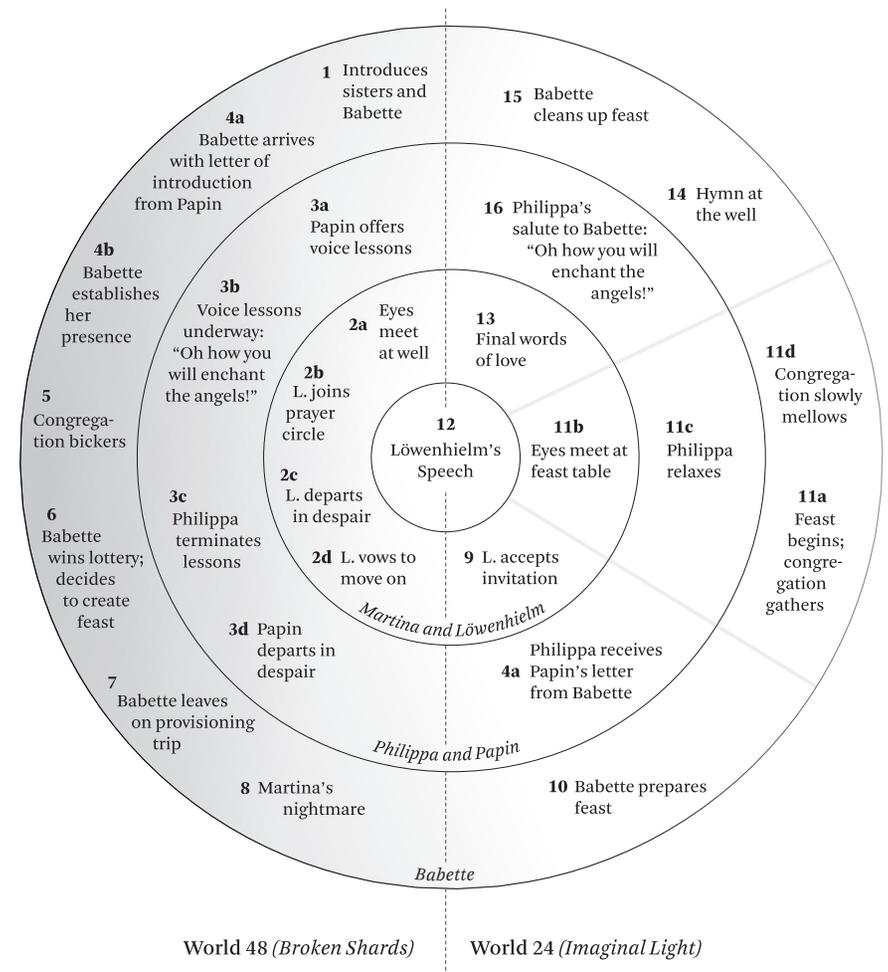
### *The Gospel of John in Chiastic Form*

Adapted from Bruno Barnhart,  
*The Good Wine: Reading John from the Center*  
 (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 40.

meaning,” or in a scientific metaphor, one can say that the meaning is “an emergent property of the whole.” It does not lie in any single part no matter how powerfully configured but in the way the bits and pieces speak to each other, calling each other into resonance. It is detected in the subtlety of the weave and in the energy released in the interplay among the various strands. From the center things flow out and toward each other, creating combinations sometimes surprising but recognized by the heart as meaningfully congruent. The themes, words, symbols, and images all sound together to reveal hitherto unsuspected dimensions of depth, meaning, and beauty. The validating sense is one of *coherence*, of richly patterned meaning.

### The Segments of Babette's Feast in Chronological Order

- 1 [*prologue*] Introduces Martina, Philippa, and Babette.
- 2 [*flashback*] The Martina and Löwenhielm story.
  - 2a Love stirs between them as their eyes meet at the town well.
  - 2b Löwenhielm becomes a regular at prayer meetings.
  - 2c Löwenhielm abruptly leaves prayer meeting upon hearing "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and bliss shall kiss."
  - 2d He vows to move on and seek fame and fortune elsewhere.
- 3 [*flashback*] The Philippa and Papin story.
  - 3a Papin, smitten by Philippa's singing, offers her voice lessons.
  - 3b Voice lessons begin, well laced with eros. "Oh, how you will enchant the angels!"
  - 3c Philippa terminates the lessons.
  - 3d Papin leaves the village, heartbroken.
- 4 Babette joins the sisters' household.
  - 4a Babette arrives bearing a letter of introduction from Papin.
  - 4b Babette establishes her presence in both the kitchen and the mission field.
- 5 Congregation falls into constant bickering.
- 6 Babette learns she holds a winning lottery ticket and seeks permission from the sisters to use her windfall to create a real French dinner.
- 7 Babette leaves on a short provisioning trip.
- 8 Martina dreams that the feast is demonically inspired.
- 9 Löwenhielm accepts invitation to attend the feast.
- 10 Babette prepares and begins to serve the meal. Congregation is silent and suspicious.
- 11 The feast gradually works its magic.
  - 11a The congregation gathers and the feast begins.
  - 11b Martina's and Löwenhielm's eyes meet across the table.
  - 11c Philippa is unafraid of the feast, surprisingly "in her element."
  - 11d Congregation slowly mellows.
- 12 Löwenhielm's speech.
- 13 Löwenhielm departs, exchanging words of love with Martina.
- 14 Parishoners gather around the town well for a hymn of fellowship.
- 15 Babette cleans up the kitchen, savors her moment of triumph.
- 16 After learning that Babette has spent all her entire lottery proceeds on the feast, Philippa salutes Babette as a fellow artist: "Oh, how you will enchant the angels!"



*Babette's Feast in Chiastic Form*

Six

# IMAGINAL PURIFICATION

IN THE PAST two chapters we've been looking at some of the ways in which imaginal causality expresses itself in this world. Now it's time to look a bit more closely at some of the ways in which this expression can be distorted—or in other words, areas in which some purification of the vehicle is necessary in order to ensure a greater reliability and consistency of connection.

The Sufis call this work “polishing the mirror” or “cleansing the lens of perception.” For Christian readers long accustomed to associating purification with sorrow and penance, this “housecleaning” metaphor may indeed offer a refreshing new take. In this more praxis-oriented context, the issue is not so much remorse for our moral failings (although that never drops out of the picture) as it is a deliberate effort to keep the viewing screen clear so that what falls on it is not immediately distorted by lower-order agendas.

The biggest single area of distortion lies in the tendency to drag the interpretation down to the level of magical thinking. At this level the focus is on individual “signs and wonders,” almost invariably drawn from the stock repertory. An eagle feather drops in your path, a rainbow appears in the sky, a shooting star streaks across the night sky, and suddenly you

are in receipt of a personal message from God! Or perhaps you race on ahead and start filling in the pieces of the imaginal puzzle with your own imagination and mental calculations. Then you are in some ways worse off than if you had never begun, conscripted to a scenario that exists only in your own head. In both cases there is a *level confusion* going on here, and this confusion is what will inevitably switch the message (however accurate it may have been at its initial point of impact) onto a generally unreliable track.

Who is this “I” who is receiving the message? The confusion is between two levels of consciousness, which in the classic typologies of both East and West are known as “psychic” and “subtle.”<sup>1</sup> The bottom line is that imaginal causality belongs to the subtle level of consciousness; all attempts to capture it at the psychic level will lead to distortion, at best innocuous, at worst downright dangerous.

The psychic level of consciousness is that intermediate state at which a growing sensitization to transpersonal (a.k.a. “psychic”) phenomena is still firmly tied to an egoic (or narrative) self-center. It is the next rung above rational consciousness on the early Ken Wilber maps (see endnote 1 above), and insofar as it does signal the initial opening of the imaginal capacities, it represents progress. But it is a very unstable place in the growth curve, and until the tension is ironed out a lot of damage can be done.

I will speak only in passing here of those more dangerous levels of magic and the occult, which happen in exactly this configuration at its extreme negative pole, i.e., a pronounced psychic capacity tied to a strong, amoral personal will. With concentrated attention and training, it is indeed possible to draw down the energy of World 24 and even World 6 to wreak havoc on this earth plane. Gurdjieff called such people “hasnamusses,”<sup>2</sup> but perhaps the old term *evil* will serve just

as well. We see them in the Hitlers, the Jim Joneses, the cult leaders run amuck, and in many more who wreak harm in a much more subtle but pervasive way (I would personally place Ayn Rand in that category): too much psychic power, too little love. The moral inversion at work here is not only an affront to the image of our common humanity, it also badly misinterprets the nature of the higher energy itself, which appears under this filter to be simply an impersonal, amoral, “spirit in third person,”<sup>3</sup> another mechanistic force to be harnessed—not, as it really is, a powerfully compassionate and coherent relational field bearing the moral heart of God. When Teilhard de Chardin insisted adamantly toward the end of his life that “God is a person, God is person,” he was not picturing an old man with a beard up in the sky. He was saying, rather, that as we proceed further and further into those luminous spheres, we encounter more and more fully the personal, radiant, tender, and intimate presence of the divine heart, which can never be relegated to an “it.” It is always a “thou,” and it pulls us inevitably toward greater thou-ness, the ultimate sacrifice that is love’s.

The imaginal realm properly corresponds to the subtle level of consciousness, which in turn corresponds to a different kind of selfhood. We move here necessarily from a narrative or egoic seat of selfhood to the beginnings of authentic witnessing selfhood. The concept is not well understood in Christian spiritual theology, which still tends to confuse the mythical beast of “true self” with the high egoic functioning of World 48. Witnessing selfhood is a World 24 phenomenon. That discrete sense of a personal “I” marching along a linear timeline held in place by memory and desire, gradually shifts to a larger and more unboundaried selfhood, the “wave” form of oneself, as it were.

Paying attention not to what you are but to *that* you are is how the anonymous medieval author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* summarized this fundamental shift in perspective.<sup>4</sup> For Gurdjieff, this would be the beginning of the transition from “essence” to “Real I.” I have written extensively about this transition elsewhere, most recently in my book *The Heart of Centering Prayer* so I will not elaborate further here.<sup>5</sup> But I would want to make very clear, with regard to our present concern, that *imaginal causality can only be reliably read beginning at the level of witnessing selfhood and sooner or later demands that one join it at that level*. The cost of admission to this new and more intense bandwidth of reality is ultimately your phenomenal self. Those things that you once *thought* were you—your history, your emotions, your particularities, your “descriptions” (as Beatrice Bruteau calls them)<sup>6</sup> are precisely those things offered into the refiner’s fires in order to create a being that can reliably listen and respond.

### *Seeing with the Eye of the Heart*

In the Western Inner traditions there is a strong implicit thread that this shift to a new seat of selfhood is inextricably linked to a *new operating system* of perception, centered in the heart. “Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God,” said Jesus, in these words of the sixth beatitude inaugurating not only a new pathway of purification but in fact a new phenomenology of it. The heart is already implicitly identified as the seat of imaginal vision, and as the teaching gets fleshed out over the centuries, particularly in mystical Sufism, the consensus continues to build that the heart (rather than the cognitive mind, i.e., the brain) is the true organ of spiritual perception and the seat of our imaginal selfhood. In Kabir

Helminski's cogent summary of traditional Sufi teaching on the heart, *Living Presence*, you will certainly notice several capacities already specifically underscored in the previous chapter as foundational to imaginal literacy, including the capacity to read pattern, visual and verbal symbolism, overall unity, and nonlinear timing:

We have subtle subconscious faculties we are not using. Beyond the limited analytic intellect lies a vast realm of mind that includes psychic and extra-sensory abilities, intuition; wisdom, a sense of unity, aesthetic, qualitative and creative faculties; and image-forming and symbolic capacities. Though these capacities are many, they are operating best when they are in concert. They comprise a mind, moreover, in spontaneous connection to the cosmic mind. This total mind we call heart.<sup>7</sup>

The teachings of Christian East follow a parallel track, with an increasing emphasis on a quality known as *attention of the heart* as the required prerequisite for following Christ directly into World 24—"putting on the mind of Christ" in the more familiar Pauline language. The eleventh-century Orthodox teacher Symeon the New Theologian precociously recognized that this mind of Christ actually emerged from a significantly higher level of consciousness than we humans can normally sustain; without the mediating presence of this inner attention, he bluntly claimed, it is flatly impossible to live the gospel teaching:

In a word, he who does not have attention in himself and does not guard his mind cannot become pure in heart and so cannot see God. He who does not have attention

in himself cannot be poor in spirit, cannot weep and be contrite, nor be gentle and meek, nor hunger and thirst after righteousness, nor be merciful or a peacemaker, nor suffer persecution for righteousness sake.<sup>8</sup>

The goal of "putting the mind in the heart" gradually came to dominate the transformational program of these Eastern Orthodox Hesychasts. The phrase shows up more and more frequently in the writings of *The Philokalia*, that great compendium of Orthodox mystical Wisdom, and as it does so, the lineaments of a practice begin to reveal themselves. Part of this practice entailed an actual energetic training (always taught one-on-one, to prepared students only) in learning to concentrate attention in the region of the chest. The lion's share of the preparatory work, however, lay in the struggle with the "passions": those turbulent, self-referential emotions that will always obscure the viewing platform and drag our sense of selfhood back into the gravitational field of the lower realms. The practice, Symeon claims—his own variation on the universal spiritual theme of nonattachment—is actually quite simple, though of course, not easy:

You should observe three things before all else: freedom from all cares, not only about bad and vain but even about good things . . . your conscience should be clear so that it denounces you in nothing, and you should have a complete absence of passionate attachment so that your thought inclines to nothing worldly. Keep your attention within yourself—not in your head, but in your heart.<sup>9</sup>

If this sounds more than a little unpalatable, like deliberately squandering our God-given human right to "go for the gusto,"

remember the context in which we are raising this possibility—*which world do you want to play in?* The fact remains that from the standpoint of imaginal causality, the energy consumed maintaining the nucleated egoic selfhood (with its constantly whirling orbit of stories and emotions) as the seat of identity drains energy and drags one back into the denser gravitational field of World 48 and below. Break that bond, and the energy is immediately released back into one's being as that additional boost required for participation in World 24 causality. Maurice Nicoll aptly reminds us that our capacity to see is state dependent: "As your being increases, your receptivity to higher meaning increases."<sup>10</sup> This is essentially what Rafe was trying to teach me when he would promptly depart whenever I fell into a negative state. From the perspective of World 48, it sounds quite "unsupportive," but I had come to him essentially petitioning for a novitiate in World 24, and that's what he intended to deliver. The inconvenient truth remains: If you are going to play in World 24, all those heavy, negative emotions you are clinging to and wallowing in are useless. They belong to the density of that other realm. You can indulge them as much as you want there as you perfect your World 48 self. But to step fully across the line into the imaginal realm, there can be no more wallowing or clinging; it's transforming all the way.

# Notes

## Chapter 1: Introducing the Imaginal

1. It is beyond the scope of this book to give a complete introduction to the Western tradition of perennial wisdom, but an excellent start (beyond an unusually nuanced and helpful introduction on the Wikipedia site) is Aldous Huxley's now classic book *The Perennial Philosophy*, first published in 1945 by Harper and Brothers and in continuous circulation ever since. The perennial philosophy is represented in various flavors and lineages, and while it is impossible to accommodate all the variations under a single philosophical rubric, a good starting point is Huxley's 1944 essay in *Vedanta and the West*, in which he describes "The Minimum Working Hypothesis"; the basic outline of the perennial philosophy found in all the mystic branches of the religions of the world:

That there is a Godhead or Ground, which is the unmanifested principle of all manifestation.

That the Ground is transcendent and immanent.

That it is possible for human beings to love, know and, from virtually, to become actually identified with the Ground.

That to achieve this unitive knowledge, to realize this supreme identity, is the final end and purpose of human existence.

That there is a Law or Dharma, which must be obeyed, a Tao or Way, which must be followed, if men are to achieve their final end.

2. Valentine Tomberg, *Meditations on the Tarot* (Rockport, MA: Element Books, 1985), 574.
3. You will find these energies described in many places throughout Teilhard's voluminous work, but a good place to begin is with his masterpiece, *The Human Phenomenon*, particularly in the Sarah Appleton-Weber translation (Chicago: Sussex Academic Press, 1999), which adds back into the text a crucial diagram in Teilhard's original manuscript (eliminated in later revisions), followed by an extensive and exceedingly helpful commentary in her "Appendix A," 227–32.
4. Lynn Bauman, trans., *The Gospel of Thomas* (logion 77) (Ashland, OR: White Cloud Press, 2002), 163.
5. Jean-Yves Leloup, *The Gospel of Mary Magdalene* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2002), 153.
6. Walter Wink, "Easter: What Happened to Jesus?" *Tikkun*, March–April 2008. [www.tikkun.org/article\\_php/MarchAprilTOC2008](http://www.tikkun.org/article_php/MarchAprilTOC2008).
7. For a recent and beautifully displayed version of this map, see Ken Wilber, *Integral Spirituality* (Cambridge, MA: Shambhala Publications, 2007, facing page 27).

## Chapter 2: Worlds within Worlds

4. In the American solfeggio system this note is known as *ti*, but the European models universally (and with much more of a vestigial esoteric memory!) identify this note as *si*.
5. Cynthia Bourgeault, *The Holy Trinity and the Law of Three* (Boulder: Shambhala Publications, 2013), particularly pages 33–36 and all of chapter 4, pages 48–59. The bibliographical references in that book will lead you to the main source material in Ouspensky's *In Search of the Miraculous* and Nicoll's *Psychological Commentaries on the Teachings of Ouspensky and Gurdjieff*. From there the trail branches nearly endlessly.
6. Once again, this is laid out in Ouspensky's *In Search of the Miraculous* (see previous note).
7. Jacob Boehme, *The Way to Christ* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 192.
8. Jacob Boehme, *The Clavis or Key and Dialogues on the Supersensual Life* (Kila, MT: Kessinger Publications, 2010), 50.
9. In ascending order, these states of consciousness are known as *gross*, *subtle*, *causal*, and *nondual*. For a further explanation, see Ken Wilber, *Integral Spirituality* (Cambridge, MA: Shambhala, 2006), 74; for Wilber's helpful diagram of the interface between stages and states of consciousness, see *Integral Spirituality*, 88.
10. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Human Phenomenon*, trans. Sarah Appleton-Weber (Chicago: Sussex Academic Press, 1999), 188.
11. See in particular Bernadette Roberts's *The Real Christ*. Like so much of her later work, this tract is privately published but available for purchase. Googling her name will lead you to the current contact information for a spiral-bound copy of this brilliant and challenging work.
12. The tendency to equate the Christic with the nondual realms (or levels of consciousness) emerges in my estimate out of two confluences, both well intentioned but ultimately unhelpful. The first is the conflation of consciousness and cosmology. While it is certainly beyond question that Jesus as a person modeled the signature traits of what we now call "Christ consciousness," that does not imply that the Christic realm, understood cosmologically, is situated in the nondual bandwidth. The second is the conflation of theology and metaphysics. Because World 3 is the primary ternary and Jesus is classically identified theologically as the second person of the Trinity, Christians are sometimes too quick to assume that this places him—as a human person—in World 3. But the Trinity in World 3 is not yet "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit"; it is the primordial Law of Three. The Trinity as we know it theologically belongs entirely within what I will shortly identify as "the sphere of the personal"—Worlds 12, 24, and 48—where it serves as its central icon and pathway to spiritual fullness. I will unpack this a bit further in chapter 7, but the fullest exploration is in my book *The Holy Trinity and the Law of Three* (Shambhala, 2013), particularly in section 3.

### Chapter 3: The Great Exchange

6. You will find these sayings quoted in J. G. Bennett, *The Masters of Wisdom* (Wellingborough, Northamptonshire: Turnstone Press, Ltd., 1982), 133–37.
7. Maurice Nicoll, *The New Man* (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), 143.
8. Jacob Boehme, *The Way to Christ* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 192.
9. G. I. Gurdjieff, *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson* (New York: Viking Arcana, 1992), 351.

### Chapter 4: Imaginal Causality

4. Bruno Barnhart, *The Good Wine: Reading John from the Center* (New York/Mahwah NJ: Paulist Press, 1993).
5. Barnhart, *Good Wine*, 240.
6. I believe, incidentally, that exactly this same chiastic mandala—Jesus as the Lord of the New Creation—is strongly at play in Teilhard de Chardin's work and in fact furnishes the key to a chiastic reconstruction of his collected works. While I won't load the decks with that in this book, it might furnish an intriguing new starting point for a desideratum yet to be achieved in Teilhardian scholarly circles: a comprehensive reorganizing of his canon in a way that makes it both more accessible and more internally coherent.

### Chapter 6: Imaginal Purification

1. Ken Wilber used these terms in his earlier maps of the levels of consciousness but later abandoned them—not, however, before passing on the original roadmap to Jim Marion, whose influential book *Putting on the Mind of Christ* (Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Roads, 2000) made extensive and helpful use of these categories.
2. For a further elucidation of this horrifying typology, see *Beelzebub's Tales* (Viking Arcana edition) 369–73.
3. This descriptor comes from Ken Wilber, as part of his helpful exploration of the role of the personal and relational in the life of higher consciousness. See Ken Wilber, *Integral Spirituality* (Cambridge: Shambhala Publications 2007), 158–61.
4. This is not a direct quotation but rather my paraphrase of a very closely argued section of an impassioned and sophisticated argument offered by this anonymous fourteenth-century English monk in an essay now most widely known as “A Letter of Spiritual Direction” in *The Pursuit of Wisdom*, translated and edited by James A. Walsh (New York: Paulist Press 1988). See in particular, on page 226: “There is no need, no order to increase your perfection, to go back and feed your faculties by contemplating the qualities of your being . . . [but simply by] offering up to God that simple awareness of the substance of your being.”
5. Cynthia Bourgeault, *The Heart of Centering Prayer: Nondual Christianity in Theory and Practice* (Boulder: Shambhala Publications, 2016).
6. Beatrice Bruteau, “Prayer and Identity,” quoted in Thomas Keating and others, *Spirituality, Contemplation, and Transformation* (New York: Lantern Books, 2008), 101.
7. Kabir Helminski, *Living Presence: A Sufi Way to Mindfulness and the Essential Self* (New York: Jeremy Tarcher/Putnam, 1992), 157.
8. Symeon the New Theologian, “Three Methods of Attention and Prayer,” in *Writings from the Philokalia: On Prayer of the Heart*, trans. E. Kadloubovsky and G. E. H. Palmer (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), 158.
9. Symeon, “Three Methods.” For more on Symeon, the practice of nonattachment, and the striking parallels between his teachings on attention of the heart and classic Asian notions of nonduality, see chapter 5, “Further to Symeon the New Theologian,” in my book *The Heart of Centering Prayer: Nondual Christianity in Theory and Practice*.
10. Maurice Nicoll, *Psychological Commentaries on the Teachings of Ouspensky and Gurdjieff* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1984), vol. 5, 1,542.