

WITHIN

A 21st Century Philosopher's Stone

By

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Chapter 1

More Precious than Gold?

“*Within*” promises to provide its reader with a genuine 21st Century *Philosopher’s Stone*, no less!

Originally, a *Philosopher’s Stone* was the alchemical substance which could transmute a metal into pure gold.

“*Within*” *Philosopher’s Stone*’s main property is to transform a difficult existence into a blissful one.

There should be some demand for such a beneficial element, as many people find themselves regularly struck by misfortunes, doubts, disappointments, etc.

The world is but a passing shadow; a guest who stays one night and then leaves; a dream of a man fast asleep; a lightning glistening in the horizon of hope...

Tossed in the tides of living, I don't know when I shall wake up from this dream...

These ancient laments were pronounced by Ali Thaleb and Chen Fu. We chose them randomly among a few millions quotes. Actually, much of the world’s literatures, religions and philosophies centers on our species’ sufferings.

If we were to comb all these complaints, we would quickly come across the description of our own pains, which seem to us so... unique! Indeed, *Senescence and Death* make us the members of a very large family:

Ave mater, moritori te salutant (those who are about to die salute you)

Thankfully, the *world’s literatures, religions and philosophies* do not only gather the always sadly entertaining descriptions of our ineluctable demise. They formulate theories to make sense of a condition absurdly impaired by these perverse *Senescence and Death*.

“*Within*” claims to have discovered some sort of “existential sieve or filter” to extract from these often dissonant systems, the recipes to acquire the spiritual *Philosopher’s Stone*.

Chapter 2

The Twenty-First Century to the Rescue

The reader's suspicion may be in high alert. Anyone promising to "transform a difficult existence into a blissful one" could be also selling *snake oil*, right?

In a few paragraphs, we will actually shoot ourselves in the proverbial foot, and demonstrate that the *Philosopher's Stone* cannot be transmitted by words. Such confession could greatly diminish the value of "*Within*," at first glance a regular, old-fashioned beanbag of words.

Fortunately, "*Within*" came incidentally across a few fantastic tools, apparently seldom used together.

The first one stems from the fact we are temporarily and literally at the end of a cultural line. It does not make us special, but it does give us the immense luxury to have access to almost everything that has ever been written on the human condition up to today. That literature reflects, among many other things that, since the dawn of human communication, some people did possess *Philosopher's Stones*!

We just have to browse through this voluminous amount of information.

The second extraordinary element at our disposal is that we live in a century that has a special zeitgeist, a peculiar general knowledge shared by most people.

A little further down, as we will be progressing toward our *Philosopher's Stone* like Indiana Jones toward the Lost Ark, we will have to use our virtual machete to sever some foul-smelling zeitgeist tentacles, such as social tendencies we should not accept blindly.

The special zeitgeist we are mentioning here has the phenomenal quality to allow anybody to hop, sway and boogie in a relativist and quantic world!

Our century has naturally bend our minds to allow a photon to be a wave and a particle at the same time; for time to be part of spacetime; for mass to be energy; for a "yes" and a "no" to be simultaneously "yes *and* no" in a qubit world, etc.

Today, any layperson, even allergic to math and exact sciences, accepts naturally the greatest paradoxes that used to be reserved to the most progressive *metaphysicians* of the past.

Since the *Philosopher's Stone* belongs to the realm of the consciousness, a dimension filled with dizzying paradoxes, having this limberness of the mind at our disposal is going to help us tremendously.

Chapter 3

Where the Author Has to Show its Credentials

I am currently a neurosurgeon, but I studied Physics at MIT, Social Psychology in Paris. I spent my childhood in an ashram, my adolescence with an Amazonian tribe. I am proud to be fluent in Swahili. I almost forgot to mention that I am a living Buddha.

Rest assured that this is absolutely not the biography of the author of “*Within*.”

But if that ideal character could write a book on how to obtain an *inalterable peace of mind*, its readers would have exactly the same chance to reach it as the reader of “*Within*.”

Socrates exclaimed:

How I wish that wisdom could be infused by touch, out of the fuller into the emptier man, as water runs through wool out of a fuller cup into an emptier one!”

If the secret of everlasting bliss could be passed on like a relay baton, transmitted by a special stroke, or through any medium, like storytelling, poetry, music, painting, rituals, etc., we would be bathing all the time in an ocean of happiness.

Born at the convergence of several events, “*Within*” may tip the impossible odds against communicating the spiritual *Philosopher’s Stone*.

We have already mentioned a labyrinthine library and an epoch that teaches us to think outside of rigid dualities. That singular intersection brought a few new ways of highlighting the ancient, essential, existential axioms we are going to examine in the next few chapters.

.Moreover, we’ll soon reveal that this book is a collaborative effort.

And last but not least, as if “shooting oneself in the foot” was too sappy an image, our author must also confess having the *Philosopher’s Stone*... and *losing* it more often than not.

We can almost hear the reader’s horrified gasp: “Why would I read a recipe book from a chef who burns half of its dishes?”

We must protest that the comparison is not really appropriate. Actually, these very losses constitute an unexpected positive mechanism that could allow us to find and *keep* the Stone!

Chapter 4

Are we sure there is no “I” in “We”?

The previous chapter alluded to a *collaborative effort*.

The reader may have noticed that the writer referred awkwardly to itself as “it” or as “we.”

The third person singular and neuter “it” was chosen because of its genderless status. The quest for happiness should interest equally all genders.

But understanding the “we” is crucial for participating in the *Philosopher’s Stone Search*.

The first person plural expresses the synergy between the writer and the reader, their essential *entanglement*, to use a popular contemporary term.

Stressing the indispensably active role of the reader is not an awkward form of flattery, but the understanding that simply deciphering letters, words and sentences will never provide any *Philosopher’s Stone* to anyone.

Our book has a chance to indicate an *inalterable peace of mind* only if the reader accepts fully this definition:

All books are thought experiments!

A thought experiment cannot pretend to serve as evidence. Nonetheless, imagining and allowing concepts to take form in our mind is the first condition to stretch our consciousness.

One of “*Within*” mottos is that

Constant satisfaction is a sleight of consciousness

The ambiguity of the term *sleight* and its dubious association with “deception” should not alarm the reader, who can always reject intellectually an apparently shocking notion, *afterwards*.

Epicure said:

***We do not need theories about physics and nature and hollow opinions...
We only need to live without problems.***

“*Within*” is less about *theories and hollow opinions* (even though we have to examine some of yesteryears spiritual alchemists discoveries) than *living without problems*.

In other words, it could be compared to an eclectic culinary manual rather than to a philosophical treaty!

The only way for the reader to assess the quality of such a book is to *try* the recipes. The reader as a *chef* must adapt the recipes according to the available skillset, ingredients and also to the reader's own taste buds.

That is why the hero of this book has to be the reader, wearing a safari helmet or the chef's hat, with "*Within*" as an essentially blurry treasure map or as an incomplete recipe book!

Chapter 5

Creative Reading

Another important aspect of the writer/reader's connection could be called "re-creation." It gives us a powerful tool capable to pierce through the *labyrinthine library of everything that has ever been written on the human condition.*

Here are a couple of illustrations of that process.

A 20th century novelist, invited to a televised debate around one of his books, quipped: "The other panelists dissected my characters' hidden motivations so cleverly that I am starting to think I am much more intelligent than I thought. I had never analyzed them so deeply."

A celebrated poetess recounted that a very old lady came to congratulate her: "Your poem is on my bedside table, so I can remember to be always as courageous as this woman, your model, when she confronts that horrible, inexorable attrition endured over time. How could such a young soul like yours have the insight to know about the winter of the body and the mind?" The poetess realized that her poem, actually voicing her ecological concerns, had been reinterpreted by her elderly admirer into a completely original creation."

Re-creation is a curious phenomenon. It is as if the panelists of the first example and the older lady of the second had *metabolized* what they had read, transforming it into something they needed.

Here is another illustration, closer to this very book.

Some time ago, our author read a translation of a text by Novalis, where the lover lamented before the beloved:

It is a real torture not to be able to say everything at the same time, not to be able to expose one's heart completely at once.

More recently, after finding and typing the title "Within, a 21st Century Philosopher's Stone," the writer froze... until the Novalis sentence reappeared in its mind. Even though it was adapted from a foreign language, another century and a totally different context, it expressed perfectly the overwhelming, monstrous feeling before the task at hand: how to communicate what cannot be expressed in words?

The sentence was, in a way part of the author's psyche. It flew naturally out to the page, as a product of its own reflection...

At some point, we should establish why re-creation and plagiarism are totally unrelated,

Chapter 6

The Taoist Bird/Mendel of Kotzk's Method

It is time to take hold of the “very powerful tool capable of piercing through a *labyrinthine library*.”

Everything that has ever been written on the human condition represents a whole lot of data! Does “*Within*” have the means to acquire a supercomputer capable to sieve through trillions of words transmitted in many dozens of different languages?

Thankfully, our aim is not to compose an encyclopedic theory of *the human condition*. We only need some information relevant to our quest for an *inalterable peace of mind*.

We chose to have recourse to the Mendel of Kotzk's Approach:

The storyteller told what he knew... and I heard what I needed.

It is also called *the Taoist Bird Method*:

For its subsistence, the Wise Bird of the Taoists depends on the seeds found in the gardens of men. However, after pecking what it needs, that bird flies swiftly away, fearing to be put in a cage.

Does that technique operate in a totally random mode?

Before answering that important question, we have found a curious piece illustrating what types of “seeds” are collected.

The text imagined an actual bird that would visit the gardens of men to find its (spiritual) pittance.

Why wouldn't the Taoist Bird be afraid of an omnivorous species for which hunting is a sport or a hobby? How could it ever trust that famously unpredictable group?

It does depend on what grows in the Human gardens. But the gardeners are all to be avoided.

What sense does it make when this one human being is a violent and callous character, but capable to paint soulful landscapes? Or when a despicable racist can compose divine harmonies? Or when a hideous slave driver, only worthy of total contempt, has solved a problem allowing doctors to eradicate a certain disease?

These bipeds could, during one single lifetime, be alternatively nice and evil. More bizarrely, they could be simultaneously both!

Therefore, the Wise Bird could care less whether the gardener is a saint or a Nazi. It considers safer to stay away from all of them.

Chapter 7

Instructions for Seed-Picking

We asked if gathering what we need for the *Philosopher's Stone* quest was totally random.

The answer could be highly speculative and should cover quite a few chapters. Since the pair reader/writer is still in the process of getting acquainted, let's just observe a strange occurrence, without commenting it for now:

Our goal seems to act like a magnetic field, irresistibly attracting relevant elements.

The *Taoist Bird/Mendel of Kotzk's* method is supposed to be an efficient tool. Can a mere instrument transform its user? Since our quest or research is taking place in the realm of the consciousness, it is not only possible; it is guaranteed.

Implementing that harvesting technique means we must always “fly away.” We cannot stop at any particular school of thoughts, not even ours! Actually, especially not ours, as the following sentence summarizes well the reason:

The first principle is that you must not fool yourself and you are the easiest person to fool.

Ibn al-'Arabi said:

Do not attach yourself to any particular creed exclusively, so that you disbelieve in all the rest; otherwise you will lose much good, nay, you will fail to recognize the real truth of the matter. Let your soul be capable of embracing all forms of belief.

That should be enough quotes for one chapter.

Before closing this one, let's remark a fairly good example of the *Taoist Bird/Mendel of Kotzk's* whimsical choices. What is the name of the philosopher who uttered the sentence warning us against our arbitrary certitudes (“*you are the easiest person to fool...*”)?

It is actually Richard Feynman, a theoretical physicist.

Chapter 8

Who said What?

Can the reader assume that, since Richard Feynman has been nonchalantly quoted, quantum physics is for us like the multiplication table for most people?

Actually, that citation was merely a random example of the *Taoist Bird/Mendel of Kotzk's* Method.

Curiosity brought us to the quantum physics “garden,” where we collected a great number of concepts to be examined, as well as the sentence-illustration by Feynman about our own convictions (“*we are the easiest person to fool*”).

By the way, isn't *curiosity* one of the main bonds between the reader and the writer?

We have loudly mentioned the name Richard Feynman to illustrate our gathering technique and perhaps, off the record, to show off some scientific shine.

But usually, we tend to lose track of who said what.

Sometimes, it is better not to cite a specific name for fear of the pseudo-specialist's always vindictive reaction”: “Who are you to dare using that name in vain?”

Also, we saw that the mere fact of learning what we need is a form of re-creation. We marvel:

That formulation depicts exactly what I feel!

We *phagocytize* or *metabolize* the precious element. It becomes part of our personal cultural fabric.

Another reason to keep our sources mostly anonymous is that we are a little wary of the connection between creator and creation. Biographies of official “geniuses” are filled with examples of hard-to-stomach callousness or cruelty.

To go back to the *Taoist Bird* literal character, it considers the creator/creation unit very much like the fruit and its shell. It values only one part of that duo, and it is not the being who could be ***alternatively or even simultaneously good and evil.***

In the Wise Bird's eyes, the creator is a mere conduit, hardly worthy of any form of posterity. That is the reason why some people can hear in its modulations the mocking lyrics:

Gardeners filthy, shifty, natty

Our harvest is always healthy

Chapter 9

Plank and Speck in this Century?

We mentioned that the *Philosopher's Stone* can be found within the consciousness, where spacetime is curiously warped and the instruments used to explore it tend to operate on the operator.

Therefore, the *Taoist Bird/Mendel of Kotzk's* Method, at some point, is likely to question its user!

Illustrating that phenomenon is a little easier with the metaphor featuring a literal bird.

Our feelings could be hurt when the Wise Bird flies away after pecking half a thought of ours, as if we were filthy gardeners! How could it confuse us with a despicable type?

We might as well give it a voice to hear its answer:

“We have been told that all of you share 99.9% of the same DNA. Apparently, the remaining 0.1% makes your differences, a bewildering source of conflicts among you. We have observed your bizarre hierarchies according to symmetrical features, deep voices, skin shades, dimples, etc. To us, that is just absurd. And as long as we have lived in your midst, we still cannot fathom how you can massacre each other for borders that Nature or the next human generation quickly erases.”

We want to protest that this fictitious character uses too broad a paintbrush. But having access to all our knowledge, the Talkative Bird takes us off-guard and is able to swiftly conclude:

“You have in you 99.9% of the filthiest gardener.

Don't be what your own tradition calls ‘a hypocrite who should take the plank out of your own eye, and then see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.’

The sooner you recognize you have in you 99.9% of the most loathsome individual you know, the faster you will be able to start your spiritual journey. Actually, you should not go too fast. Learn one or two things before embarking on your quest.

After all, another tradition of yours reports that ‘when (the Taoist master) Lie tzu was still a disciple, it took him three years to unlearn judging and qualifying with words. Then and only then, did his master honor him with a glance.’”

Changing chapter should shut this bird up.

Chapter 10

Pro-Philosophy But Not Pro-Philosophers?

Last chapter, a lecturing bird advised us to “unlearn things,” but not before *learning one or two things*. If this is not the most blatant contradiction, what is?

The problem could be the word “things,” a rather vague term to be sure. It seems possible to imagine *learning* new concepts and techniques and *unlearning* some inadequate habit or old prejudice.

Learning and *unlearning* are studied at length by scientists and also by philosophers. Speaking of which, isn't it suspicious that the root of the term *Philosopher's Stone* appears to be *philosophy*, nowadays a mere boring school subject for most people?

Philosophy has always had a dubious reputation, mainly because of the *philosophers*, who happen to loudly define themselves as such. But:

It is extremely unfortunate that philosophy bears a specific name and that philosophers are members of a special circle, while philosophy is not something separated, and absolutely not a specialty.

Philosophy is the very path of the human mind, its very own way of behaving."

According to that axiom, we are born *philosophers* and therefore the *Philosopher's Stone* should eventually be ours.

Natural philosophy comes to any human being who has ever asked why it is born in a universe dominated by *Senescence and Death*.

In our first chapter, we have fished a couple of quotes from a few millions laments. In the next few pages, we are going to have a look at the *meaning* our forefathers saw in the precarious human destiny. Perhaps we could use their conclusions in our quest for the *Philosopher's Stone*?

Beforehand, we must acknowledge that our dearest motto ***Philosophy is absolutely not a specialty; it is the very path of the human mind, its very own way of behaving*** was freely “adapted” from a text that Novalis wrote about *poetry*, not *philosophy*.

That could be another vivid example of the *Taoist Bird/Mendel of Kotzk's Method*.

Chapter 11

Who is Knocking at the Door?

In a Sufi text, God's voice boomed gloriously:

“Your pain? It is your pain that brought you to Me!”

The most literal interpretation sees in that excerpt the horrific illustration of a sadistic God. In a few chapters, we should examine these controversial three letters. For now, knowing that Sufi's texts usually confuse literal minds, we prefer to read the sentence not so much as a representation of the nature of God (the Sufi's Goal), but as a particular account of the human suffering.

It is one of the thousands variations on the *Messengers Tradition*.

Our *labyrinthine library* contains countless descriptions of the intrusion of *natural philosophy* in the human's mind.

Here is the pattern, in extremely trivial terms. A baby comes into existence. Rather impotent and ignorant, it is protected and molded by its environment, while its “I” develops inexorably, but in a convoluted fashion. At a certain stage, an explosion occurs: the realization that *Senescence and Death* are part of its course. They do not flash a business card on which their names are artfully calligraphed. They most often show up in a dizzying drizzle of silent horror. Not too surprisingly, the baby - who must have now grown considerably - and its “I,” start running away or burying the dreadful intuition... until *natural philosophy* appears, suggesting it would be most beneficial to face all feelings, even - or especially - the most frightful.

Of course, yesteryears *Philosopher's Stone Seekers* did not formulate that timeline in quite the same terms. They used myths, around which initiatory tales were built.

The famous legend of Buddha's youth comes to mind.

Prince Gautama was raised by loving royal parents who sheltered him from all the evidences of human suffering. It was only at the tender age of 29 that he ventured out of the palace where everything was heavenly arranged for his enjoyment. And soon enough, he came across an old crippled man, a sick person, a dead body, and a holy man with no home.

Shocked, the prince renounced his throne to roam the world, looking for the meaning of the horrendous predicament called the human condition.

The tale happens to have a rather happy ending, although a little unexpected for an initiatory tale. Instead of going back to his throne and becoming an extraordinary king, like Gilgamesh or Ulysses, Gautama “only” becomes Buddha!

Chapter 12

Who Did You Say Was At the Door?

In the previous tale, *the old crippled man, the sick person, the dead body, and the holy man with no home* are *Messengers*. They indicate that there is something precious to be searched.

Interestingly, that *something precious* may very well be the *Philosopher's Stone*! What would the chances?

Let's take a little time to frolic in our phenomenal library, and examine another classical example of the *Messengers Tradition*.

Of course, it is stipulated in our implicit rulebook that a reader very focused on the quest and its precious potential benefits can easily skip these wordy examples.

In the Grimm's Brothers "*The Messengers of Death*," Death is beaten to a pulp by some giant and is close to die (sic). Weirdly, a poor ploughman rescues it. The *Taoist Bird/Mendel of Kotzk's* Method brought us a much older version of that story, apparently originated in India.

It features a rich merchant who passes away, leaving a good, comfortable life behind him. The late merchant discovers that his afterlife is starting rather poorly: he finds himself as the defendant in his own trial.

In the story we read, his Judge was translated by "The Truth," which deliberately imposes a metaphysical level to the tale. In a desperate effort to keep it *light and entertaining* for our reader, so early in this book, we are choosing for our summary a more neutral "Grand Judge."

The verdict falls: the merchant's soul is found guilty of not having looked for the Grand Judge during his life.

The merchant, who used to be a shrewd negotiator, has an interesting response:

"Your Excellence is saying that I was put on Earth to look for the Grand Judge. But on Earth, except for a few religious fanatics who give religion a bad name, nobody knows that you even exist.

Humans are flawed, indeed, but when they judge someone, it is because the person has knowingly violated the law. I did not violate it, since the law requiring people to look for you was never clearly published."

The Judge replies with the following questions:

Have you ever seen a birth: a being coming into existence?

Have you ever seen a man, a woman, standing tall in all their glory and strength, their great power forcing the admiration and envy of everyone, suddenly scythed down by a disease or an accident, and becoming at once a miserable, destitute, impotent being, avoided by all in horror?

Have you ever seen a man or a woman, full of energy, supporting a family, perhaps an entire community, little by little crumbling under the weight of the years, looking up to a new generation that does not even acknowledge their contributions?

Have you ever seen some elderly people, once limber and surrounded with friends, moving with difficulty like ghosts, almost transparent, inaudible, in a society where they feel estranged?

Have you ever seen a being that could open its heart to the stars, suddenly deprived of that treasure by Death, erasing seemingly all its laughs, tears and memories?

If you saw them, then you saw my Messengers.”

Chapter 13

The B WORD

Some other popular variations of the *Messengers Tradition* take a more aggressive form:

Every time, a youngster filled with arrogance, appears and boasts: “Here I am!”

Every time, powerful families transmit their opulence from one generation to the next and boast: “Here we are!”

Every time, brutal gangs and armies feel invincible and they boast: “Here we are!”

Every time, Death slithers from its hole and whispers: “Here I am.”

By now, we should be convinced that our mortality makes us *natural philosophers*.

However, in the previous chapter’s tale, the Grand Judge, aka “The Truth” or the “Ultimate Goal” reveals itself after death. That does not help much our purpose to *transmute a difficult existence into a blissful one*. Here, the key word is *existence*, not “afterlife”! By the way, another key word is *blissful*.

The *Taoist Bird/Mendel of Kotzk’s* Method brought us this bitter reflection: “Evolution could have made human babies laugh hysterically at birth. But their cries are revelatory of the misery to come.”

We beg to differ. Without remembering what we felt inside the womb, it is plausible to assume that some form of bliss exists for the fetus. If the term “bliss” is too strong, let’s say “contentment” or, if we must be even more neutral, “comfort.”

That satisfaction precedes the birth cries. And this neonatal screaming is less predictive of an ominous fate than indicative of the difficulty to pass from one universe to the next.

This *passage from one universe to the next* is actually a common occurrence during our lifetime.

Anyway, it seems that:

Infants know how to laugh before they know how to talk.

Therefore, we should now examine another group of *Messengers*, who are signaling one more important *natural philosophy* component,

Bliss?

Chapter 14

Reading Plan B, If Plan A Is Not in Plain Sight

Very early on, *natural philosophers*, taking note of the ineluctable occurrence of misfortunes and of the no-less unavoidable impermanence of happiness, sigh, very much like the *Ecclesiastes*:

During the times of despair, reflect. During the times of happiness, enjoy.

Many thinkers have affirmed that there is nothing more to do. It is then logical to just try extending these *times of happiness*. As Omar Khayyam famously expressed it:

**“Intoxicated with wine and love, enjoy!
In the end, nothingness absorbs the whole world,
and all is solved
Thus, live as if you were already in the heavens above!”**

Wine and love are indeed the elations of choice, but there are also drugs, special places, any type of recklessness, hobbies, sex, incessant traveling, etc.

Of course, these pleasures can be addictive, but their real drawback is that they are external and bound to end or to be missing altogether, while our *Philosopher’s Stone* is a sleight of consciousness, and that element (consciousness) can hardly be missing as long as we are semi-alive.

To reinforce that important point, let’s imagine that a genius neuroscientist claims suddenly to have discovered a molecule that can be injected into a patient’s brain, triggering at will and without any horrible side-effect an *inalterable peace of mind*.

Soon, a satisfaction-triggering kit hits the market, gloriously approved by the FDA, and available in 5 easy payments, shipping and handling included.

Compared to “*Within*,” which is, oddly enough, not approved by the FDA, and which cannot guaranty any tangible result, since *inalterable peace of mind* cannot be communicated by words, the marvelous kit (a chemical, electrical or mechanical poking of specific neurons) wins by a landslide.

However, even if such a splendid contraption was available today, the reader would want to consider that our forefathers, the discreet bearers of a subtle *inalterable peace of mind*, did not wait around for a Nobel-Prize-worthy biochemical formula to be invented.

Also, since the *marvelous kit* is *external* to us, a power outage, a transporter’s strike, any of its components shortage, etc. may affect its availability.

To counter such catastrophic possibility, the reader might as well continue browsing through our recipe manual for concocting an always available, satisfactory *Philosopher’s Stone*.

Chapter 15

Blind? Me? Who Knew?

In the previous chapter, we implied a certain opposition between the “thinkers who believe that there is nothing to do in our lifetime other than trying to extend the *times of happiness*,” and “the discreet bearers of the subtle *Philosopher’s Stone*.”

Why would we side with the latter, if wine, love and all these pleasures are readily accessible, compared to a vague promise for some *inalterable peace of mind*?

Let’s start by the sentence at the foundation of *natural philosophy*:

During the times of despair, reflect. During the times of happiness, enjoy.

The *enjoyment* part is most certainly embraced by everyone.

On the other hand, *reflection* leads to many conclusions, often opposite to each other.

The position stating that we should live in pleasure and not worry about anything else is pretty straight forward and does not really need any explanation.

When we posit that there is a *Philosopher’s Stone* inside our own consciousness, it may trigger a vehement denial from people who are quite proud of their intelligence and education: “If there was anything of the sort, I or my good friend, the eminent Professor So-And-So would know about it.”

The 21st century gives us a lot of research material on all the factors that can affect the representation of the reality we call *consciousness*. It is likely that the eminent Professor So-And-So knows better than us that our *consciousness* fluctuates quite widely.

But just in case, we have gleaned in the varied and broad fields of neuroscience a few papers supporting that, for everyone...

The hardest thing to see is what is there

- “Inattention blindness”: too concentrated on one mental task, we are blind to the rest.
- “Completeness paradigm”: our mind automatically and arbitrarily fills out blanks or overwrites unusual events.
- “Expectation bias”: the subject is mainly conscious of what it expects to see or feel.
- “The powerful unconscious”: unconscious processes shape our reality.
- “Linguistic or cultural blindness”: some concepts absent from a language are not grasped.
- “Laboratory induced out-of-body experiences and other unusual states of consciousness...”

Chapter 16

We had no idea!

If we were to use the scientific articles mentioned in the previous chapter, we would probably encounter some haughty pushback: “And who are you to divert serious scientific experiments?”

Do we have the stamina to explain we were just applying the *Taoist Bird/Mendel of Kotzk’s* Method to illustrate with these objective studies how complex the usual representations of our reality are?

Actually, the bearers of the *Philosopher’s Stone* from the past did not wait for these papers to be published to explore their own consciousness.

We can just revisit their testimonies. Our plan is to first show a glimmer of what we want to investigate. It should be a banal phenomenon, something that any *eminent Professor So-And-So* knows well, but does not value much.

Actually, it is less a problem of evaluation than the fact that our intellect always overestimates its grasp on reality.

Between the concept and the experience, there is a universe-size gap.

Every time (this young man) visited his aunt, an elderly lady, he would give ample, vivid details of his motto: “Work hard and party harder.”

And every time, his aunt would smile and whisper her own motto:

“If youth only knew; if age only could.”

And every time, the young man would shake his head, thinking: “You are too old to be able to do what I do. But our generation already knows everything you know, auntie.”

Forty years later, this young man became an uncle and his niece visited him regularly. He often thought of his late aunt and how unexpectedly true was her “If youth only knew...”

Forty years earlier, that man knew indeed all the concepts... intellectually. Since then, life actualized them with laughter, tears, expectations, disenchantments, enthusiasms, dreads...

Grasping a concept such as bliss, grief, love, impotence, trauma, discovery, etc. is intellectually easy. But when that occurrence *grasps us*, we experience its reality.

We had no idea!

So, let's embark in this paradoxical expedition, where "*Within*" can only distill *intellectual* concepts. Of course, the way to verify them would be for the reader to somehow *experience* them.

Chapter 17

From Office Clerk to Superheroine

How can we show *a glimmer of what we want to investigate* if it is supposed to be almost invisible to your eyes and mine, as well as to the *eminent Professor So-And-So's* formidable IQ?

We found in a text from the turn of the 20th century the ideal heroine to guide us to a somewhat peculiar way of considering our reality.

Ann lives in a cold and overpopulated city. She has a monotonous and tiring job that maintains her just above poverty level.

Her neighbors do not consider her very pretty. Some of them think she is in her late thirties, while the convenience store clerk down her street claims to have evidence she is in her sixties!

We meet Ann on a certain Tuesday of October, in the early evening.

That day, Ann has been harassed even more than usually by her small-minded, always-in-a-bad-mood supervisor. Because of him, she left late the office and she has missed her bus.

Now, she must walk back home, an hour journey by foot.

At home, nobody is waiting for her: no husband, no sister, no cat, not even a goldfish.

She is not looking forward to getting back to a good book or to a special hobby...

She knows her pantry is almost empty, and wonders if the convenience store down her street will be still open. She usually dreads going there at closing time, because it is the shift of that racist clerk who hates her, for some obscure reason.

So, Ann is walking among dozens of passersby she hardly sees, her mind filled with gloom and rancor.

Suddenly, Ann looks up.

Why on earth did she do that?

She is just looking at the sky.

It has rained intermittently during the whole day, and the clouds are getting very dark, for the night is almost there.

Just as Ann looks suddenly up, a faint slither of light pierces the clouds. And this opening widens, becoming golden, with shades of pink and carmine.

The sun is setting. It is its very first appearance that day, and it coincides with a parting of the clouds that lasts only a few seconds.

It is as if the sun has its most gorgeous, unexpected setting of the year, only for Ann, as nobody around her seems to notice the glorious vision.

Chapter 18

Feynman, Proust. Who Else Can We Invite?

Ann, our heroin, is modeled after a Londoner described by John Cowper Powys. Like Ann, his character had a glance at an unanticipated sunset. After that vision, the author added that the woman started walking with longer strides. She was rubbing her hands with contentment, a satisfied smile on her face.

His conclusion was rather startling:

All of the Creation, from Chaos to that point, and throughout all of Human History... had been fulfilled and justified by this very act: she was rubbing her hands with contentment!

Before analyzing that statement, let's examine another literary example of an extraordinary satisfaction stemming from a most ordinary occurrence.

This rather famous episode sees the French writer Marcel Proust sipping a cup of tea in which he dips a "madeleine," a small shell-shaped cake.

Suddenly,

"An exquisite pleasure had invaded my senses, something isolated, detached, with no suggestion of its origin. And at once the vicissitudes of life had become indifferent to me, its disasters innocuous, its brevity illusory – this new sensation having had on me the effect which love has of filling me with a precious essence; or rather this essence was not in me, it was me. ... Whence did it come? What did it mean? How could I seize and apprehend it?"

We just saw two very different persons - the "commoner" Ann and the refined Marcel Proust – stumbling upon rather banal "epiphanies." Their causes were not overly melodramatic: a simple sunset, a little cake dipped in some tea.

Did these two examples resonate with a personal episode experienced by the reader? Anyway, what counts here is that, instead of forgetting that instant or memorizing it as a simple anecdote ("I saw the most extraordinary sunset"), Ann is going to try answering Marcel's questions:

Whence did it come? What did it mean?

How could I seize and apprehend it?

Chapter 19

I Know! Let's Invite Rousseau

During the next few days, after work, Ann is on the lookout for the divine sunset.

She experiments; varying the time she leaves her work, making always sure to miss her bus. She finds rainy days quite promising and hopes during the whole way back home for a glimmer of sun. She even scrutinizes the moods of her malevolent manager, who is becoming some type of involuntary but important agent.

We should explain further down why it is most unlikely that Ann's *experiments* could lead to any more glorious visions.

Marcel Proust, after the initial *new sensation* we have copied, also tried to rekindle the magic. He took another sip of tea, and a third one.... But he noticed that the initial emotion was less and less intense. He concluded that

The truth I was looking for was not in the tea but inside of me.

He added that this "truth" inside of him was:

A testimony I did not understand.

Ann and Marcel are here to help us identify the subtle part of our consciousness we must study.

If we were to use terms borrowed from the field of Physics, what we will be looking for would be "a mysterious element interacting weakly or at times negatively with our consciousness, while being very abundant in our existence." In due time, we should give that *element*, an essential component of the *Philosopher's Stone*, a name with a serious *um*-ending, like the promising sounding *iridium*, the ill reputed, fast-decaying *uranium*, the evocative *osmium* or, more facetiously, the explicit *aurum*...

In the meantime, let's call on a third literary example, this time a roughly translated excerpt of the *Reveries of a Solitary Walker* by Jean-Jacques Rousseau:

When evening approached, I would walk down from the tops of the island, and sit by the lake, on the pebbled shore, hidden from anyone. There, the sound of the waves and the movement of the water, binding my senses and chasing from my soul any other agitation, immersed it into a delightful reverie... The ebb and flow of this water, its continuous noise, increasing now and then, relentlessly stroke my ears and my eyes, replacing any internal movements. Then, I could feel so enjoyably my own existence...

Chapter 20

Unwelcome addition to the Mendeleev Table

Jean-Jacques Rousseau's testimony appears to be different in nature from Ann's unexpected sunset and Proust's "new sensation." Rousseau's *exquisite pleasure* did not suddenly startle him. While posing as a regular stroller, he chose carefully the background for the *enjoyment of his own existence*.

Rousseau cultivated systematically a certain state of mind he called "reveries," where he would go from the "ecstasy" (sic) of being part of the nature surrounding him, to reflections about the strife he had to endure as a 18th century intellectual, his purpose in life, etc.

In the world literatures, there are literally millions of lyrical descriptions singing "the ecstasy of being part of Nature." If in the previous chapter we have selected Rousseau's excerpt, it is also because the author's *reverie* was abruptly interrupted:

(Hearing) the agreed signal, I could not extract myself from (this special place by the lake) without great effort.

That *agreed signal* that had him *extract himself from (that charmed spot)* was actually a friendly sound, letting him know that dinner was ready for him.

Ann, Marcel and Jean-Jacques may have given us enough material to isolate the subtle *element* we should examine to acquire a *Philosopher's Stone*.

The first two examples described a consciousness suddenly jumping to another level, an *enchanted* one, and then, regrettably, falling back to the *tedious* reality.

The third description showed a man already training his consciousness to mix the "ecstasy of being one with Nature" and his more mundane, recurring preoccupations. Then, a bell rang, and there was an inner struggle for our literary witness to drag himself to a house where his friends had cooked a meal for him.

Actually, what these illustrations have in common are less a peak of *exquisite pleasure* than the inexorable drop back into a *tedious reality*. For Marcel, it was *the vicissitudes of life*; for Ann, *a mind filled with gloom and rancor*; and for Jean Jacques, *the strife he had to endure*.

At this point, we could either study *peaks of exquisite pleasure* or everything that surrounds these peaks: all these hollow times, all that *tedious reality*.

Of course, we will have to examine both but, just to hold on to the theme of the 21st century *Philosopher's Stone* that can transmute any metal into gold (*aurum*), we will give this *omnipresent element, interacting weakly or at times negatively with our consciousness, while being very abundant in our existence*, the glorious name of TEDIUM!

Chapter 21

The Return of the Plank and the Speck

Ann is told the anecdote of this 18th century gentleman whose elated meditation was interrupted by a bell announcing that his dinner was waiting for him. In our version of the story, Rousseau's reaction of displeasure is purposefully exaggerated.

Ann shakes her head: "There is something wrong with this guy. I don't know, but I can't recall the last time someone cooked a meal for me. So, if during that *Certain Tuesday of October* I would have heard that bell, I would have been even happier. I would have never grumbled about it."

Ann's criticism would undoubtedly trigger a *Taoist Bird's* sardonic chirp:

A hypocrite should take the plank out of her own eye, and then see clearly to remove the speck from her brother's eye.

We are absolutely not accusing Ann, our dearest heroine, to be a hypocrite. She simply does not know yet that she is basically following the pattern she sees so clearly in Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

By the way, it is not because we can intellectually analyze that pattern that we are personally immune to it.

Ann will help us again illustrate that point. Let's go back to the times when, in order to feel for a second time that *Certain Tuesday of October's Bliss*, Ann did a great number of experiments.

One evening, walking back home, she thought: "What if the satisfaction I felt was due to an exceptional concurrence of circumstances, the type that occurs once every blue moon? I might as well forget about it. By the way, my memory of that day is actually fading already."

She reluctantly entered the convenience store, curiously still open. But instead of the racist clerk, apparently sick that day, a woman greeted her jovially: "Sorry, we are out of bread, sister. But here are some fresh pastries someone gave me. I didn't dare tell her I am allergic to butter. You might as well enjoy them. They are free of charge"

That night, as she savored her unexpected dessert, Ann reflected. If this was not a glorious *parting of the clouds in the sky*, she did nonetheless feel a shiver of joy; another little miracle! But tomorrow, the same nasty clerk would be back...

What was the use?

Chapter 22

Ann and Jean-Jacques in Discreet Harmony

Ann is not a happy character. She protests: “Why would you compare me to this stiff, ungrateful 18th century fellow?”

We are pleasantly surprised that our heroin would choose the adjective *ungrateful*, since *gratitude* happened to be an essential element of the *Philosopher’s Stone’s* Quest.

We have posited earlier that a certain perspective transforms dramatically any reality. The following sentence, liberally repeated, describes well that idea:

Constant satisfaction is a sleight of consciousness

Here is how it would have helped Ann and Jean-Jacques.

Ann is judging rather harshly a man who felt a glorious ecstasy on the banks of a lake, but then found *tedious* the walk back home. According to Ann, the signal that bothered him so much should have been a natural extension of his initial rapture.

Comparing herself to that “ungrateful fellow,” she boasts being at least able to appreciate unexpected wonders (such as her *Certain Tuesday of October’s Bliss*) as well as small joys (such as the *Unexpected Dessert a Stranger gave her*).

Let’s see now how Ann and Jean-Jacques followed exactly the same pattern of unfortunate ungratefulness.

Between her *Certain Tuesday of October’s Bliss* and the *Unexpected Dessert a Stranger gave her*, there were a multitude of very *tedious* moments she was unwilling to appreciate.

Most people have the feeling they live only when they are at the bottom of a valley or up on a peak. Mathematically speaking, it is not a very economical proposition.

Would these people, at the threshold of dying, see all these past “tedious moments” in a new light? Before their last breath, instead of watching their existence’s major accomplishments or deepest regrets, would all the moments they used to call “tedious” or “dull” visit them? And then, would these moments be shining like galaxies of existence, of full, promising breaths of life? Would these people finally recognize that this *tedium* is nothing less than time, the very precious, elapsing *blood* of their existence? Would they then wonder why they did not fully harvest all these heartbeats liberally given to them?

Chapter 23

Equipped With Pen/Scalpel Hybrids

Isn't it a little counterintuitive to consider *tedium* as a *precious element*?

Let's dissect it.

Before we could use our pen as a scalpel, Ann proposes one personal memory: "Is your *tedium* like that?"

"I was a very young girl, the first time I felt that life was very "tedious," as you say. I remember lying in my small room, alone. I am not sure if I was sick of just too shy, but I could hear the other kids playing and laughing outside. I really had nothing to do. I knew by heart the comic book someone had left me. I was bored to tears, as they say. Actually, I cried a lot that day."

The young Ann's feeling of exclusion from a world where everyone *sounds* happy is actually more like a deep *valley* than what we call *tedium*.

This *valley* can become a chasm of continuous despair. Later in the book, we should see how holding a *Philosopher's Stone* can help a dejected mind.

Tedium is much more tasteless and odorless than the feeling of exclusion that Ann has evoked, or the deep boredom that can morph into depression.

In order to define the "subtle, abundant element, interacting weakly with our consciousness," we ask Ann to recall and sort out all the thoughts that she had between her *Certain Tuesday of October's Bliss* and the *Unexpected Dessert a Stranger Gave Her*.

Ann shrugs: "What is the point? There were too many of these not very interesting thoughts."

Were they *tedious*?

Ann begrudgingly divides these thoughts into "fairly innocuous" ("How does the song go?"); "mildly entertaining" (I wonder how much this coat costs."); "somewhat futile" ("What did Mindy really mean by 'I should lose some weight?'); "foggy" ("Was Wednesday morning colder than today?"); "way too disturbing" ("How many species are extinct because of Men?"), "ominous" ("Tomorrow, our supervisor will review my work for the week"), etc.

Most of them were repeated many times, sometimes in a quasi-regular loop.

Chapter 24

A Whole Anthropology in Ten Lines or Less?

Here is the first idea Ann wrote down as a *natural* philosopher: “Basically, we live from peaks to valleys, peaks to peaks, valleys to valleys!”

When asked about everything that is not “peaks and valleys,” for instance all her thoughts between two recent peaks in her life, Ann is reluctant to share our enthusiasm for *the immense value of tedium*.

When we press her into a slightly deeper introspection, she acknowledges that “there is like a continuous voice.”

Is it then truly Ann’s inner voice?

In an early chapter, we imagined “in extremely trivial terms a baby coming into existence, protected and molded by its environment, while its “I” develops inexorably, but in a convoluted fashion.”

Now we have *Ann’s inner voice* and *Ann’s “I”* looking at each other like exact doppelgangers. Are they one and the same?

It is time to quote an obscure *Anthropology of the “I,”* a rather foreboding title, brought by the gloriously imprecise *Taoist Bird/Mendel of Kotzk’s Method*:

I chose the term “I” because it is less ambiguous than the Latin “ego”.

(...) In English, tellingly, “I” happens to be the only pronoun written with a capital letter!

(...) Some people hypothesize that babies have a special consciousness that dissipates with time and common education. That idea is presently impossible to prove. But even if such a special consciousness existed, very early on, it would take a backseat to the inexorable growth of the “I,” which soon composes the entire personality and the whole consciousness...

Here, we spare the reader the enumeration of the psychological consequences of the exchange between the baby initial defenselessness and the environment forcefully molding it. We only quote this categorical conclusion:

The most extroverted of these individuals, with an overinflated self-esteem, and the most timid, the most fearful ones, have their “I” occupying equally their whole consciousness!

Chapter 25

Shadow Wrestling

The previous chapter ended on the curious assertion that the “I” of an individual with an overinflated self-esteem, and the “I” of the most timid person have exactly the same size: they occupy the whole consciousness.

One consequence of that innate gigantism is that it distorts reality. That is why Ann, Marcel Proust, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, we and even the eminent Professor So-And-So are all almost blind or rather *deaf* to the precious *tedium*, among other wonders!

According to the previously mentioned *Anthropology*, the “I” is not passively formatted by its interaction with its environment. It actively uses all means within its reach to facilitate its growth, which happened to be *our* growth.

Its incredible buoyancy dictates our alliances, tastes, goals... And its first function is to protect.

The “I” is not meant to be very subtle. If your goal is to protect, there is no such thing as being *overprotective*. You call every tactics at your disposal “being prudent and anticipatory.”

Let’s imagine that one of the shielding mechanisms in the arsenal of the “I” is the pressing *fight or flight* response. Our survival depends indeed of that “instinct” when a danger arises.

However, what is this incessant anxiety weighing on us, even when there is no danger in sight?

It is the “I” alarm system, always on to prepare us for unexpected trials. It reminds us, sometimes in a very backhanded way, of our past scars, failures, disenchantments... It makes them very pressing on our mind: “Do you really want to go through that ordeal again?”

The “I” does not seem incline to ever quiet down. It is simply not its role.

The *Taoist Bird/Mendel of Kotzk’s Method* brought us a whole library of texts from the fields of religion, psychology, philosophy, etc. where authors of all persuasions struggle to shush the “I.” Some passages of these holly wars can be at times exhilarating. But time being of the matter, have we been told, we must postpone for now any attempt to compile these heroic texts.

We should also confess that we have a hard time understanding in these epic fights who is attacking whom. Is a superego trying to detach from the ego? Is the “I” grappling with the self? Luckily, the *Philosopher’s Stone* has a beneficial effect on this almost schizophrenic confusion, as we are going to see.

Chapter 26

A Geyser of Satisfaction? Really?

Ann finally caught her 6:25 PM bus on time. But today, the traffic is at a standstill, and she has plenty of time to reflect. In the past four weeks, she has experienced two rather exceptional events, while maybe not at the level of winning the lottery!

At some point, she was told that these two outstanding episodes highlighted all the tedious moments between them. She listened to these theories with a marked skepticism. When she heard that her “I,” which apparently controlled her consciousness, was so obsessed with her well-being that it kept her in a constant state of anxiety, “making her blind and deaf to the beauty of *tedium*,” she uttered a mildly polite “Really?”

It is a little disturbing to see that our very own character, created to help us persuade the reader that *tedium* can be transformed into sheer bliss, appears unconvinced, to say the least.

However, we can try on her the plan we had originally designed for the reader.

First, we need to have Ann revisit how little control she had on the “runaway train of thoughts that crisscrosses relentlessly the mind.”

Actually, Ann had divided them into different categories, going from “fairly innocuous” to “way too disturbing” and “ominous.”

Now we can suggest that yesteryears masters have conceived many techniques for managing the wild flows of thoughts and emotions. All of them start with curiosity and observation.

Instead of the critical labels used by our heroin (“annoying,” “fairly amusing,” “menacing,” etc.), these masters took much more distance in order to vaguely distinguish regions of consciousness: meadows of rapidly varying shades, dark and turbulent currents, geysers of satisfactions; hard to interpret harmonies; a “void,” an elastic peace of mind, etc.

Novalis affirmed:

It is only because of the weakness of our organs that we do not realize we are living in a fairy world.

These “organs” are not only our five senses, but our apprehension of reality without the very thick filter of the “I.”

A text by Vladimir Jankélévitch concludes our “plan:”

If an opportunity is a grace, this grace requires, in order to be received, a consciousness in a state of grace.

Everything can become an opportunity for a consciousness on the watch, able to make of any opportunity a fertile chance."

Transposed in Ann’s personal experience, that idea takes the form of the following questions:

What if her Certain Tuesday evening in October was not that special?

Instead of scrutinizing external elements, like a special time to leave the office, the street or the weather, etc., Ann would be better inspired to find what makes anyone suddenly... look up.

What if her consciousness could learn to always be on the watch, making of any opportunity a Certain Tuesday evening in October?

In other words,

Sunsets, profound musical harmonies, “exquisite pleasures invading the senses,” etc., are continuously, incessantly taking place.

Our goal is to learn to feel them *continuously, incessantly*.

Chapter 27

Look! A Digression! What an Unexpected Encounter in these pages!

To expose the “various techniques proposed for controlling the runaway train of thoughts that crisscrosses relentlessly the mind,” we chose to chart Ann’s awareness as she would go through different methods of meditation.

Curiously, Ann feels “queasy” about that decision. She explains that meditation is “a useless exercise for intellectual snobs or trendy new age followers. It is not for me: I am a simple woman.”

Ann appears to be *allergic* to meditation!

That could have thrown the proverbial wrench into our (incredibly meticulous?) plan.

It actually only forces us to bypass the *Churchgoer Syndrome*.

The word “church” has a somewhat negative connotation, nowadays.

Earlier in this book, we said that philosophers harmed quite a bit philosophy by naming themselves as such...

While philosophy is not something separated, and absolutely not a specialty. It is the very path of the human mind.

But that trouble is truly mild compared to the catastrophic devastation the Churches inflicted to the poor religions, which were initially *spiritual studies*. Speaking of *catastrophic devastation*, Churches did also a number on humanity in general, with all its holy wars and crusades, pogroms, genocides. Shall we mention the countless people that various Churches, throughout human history, lynched, burnt at the stake, lapidated, crucified, and... silenced?

But we digress, don’t we? We were talking of something totally different: the *Churchgoer Syndrome*, where people go to church, with a lower case “c.”

That 19th century excerpt reads:

“My father would take me to church every Sunday without fail. Even though we were not rich, he would give alms very generously and the vicar considered us one of the most religious families of the county.

I always wondered why my father was such a good man at church and such a sinner during the week.

“Would he have been a better man if he had gone more often to church?”

Sometimes, we have the same question when some people practice meditation, They describe the most wonderful spiritual insights during that special moment, However, when they get up and go back to their activities, they can display the most callous tendencies...

That is why Ann will be able to (or will have to) avoid the *Churchgoer Syndrome* or the more modern *Sitting-in-a-Special-Relaxed-Environment Syndrome*. She has then to always carry her “altar,” which could be for instance *remembering to look up...*

A Buddhist text advised:

“When you meditate in the temple, take your meditation with you as you leave the sacred place. If you ever lose it, know that you have never entered the temple and have not meditated.”

To summarize our personal predicament, Ann will have to take her meditation with her to her various activities without ever feeling she has meditated.

How difficult can that be?

Chapter 28

Hold the Mirror, Please

In exchange of our promise to avoid any formal meditation, Ann agrees to examine her train of thoughts at night, when she has some difficulty falling asleep; or walking back home when she misses her bus; or in the bus, when there is no one interesting to look at; or when she makes her bed or washes the toilet; or when she waits in line to pay some bill, etc.

She admits it is usually very difficult, sometimes impossible to have any control on her mind when her emotions are too intense.

It is time to reveal a very ancient aphorism, which happens to be the most powerful natural remedy against uncontrollable trains of thoughts:

When they see themselves in a mirror, all Demons vanish.

Many people try to wrestle with their mind. That leads to very schizophrenic propositions, as we saw briefly when we mentioned opposing the “I.” The following frustrated utterance by Michel Leiris illustrates quite well this impossible situation:

To watch myself even without complacency is still to watch myself; it is keeping my eyes on me instead of going beyond, of moving toward something more widely human.

And Gnânânanda warns:

If you want to practice yoga, start by asking who wants to practice yoga; search this answer exclusively. During this research, forget books, conversations, pilgrimages and everything else. That is practicing yoga.

But for Ann, who does not trust French intellectuals from another generation and Indian gurus, the ancient and powerful ***When they see themselves in a mirror, all Demons vanish*** seems somewhat more useful.

To apply that “secret weapon,” Ann needs to catch herself riding her wild train of thoughts. Let’s say that during a sleepless night, she notices she has passed a dozen times from a “fairly innocuous *How does the song go?*” to the ominous “*Tomorrow, our supervisor will review my work for the week.*”

Applying her new mantra “***When they see themselves in a mirror, all Demons vanish,***” Ann replaces the word “demons” with all her tenacious, bothersome thoughts.

We can observe that when Ann “notices she has passed a dozen times” through the same mental ups-and-downs, she is curiously already stepping outside of the train of thoughts!

This “simple” movement represents “holding the mirror” to greet her yammering thoughts.

In other words, instead of resisting, rebelling, feeling inadequate for allowing in thirty times the same dull or gloomy ideas, an almost cheerful acknowledgement can calm down the distraught thinker *and* slow considerably down the train of thoughts:

I see you; I hear you: I know you. And I don't mean to be rude, but you are a bit redundant. You kind of repeat yourself. Are you all right?

Chapter 29

Haikel, Did You Look At The Sky?

Ann is afraid that she may not be using adequately the *Mirror that makes all Demons vanish*. After a few satisfying seconds of “greeting” each thought separately, they all rush back with the same tidal wave strength as before.

We try to explain that in the realm of the consciousness, a Eureka moment does not last. It is usually preceded by a long period of puzzlement, and followed by an even longer phase of verifications.

This “longer phase of verifications” usually leads to new, unexpected perspectives.

For instance, for an experienced *Mirror* operator, a disturbing thought that seems to have “vanished,” instead of springing right back up after a few minutes, morphs into an astonishing correlation.

But Ann is not in the mood to hear this type of abstract pep talk. She decides to suspend the repeated use of the “thought-greeting” tool.

Thankfully, we have another image to show her, a dialogue read in a compendium of popular wisdom.

The key expression here is “Looking up,” which should remind Ann that she initially wanted to encounter *Certain Tuesdays of October* every day of the year, at any hour of the day.

Rabbi Nahman of Bratzlav said: "Haikel, did you look at the sky this morning?"

- No Reb, I did not.

- And the street, Haikel? Did you look at the street this morning?

- Yes, Reb, I did.

- Do you see the street now, Haikel?

- Yes, I can see the street from here, Reb.

- Tell me what you see.

Haikel described a busy street, on a market day.

Rabbi Nahman then continued:

- Haikel, in fifty years, in two times fifty years, there will be a street, very much like this one, and another market. Other cars will bring other merchants... But I will not be here any longer and you, you will not be here anymore.

Then, I am asking you, Haikel, why going here and there if you don't have the time to look at the sky?

Chapter 30

Simple Warm-up Exercises

Looking Up seems to be the common head motion in both illustrations: the *Certain Tuesday of October* and *Haikel's Exhortation*.

It may not be physically so literal. Couldn't the *sky* be also part of the *Churchgoer Syndrome*? Everything *external* can at some point be absent: a temple, a prayer mat, a magical pill... even a *sky*!

Earlier, we have considered:

Suddenly, Ann looks up. Why on earth did she do that?

It is still a little too early to venture an answer to that question. But after the original *Certain Tuesday of October*, Ann just has to *remember* to look up.

"Looking up" is *remembering* that

Sunsets, profound musical harmonies, "exquisite pleasures invading the senses," etc., are continuously, incessantly taking place.

During our description of the *Mirror that makes all Demons vanish*, we mentioned that merely facing the bothersome thoughts and greeting them could be seen as *stepping out* of the regular "mental train."

Looking up and *remembering* to look up also mean *stepping out* of the usual mental patterns.

Later, we will see that a *Philosopher's Stone Seeker* can show a dimension where "inside," "out," "up" and "down" are eerily similar.

In the meantime, since Ann claims loudly to be "a simple woman," we are staying away from any lyrical ecstasies, profound meditations and secret rituals.

During *tedious* moments, rather than exceptional events, *looking up, remembering* to look up, *stepping out, greeting one's thoughts*... All these *simple* activities constitute the elementary mind-stretching exercises that will soon allow us to verify that indeed...

Constant satisfaction is a sleight of consciousness

Chapter 31

A Neurophysiologist Called To Be a Sacrificial Horse

A neurophysiologist affirmed in an article that a thought is an adaptive answer to an environment.

We are happy to report that Ann, “a simple lady,” is *adapting* considerably her answers to her environment. Is she going to transform it?

We find oddly enjoyable to observe neurophysiologists and simple ladies next to each other, in this chapter. a thought is an adaptive answer to an environment” could ever help her find a permanent *Certain Tuesday of October*. We argue that her situation is more advantageous than the poor scientists’. Ann can actually use for her own needs all the ideas published by the neurophysiologists, while it is doubtful the neurophysiologists would consult Ann for their researches.

Furthermore, the neurophysiologists and Ann are evidently ontologically identical.

Also, it is always potentially hazardous for the scientists to believe that the only kind of laboratory is where they work, while there is also the vital *interior lab* where all of us must explore our consciousness.

Our first two arguments do not amuse Ann. As for the *interior lab*, she has already heard us explain that image. That allows us to mention the ancient Vedic ritual called Ashvamedha, the Sacrifice of the Horse:

The Sacrifice is a True Offering only when the sacrificial priest, the blade he uses and the horse are one and the same.

In the *interior lab*, the *consciousness* is the researcher, the object studied and the instrument to observe it.

However, we should acknowledge that, as paradoxical as the Vedic ritual may appear, it is relatively simple: the *consciousness* wants ideally to know itself.

But our complex 21st century *interior lab* is inhabited by the “I,” with all its blaring warnings. Its pipes pump a prodigiously complex, always changing environment that includes a multitude of other “I’s” and a cacophonous zeitgeist.

In these conditions, finding that all is ***one and the same*** could be an even greater challenge.

That is why it is advised to enter this lab, wearing a special smock with two pockets, for it is said:

They traveled through life with two sentences.

In their right pocket, there was: "It is for the love of me that the world has been created." (Talmud Sanhedrin)

In the left pocket, they could find: "I am but dust and ashes" (Genesis)

Chapter 32

Can Two Pockets Become One?

The previous design for the two-pocketed traveler/researcher outfit came from Bounam of Pjyza.

The **“It is for the love of me that the world has been created”** represents the immense pride of being here and now. It is the child who feels like the sole recipient and the cause of everything.

Ontologically, it is this short remark by Jankélévitch, among many:

What is unique has an infinite value.

And each one of us is indeed unique.

As for the **“I am but dust and ashes,”** it is of course the realization of the *Senescence and Death* component of our destiny.

Going from one pole to the other and back should provide a good protective layer of *natural philosophy*.

However, being in both poles at the same time represents a form of *superposition*, to use another popular term from the field of physics. It represents a form of transcendence of our everyday consciousness. Can we already call this phenomenon the *Philosopher’s Stone*?

The reader who has studied quantum physics may feel a little uncomfortable before the terms *“transcendence and superposition,”* associated in the previous paragraph.

“Is it really a *superposition*?”

We have truly no idea of what it *really* is.

In our *interior lab*, we can apply Newton’s principle according to which

Science is observation, mathematical evidence, supposition, hypothesis, and then experiments about the hypothesis.

We can indeed observe this scientific procedure step by step, albeit the mathematical part could be a stretch.

However, another definition affirms that science is...

Learning; Understanding; Sharing.

How can we share what is in our respective consciousness:

(“Did you sense that?” “What was I supposed to sense? And when?”)

We have affirmed that having an *infinite value* and being *dust and ashes* can be felt at the same time, like *in a state of superposition*.

The reader may be of the opinion that the consciousness can never be in *a state of superposition*, but could go back and forth between these two “poles.”

Is there an experiment that can prove us wrong?

At this stage, we can just repeat Epicurus’s shrug:

***"We do not need theories about physics and nature and hollow opinions...
We only need to live without problems."***

Chapter 33

The Ferryman and the Poet

Let's consider another example of two seemingly opposite "poles" that can be experienced by conscious *superposition* or by any other phenomenon the readers may define during their own quest.

This tale originally inspired by Rabindranath Tagore, was meddled quite a bit by a Taoist Bird whose foraging technique was a little rough.

A ferryman and his only passenger, who happened to be a poet, were crossing a large lake, on a stiflingly hot summer day.

The sailor was chatty. He was a down-to-earth fisherman who used his boat also to transport travelers. He worked hard and could seldom rest...

As he was describing his daily life to his client, he hinted not very subtly that he did not care much for the urban type: "You write books, you said? Do you think we have time to open books around here?"

He pointed at the dry hills at a distance, the muddy, dirty banks of the lake, the scorching air buzzing with insects...

"How would you survive here, brother?"

The poet was actually quite affected by the heat and the bugs. He could only whisper: "It takes all kinds to make a country, brother..."

Suddenly, from the depth of the lake, a humongous fish jumped very high in the air!

Both men flinched. They looked up, as the rays of the sun met the scales of the fish. The reflection triggered a firework of blinding colors. The instant before, everything was greyish. The creature from the lake produced a symphony of yellow, green, red and purple that remained in the two men's eyes as a splash of crystalline drops of water refreshed them.

All the doubts and the pain that had shackled the poet's heart were erased at once by this vision. The creature was most certainly a divine messenger from Mother Nature, sent especially to free the poet's afflicted spirit.

The writer shouted with excitement:

"Did you see that, my brother?"

“Shit, yeah! I am so bummed out!”

“Why bummed out?”

“If I only had my fishing net, my family would have had our best dinner in months!”

Chapter 34

Step Out And Jump, But Where?

The previous tale shows a single event, perceived from two very different perspectives. The common, rough consciousness (the boatman's) seems to be in opposition with the poet's, able to see the magical beauty of the universe.

These *perspectives* are then our two "poles."

Was the story originally an exhortation to cultivate a poet's sensitivity or does it highlight well that when we are hungry, worried, drained by the poor quality of our daily life, *the magical beauty of the universe* is just a bubble popping up from the warm, perfumed bath of a privileged thinker?

One obvious and conciliatory conclusion is to acknowledge that we are sometimes fishermen, sometimes poets.

It should be then possible to *train our consciousness* to be more limber, so it can transform swiftly from *fisherman* to *poet*... And then, when we lose our poetry, we can find rimes and reasons for providing for those who depend on us.

Now, let's consider the idea that we could be fishermen, poets and also *something else*.

What we have called perhaps arbitrarily *superposition* could be after all another concept altogether.

We can start by imagining a logical, linear scale between the two poles. You can be for instance 41% *ferryman* and 59% *poet*, maybe aiming to get to 30/70.

The same type of percentages can be estimated between any other concepts, like senescence (*dust and ashes*) and eternity (*the world has been created for me*).

"Poles" belong to the *dualism* family, a very misleading construct that should be avoided at any cost.

We mentioned in the first chapters that our century has the immense advantage to possess a zeitgeist infused with relativist and quantic ideas, which basically render obsolete the always erroneous *dualism*. We should be done opposing automatically good and bad; body and soul, etc.

After this little reminder, let's go back to the noble, *natural philosophical* task to *train our consciousness* to be limber. It is first an intellectual process. We **think** about how to be more or less one "pole" or the other.

At some point, instead of **thinking** about the problem, we may want to **feel** we **are** both extremes: the *ferryman* and the *poet*; or during a more abstract reflection, *senescence* and *eternity*...

In a sense, our consciousness steps out of the linear scale, like Ann's consciousness eventually *stepped out* of her runaway train of thoughts.

This *stepping out* or the *something else* we have mentioned earlier in this chapter, is not halfway between two poles, or a percentage of two opposite elements. It is a "jump."

The phenomenon could be curiously clarified, at the level of our consciousness, by this axiom:

What is so surprising is that one cannot get near the infinite without feeling some bliss.

Chapter 35

Leisure Time in an Infinite

The *Taoist Bird/Mendel of Kotzk's* Method attributes the *one cannot get near the infinite without feeling some bliss* quote to Henri Michaux, but that idea was uttered by many people from different backgrounds, including some very serious scientists!

My "I" shrinks, loses its whiny voice, pauses its screechy tune, becomes clearer, almost transparent... when my mind brushes against the depths surrounding me, such as time, energy, uncertainty, free will, particles, cosmology, inexorable constraints, chance, transitional states, etc.

If I immerse myself in them long enough, all contradictions do seem to unify.

Of course, the reader has spotted that '*My "I" shrinks, loses its whiny voice*' was a somewhat contrived enhancement to a summary of what scientists from various fields did utter, as they marveled about the (inner) fulfillment they felt in their (external) lab.

Getting near an infinite is more frequent than what one may think. Recognizing it multiplies its occurrences.

Ann's *Certain Tuesday of October*, Marcel Proust's *testimony he did not understand* while eating a madeleine, Rousseau's *so enjoyably feeling his own existence* during a walk, the fish that *freed the poet's heart* in Tagore's tale... All these episodes could be described as *brushings against everyday infinites*.

We are also adding to these rather simple but literary examples, the visceral need to feel, live, act or realize intellectual concepts.

It is what we have drafted:

"At some point, instead of thinking about both extremes -: the ferryman and the poet; senescence and eternity - we want to feel them."

In all likelihood, the reader must wish at that point that the author of "*Within*" will have the decency to avoid using the word "quantum leap" to define the "jump" between thinking and feeling.

It is the same gap that separates a dim sunset and a *Certain Tuesday of October's* bliss, a piece of cake dipped in some tea and a mysterious *testimony*; a stroll and a revelation; a fish jumping to eat a bug and a liberating, personal message, etc.

Chapter 36

An Amazingly Meaningless Chapter

Here is the chapter where, proudly wearing our symbolic two-pocketed white smock, we are entering our *internal lab* to examine and hopefully control the “jump” between thinking and feeling, or the “gap” mentioned in the previous chapter.

Isn't “gap” too trivial a term? “Jump” sounds strenuously misleading. We do love “quantum leap,” but a scientist, haphazardly wandering in these pages, may get regrettably agitated. In an early version of “*Within*,” the author chose the word “stokhos,” for the sole reason it derived from “stochastic,” which made it rather new and mysterious.

“Let's examine the exact composition of this stokhos, when we are in a state of excitement.”

That sentence does have a wonderfully academic ring to it. But imagine for a second that “stokhos” will be absorbed *in fifty years, in two times fifty years* by the zeitgeist of the time. People will boast “At least, I know my stokhos.” Books will have for title: “The Stokhos Diet.” Intellectuals will be divided in “Post-stokhosists” and “Anti-stokhosists,” etc.

Consequently, since this term is supposed to describe something beyond the common intellectual processes anyway, we will forget it and use for now the word “gap” and its synonyms!

To get to this *gap* or *jump* of consciousness, we shall consider two extremes; here pragmatism and poetry. First, we knead them with the moderate conviction that we are sometimes the *ferryman* and sometimes the *poet*.

Soon, we will examine a very useful learning tradition called *nescience*.

In the meantime, let's try to *superpose* the two concepts: can we *be* both *ferryman* and *poet* at the same time?

Of course, the author of “*Within*” has no idea if this is concretely possible. But the two “poles” become suddenly blurry. It is this nascent *blank* that is going to be our *focus*.

Tedium, blur, unanswered questions, nescience, blank states, etc.: does the reader see why the *Philosopher's Stone* is fairly invisible to energetic, always on-the-go people?

We can now write down on our *internal lab* report the following experiment: by *superposing* two apparently opposite concepts, a *blur* has been created.

The next step of the process is to consider that *blur* as a banal *infinite* that we can study. Could it be by jumping into it?

Chapter 37

The Blur Whisperer

We are not sure whether the grumbling we hear comes from Ann, the reader or one of the author's possible multiple personalities, but it points at the following inconsistency: the previous chapter has created a *blur* by *superposing* two concepts. But how, pray tell, did we, *practically speaking*, obtain that *superposition*?

The *superposition* does not *create* the *blur*. It *is* the *blur*.

The *Taoist Bird/Mendel of Kotzk's Method* spares the reader from another convoluted explanation. It brings a text from a Hindu tradition of Love/Repetition of the Name:

At first, repeat the Name (of the Beloved) with all your heart, breathing it in, breathing it out.

After many years of devotion, the Name will be in your breath and only someone extremely close will be able to hear it

After many more years of devotion, the Name will be pronounced by all your actions.

After many more years of devotion, the Name will be you.

That offering is somewhat unexpected. The *Taoist Bird* is known for presenting mystifying reflections, not to promote literal immersions into a specific form of devotion. It usually asks us to wonder and then “fly away,” to find our personal path.

Besides, it is unlikely that Ann, our main character, and the reader, “the real hero of this book,” would willingly spend several years following these rituals, since the first one is allergic to formal meditations, and the other has other books to read.

But we can deduct from this Hindu tradition that a spiritual quest does require some repetition. Also, what started as an emission of sounds (*pronouncing the Name*) became something more and more indistinct and ended with the disappearance of the subject.

The repetition does fit what we know about any learning process.

As for the transformation ending with the “disappearance of the subject,” we can replace the “vocal repetition” with *remembering* as often as possible to

jump off our usual train of thoughts; look up, experience we are one thing and its opposite...

Chapter 38

Effortless Universe Freeze

When we marveled that *one cannot get near the infinite without feeling some bliss*, we were contemplating the possibility of an *infinite* created by a *superposition of two concepts*. For lack of time (and organization?), we did not even consider the more famous *infinities*, described in yoga and meditation centers, art studios, places of worship, etc.

One thought experiment seems most interesting for our purpose. It could potentially propel the mind near an *infinite*, while revealing incidentally a glimmer of the *Philosopher's Stone's* composition.

Let's consider one 20 billion year timeline, starting arbitrarily at the Big Bang. Let's pick a specific point in this spacetime and freeze the whole universe just there.

It is so easy to be reckless when we have grand thought experiments at our disposal!

We can even place ourselves in a way we do not see the direction of the arrow of time.

We need a little adjusting to get used to be at the center of a convergence of an astronomical number of lines, all of them representing an astronomical number of events: expansions, accretions, explosions, alterations, phagocytosis, mutations, cooling, slow or abrupt shifts, melting, attractions, clashes, deviations, etc.

We cannot zoom out far enough to see where the Big Bang and our 20 billion year limit are. Thus, it looks like we are at the point where all causes and consequences meet.

From such perspective, that point is the center of the universe, past, present, future.

Now, if we unfreeze it, we quickly dissolve in that immensity of lines/events. Is there any trace of that point left?

Another formulation of that thought experiment indicates that *Evolution* is a seamless flow of *End-Points*. Each *Point* is the end-result of the whole evolution, before vanishing into the next *End-Point*, itself the convergence of everything that precedes it, and so on...

In other words, one point has the dual property of being the ultimate point of the evolution, as well as the threshold of the next stage of the evolution.

That whole speculation could then be considered an *infinite*, since...

Our mind can reach this astronomically infinitesimal point in time and dissolve into it...

Chapter 39

Why is the Author Running so Fast?

The thought experiment described in the previous chapter could be dizzying enough to lead to an *infinite*. It also hints at one essential element of the ultimate *Philosopher's Stone*: the present, or rather the consciousness of the present.

Soon, we will examine in more details the various shades of *present*, always roving at a convergence of infinities.

In the meantime, let's continue playing with our now familiar thought-experimental point in spacetime. Shall we *interview* it?

Here is Julia, a young Italian woman living in Messina. The year, 1679, is formidably close to us, if we consider the 20 billion years scale at our disposal.

Julia is getting dressed for a celebration attended by Niccolo, the very handsome man who happened to be the glorious idol of her secret dreams.

Its universe-freezing superpower made the author of "*Within*" wear a lab coat with no *humility* pocket, as it addresses the 17th century Italian lady: "You know, it is touching to see you worrying so much about your appearance. Keep it simple, Julia. You are just displaying your sexual attributes in order to carry on the transmission of your genes. You will be fine. Did you ever think about it? And doesn't this thought make you feel more relaxed? Wait! I must write down all these blunt but ever so true reflections for my next chapter."

Julia is less shocked by the sudden intrusion of the writer in her room, than by its utterly repugnant address. How could this strangely outfitted person ever understand all the sleepless nights she has spent, crying out loud the most poignant poems ever written? How could she explain the fever and the agony adorning and destroying simultaneously her days?

Julia calls to the rescue her three brothers, all armed with very sharp-looking swords.

Our writer must flee as fast as it can. Its conclusion is difficult to make out as it shouts, out of breath: "Indeed, Julia is a mere link in the reproduction of her genome. However, for herself, she is a whole universe of burning poetry, dreams, passion... The evolution (all the events rolling down to that nanosecond I have frozen) stopped at her. The goal of the whole evolution was her!"

At that very moment, John Cowper Powys' comment about his character who had witnessed an unanticipated sunset is coming back to our winded author:

All of the Creation, from Chaos to that point, and throughout all of Human History... had been fulfilled and justified by this very act: she was rubbing her hands with contentment!

Chapter 40

Bâk to the Future

Instead of the 17th century Julia, the author could have picked a point in time, still on our good old Earth, some six million years ago, to interview Bâk, a Hominin feeling also like a *whole universe* of epic triumphs over fierce beasts, demonic elements and malevolent rivals. He has no interest whatsoever in learning about “being a mere link towards Homo sapiens”!

For each point in spacetime, the whole evolution converges to it and stops. Of course, for an observer, the evolution never does. It just swallows the point in its march.

Consciousness then gives each point in spacetime a *meaning*: everything has been created “exclusively” for that point.

In an effort to accumulate the examples, as if many variations of the same thought experiment would prove anything, our writer picks a dozen more points. It deplorably selects only points on Earth, and interviews solely those with a consciousness similar to its own.

Plotinus, two thousand years ago, seemed to have probed “all living things,” as he wrote:

No: if Pleasure be the Term, if here be the good of life, it is impossible to deny the good of life to any order of living things

Could we also interview “non-living things”?

That new thought experiment will have to wait a little, as we have to examine more thoroughly the ultimate *Philosopher’s Stone*: the present, or the consciousness thereof.

And we are again confronted to two “poles.”

The first one has been summarized a few lines ago:

Consciousness gives each point in spacetime a meaning: everything has been created for (that point).

The other “pole” represents something seemingly independent of a particular consciousness; something constantly flowing.

Within the very same consciousness, one “pole” perceives a subject, an agent, an individual, while the other blurs everything.

Can we ever *experience consciously* a state of *superposition* where both “poles” exist at the same time?

Chapter 41

A Vintage Exploration Tool

The author of “*Within*” feels slightly guilty for ending the previous chapter on such a steep cliff-hanger.

The reader answers cheerfully: “No worries! I noticed you are obsessing on the question of knowing if we can experience two “poles” of consciousness in a state of *superposition*. Why don’t you leave it alone for a while and relax by actually serving us half a decent cliff-hanger?”

As usual, our writer must have misunderstood the suggestion. It yells hysterically: “You are so right! We only have to change the terms of the problem! Why didn’t I think of it? Let’s say that one “pole” develops into the “I,” while the other “pole” blurs our very existence, silencing the ‘I.’”

Sadly unstoppable, it continues feverishly: “Such perspective, based on opposites, is highly unsatisfactory. It gives the awkward impression that there is a *struggle* between the “I” and the *blur*. Would the term “struggle” apply to the interaction between the hydrogen and oxygen atoms composing a molecule of water?”

While the author continues in a drawn-out parallel chapter its heavy criticism of the image of the “two poles,” we remark that these “poles” have been studied usually separately and unequally. The “I” takes famously center stage in various sciences.

The process we have called *blurring* has also fascinated quite a few eminent thinkers, but obviously, its properties do not lead to many communicable conclusions.

People practicing meditation report regularly a dimming of the everyday reality, leading to a *silence*, a *vacuum*...

Ann may have been interested in that concept, but since she defines herself as allergic to meditation, she can still simply *brush against an infinite*.

At this stage, it is tempting to string together some illustrations of the *blurring* process gathered by *researchers of the mind* from very different cultural horizons.

Since we are not the temptation-resisting type, we will devote next chapter to that presentation.

However, “*Within*” must now indicate an extremely useful exploration tool that stems from an apparent deficiency.

The masters who will be quoted in a couple of pages seem to have full control of that elusive *consciousness superposition*, without even being aware of that term! We could call them “self-realized.”

By contrast, we have mentioned earlier that our writer “loses its *Philosopher’s Stone* more often than not.”

That imperfection has led to the discovery of a quirky shortcut toward an intermittently/permanent bliss.

Let’s carry on the comparison between the *self-realized researchers of the mind* and the author of “*Within*.” At some point, the former found *the eternal present* – we will see the different names they gave it - and never relinquished it. As for the latter, it finds a whiff of the *Infinite Present* and loses it in an incredibly large palette of ways.

However, sooner rather than later, it *remembers*.

In this case, it remembers a variation of “***When they see themselves in a mirror, all Demons vanish.***”

Instead of giving in to negative emotions, such as guilt or a feeling of inadequacy, its mind relaxes. Whatever has distracted it from the whiff of the precious present is an obligatory participant to... the present!

In short, its mind lost “a whiff of the present” to one or several incidents, more or less serious, more or less trivial, but all participating to that very *present*.

By just *remembering* that these incidents (which need to be eventually resolved), are also the present, the mind *eases up* and encounters a tenuous but resilient satisfaction... which will be hit by the next disruptive event, and disappear... until it *remembers, eases up, and encounters* again the same satisfaction, etc.

This bumpy cycle is no *nirvana*, indeed! But it may help a few people who are not yet *self-realized researchers of the mind*.

Chapter 42

But It Is At Night

As announced a few paragraphs ago, here are a few testimonies of people who *brushed against an infinite*. They spent perhaps a lifetime exploring the hazy “pole” where the “I” is relatively silent.

What are the chances for the *Taoist Bird/Mendel of Kotzk’s Method* to bring first... a Taoist quote?

Chuang Tzu advised:

Do not embody fame; do not be a storehouse of schemes; do not be an undertaker of projects; do not be a proprietor of wisdom. Embody to the fullest what has no end and wander where there is no trail.

Hold on to all that you have received from Heaven, but do not think you have gotten anything.

Be empty; that is all.

Our personal guide, Meister Eckhart said:

If a man might and knew how to make a cup completely empty and keep it empty of whatever might fill it, even air, assuredly that cup would lose and forget its own nature, and emptiness would bear it aloft.

So too, being bare, poor, and void of all creatures carries the soul to God.

Our other personal pilot, Rûmî, commented:

To be wholly without desire—that is not a natural desire, since a person must empty themselves and cease to be. But God wanted to perfect you to make you a complete Sheikh, so that within you there would be no room for duality or separation, and only complete union and unity would prevail.

We did wonder how exactly the *Taoist Bird/Mendel of Kotzk’s Method* came across a work titled: *The Ornament of the Light of Awareness That Enters the Domain of All Buddhas*.

The mind, Manjusri, is empty of a self and what belongs to a self; such is its nature.

This is called peace.

Thoroughly understanding that the mind is empty, one does not run toward dharmas.

Thus it is called utter peace.

In Ibn al-Arabi's *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq*, one can find:

God is beyond the reach of mental effort; God is revealed by Divine favor to a heart empty of all thoughts.

The Buddhist Patriarch Huineng composed:

*There is no Bodhi tree,
Nor stand of a mirror bright.
Since all is void,
Where can the dust alight?*

And the *Night* of St. John of the Cross may very well refer to the *silence/void*:

*I know it, it is the source,
It flows, it runs,
But it is at night
In the dark night of this life,
I know there cannot be a more beautiful thing,
And heaven and earth come to drink there,
But it is at night.
I know it's a bottomless abyss
And no one can ford it,
But it is at night.*

Chapter 43

Quotes, the Powder Keg

Is it a case of acute paranoia to state that the previous compilation is extremely explosive?

Upon reading it, your average Atheist Scientists will display their philosophical awkwardness by jeering compulsively any religious term, especially the word “God.”

That is sadly highly predictable. But we must also count on the vehement protestations of each “specialist” or adept of the quoted authors: “You cannot equate the outstanding conclusions of our master to those of an unrefined (fill the blank: Christian, Muslim, Jew, Buddhist, Taoist, etc.) thinker. It is not the same!”

Of course, it “is not the same”! My meditation and yours cannot be *the same*, for we have different backgrounds, sensitivities, languages, etc. But the expressions uttered by your masters define beautifully *my* experience.

As for our average Atheist Scientists, they curiously do not see that their cosmogonies (a term we will have to define soon) consist in merely replacing the terms “nature” or “elements” by “particles,” “energy” and “randomness” in an ancient and unoriginal material monism.

They proudly claim not needing a “god” to explain the universe. Since Nietzsche, who does? But why would they need “no-god”? “God” is a term used ubiquitously and ambiguously. As we are despondently running out of five-syllable adverbs, our dear Atheist Scientists should have the intellectual decency to avoid eliminating confusing concepts, because of their own cultural prejudices.

We will suggest in the *nescience* chapter a more unbiased attitude.

Their explanation of the universe is far from being all-encompassing. At least, religious mythologies and geneses try desperately to explain *everything*, from the sun and the moon to repulsive injustices and the vagaries of love!

In the Atheist Scientist cosmogonies, mathematical formulas and physical laws - without forgetting random accidents - are causes and effects. Their immanence does not seem to shock them.

We are not saying that “In the beginning Physical Laws and Random Accidents created the heavens and the earth” does not have a nice ring to it. But it is still one cosmogony among many, and we need an explanation of *everything*, don’t we?

Let's close the chapter with this quote calling the term "atheist-scientist" oxymoronic:

The religious and the scientist start from the presumption there is something to search. The atheist has the presumption there is nothing to search.

Chapter 44

What Will Deliver Us From Evil?

Before devoting a chapter to *cosmogonies*, a fundamental human compass, we should visit the wonderful learning tradition called *nescience*.

That term has been used negatively by those who confuse it with the opposite of science.

The opposite of science is ignorance, which is humanity's real evil.

Ignorance is polymorph. It is obviously a lack of knowledge, but it is more insidiously the "ignorance of our ignorance;" the certitude that *we know* and that we are somehow always correct.

That is how brilliant scientists, endowed with a phenomenal IQ, covered with fame and official honors, can end up in the ignorant bin.

Here is how Max Planck summarized that phenomenon:

Science progresses funeral by funeral.

(A new theory is rarely accepted. Its opponents die and the next generation adopts it.)

Every scientist thinks that Planck's quip applies to others, and certainly not to them!

That is why scientists should get a quick training in *nescience*, which never conflicts with their expertise in their respective field.

Nescience is the remedy to the formidable (insidious) rigidity of ignorance.

For instance, someone may believe that the earth is flat. To err is normal: we are born ignorant and may die slightly less so! That form of ignorance is relatively easy to patch up with a friendly communication.

The *insidious ignorance* finds utterly unlikeable and certainly not worthy to be heard the infidels who claim the earth is not flat. That type of ignorance is vindictive and will silence any objection, very firmly and unfortunately violently, as we have too many examples throughout human history.

It is the same *insidious ignorance* that believes people "*not like us* are inferior to us," and that "brutality is justifiable 'for a good cause' (ours)."

Chapter 45

Insatiability as a Virtue

Nescience is then the exact opposite of ignorance. It is composed of a hunger for knowledge that must never be satisfied. The moment we feel full, satiated, our spirit can easily fall victim to sclerosis, a rigidity caused by the invasion of the mind/spirit by *insidious ignorance*.

A couple of classical stories illustrate our natural craving for knowledge.

The first one is a version/commentary on a famous biblical episode.

One night, Solomon had a dream where God promised to grant him whatever wish he had in his heart.

Instead of asking to become the Earth's most powerful king, the richest, the most feared and respected, he asked God to make him wise.

And when he woke up, Solomon could understand the people, the birds, the fish, the reptiles and all the other animals as well as the trees, the flowers...

The whole world is comprehensible to the wise persons: everything talks to them; everything "makes sense."

The second illustration features the figure of wisdom itself: Socrates.

Here is a typical version of his famous paradox.

A friend of Socrates went to ask the Pythia, the respected oracle of the time, who was the wisest man on Earth. She answered it was Socrates.

However, the great Greek philosopher always claimed he knew nothing.

That was indeed a paradox!

But Socrates explained he was as ignorant as any of his contemporaries. But all his contemporaries, even though they knew nothing, believed they knew.

Socrates being the only one who knew nothing, while totally aware that he knew nothing, was indeed the wisest person alive.

Nescience is then the insatiable hunger to know, which also defines *science*. At the same time, it is the constant awareness that this knowledge will always be incomplete.

Nescience embraces knowledge with elasticity, and even a little irony to loosen the theories a little too new to be worn every day.

It was said that

Nescience is that which remains if one has forgotten everything she/he learned in school

Truth be told, it was not said it that way. The Taoist Bird has recklessly replaced the word “education” chosen by a few authors with the term *nescience*. But isn’t the replacement quite fitting?

Chapter 46

Congratulations on Your Degree in Nescience

Also *nescience* does not dismiss systematically the borders that *science* avoids like the plague, like the invasive *why*; the “blinding proximity of reality,” etc.

It invites symbols, signs, discussions of esoteric traditions, etc. to give their presentations.

Nescience asks questions to physics, and wonders about metaphysics. It systematically believes it can be a common ground between the microcosm and the macrocosm.

It allows opposites to coexist – and even “to superpose” - and leaves some space for more possibilities.

Its critics accuse *nescience* to allow too much space, to be too vague or even *permissive*!

Its defenders respond that nothing is ever etched in stone, and that every result should leave room for a change, an addendum or a contradiction:

A theory that used to be deemed as “certain,” introduced the notions of “impetus” and “inertia.” These ideas were proven incomplete by Newton’s law of universal gravitation, which was proven incomplete by Einstein’s theory of relativity. And soon, even that theory could be proven incomplete by a quantum gravity theory, etc.

Here are a few definitions of the term *nescience*. There is this vague, but oddly satisfying quote:

In short, nescience is implicit science.

We could not find the name of the scholar who declared that Nietzsche had inspired her to write this remarkable:

What we learn and eventually know is indeed fascinating.

However, we must remain faithful to what we still do not know.

Our freedom depends on it.

And finally, Vladimir Jankelevitch had that momentous definition:

Knowing that without knowing what: it is with this half-knowledge, this science mixed with nescience that we know mysteries.

Chapter 47

Creation Concoction Number Two

In the previous chapters, we have placed the atheist branch of modern cosmology in the same plan as all the other geneses and religious cosmogonies.

The reader, who signed up to get a spiritual *Philosopher's Stone* and not another intellectual detour, finds appropriate to remind us of the previously quoted Epicurus: ***We do not need theories about physics and nature and hollow opinions... We only need to live without problems.***

The problem is that humans have an innate need to orient themselves not only within the society where they live, but also in the universe.

Nescience allows our *personal* cosmogony to include everything science has discovered, without needing randomness and mathematical laws to be our senseless creators... or these 40 trillion cells working in unison to create *you*, the reader perusing these pages, which came into existence at the end of 10^{h*j} events, to be a teleological occurrence.

We simply do not know and thus, we do not need to *vote* impulsively for total randomness or various flavors of determinism.

Following mainly the *Taoist Bird/Mendel of Kotzk's Technique*, we can examine all the creation myths, choose one that we find especially elating, infuse it with every scientific fact accessible to us if we can... That *personal* concoction is a beautiful remedy against the anxiety accompanying the thought of a meaningless, ephemeral existence.

We do not have to convince anyone that our temporary version is correct, since such a proof is impossible to produce. But, if asked, we can justify why our cosmology helps us ***live without problems.***

Here is an example of such cosmogony. It was delivered to our door as a variation on the Brhad-Aranyaka Upanishad.

In the beginning was the Self, and nothing else.

The Self acknowledged: 'This is I.'

Therefore, the Self became 'I' by that acknowledgement.

The Self felt a jolt of fear, and then thought:

'As there is nothing but myself, why should I fear?'

Thence the jolt of fear dissipated at once.

The Self thought: 'Verily, that jolt can arise again from something that is not me.'

To verify that fact, the Self split itself in two.

But the Self, observing itself, could not feel the same jolt.

So, it embraced its half.

The created half thought: 'How can it embrace me, if I am made from it? I should hide myself.'

Hiding and finding incessantly through infinite transformations created all things.

Chapter 48

You and Your 40 Trillion Cells

In the previous chapter's peculiar cosmology, *the Self acknowledging itself* may represent the birth of consciousness, which is of course the central figure in the acquisition of the *Philosopher's Stone*.

We can notice that in this myth, the mysterious "self" creates everything in order to be surprised and delighted. It has to divide and unify simultaneously. And, by the way, that specific genesis includes the origin of fear and solitude!

So, we see that building a cosmology to our liking does not affect much the universe. But it does change our attitude towards it, making it more "sensible"!

It is said that

Everything exists in relation to something else. If there is no interaction is there existence?

A personal cosmogony helps an individual feel more connected; a more integral part of the universe.

Doesn't our variation on the Brhad-Aranyaka Upanishad imply that consciousness is at the origin of all things?

Where could consciousness fit in the Big Bang genesis?

We have heard some people trying very hard to draw an exact correspondence between ancient myths and the reality described by contemporary mathematics and physics.

These noble enterprises can be convincing, but *proving* them seems beyond the capacity of "*Within*."

Our need for a metaphysical compass temporarily met, we can resume our practical *Philosopher's Stone's* quest.

We have mentioned the image of "these 40 trillion cells working in unison to create *you*, the reader perusing these pages, which came into existence at the end of 10^{h*j} events..."

We have chosen to avoid taking sides in the conceptual struggle between a cold, mathematical evolution and a teleological event.

But we can always feel *awe*. We would even recommend feeling... *gratitude*?

Chapter 49

Herb Tea Break

Gratitude is a word that human history has seriously stained. Various Churches and political institutions used it famously to keep people in servitude.

But our *gratitude* is a fantastic element to acquire the *Philosopher's Stone*. We have indicated it is tied to a feeling of awe.

The person who is grateful acknowledges having received something.

Thus, the ungrateful ones believe they are entitled to whatever they have, without any moral debt towards anyone or anything.

Our average atheist posits that in life, we have not received anything. We are born without asking to be, and consequently have not been given any more breaks than a lab rat thrown in a maze.

Speaking of which, let's build a new thought experiments, this time without featuring whole universes and big bangs. Let's simply imagine two people who have poorly slept the night before and who are both somewhat low energy. One person is the optimist/appreciative type; the other one, the pessimistic/irascible kind.

And let's have them both be avid coffee drinkers.

We greet each one with a small cup of herb tea.

One of our guinea pigs refuses with a shrug; the other one, thankful, responds in kind and finds our offering actually unexpectedly flavorsome.

The problem for our Grumpy Guinea Pig and our *average atheist* is that a feeling of *appreciation* is not *just* a moral concept. It is composed of an essential neural circuitry that should be carefully trained.

Do we have any proof of it?

One century ago, empathy and compassion were merely considered like moral or even religious virtues. Nowadays, specific areas of the brain are known centers of these activities. A flaw in the empathy/compassion mechanisms complicates an existence or even a society, since a total incapacity for these neurons to fire is synonym of psychopathy or sociopathy.

And we know that the variations of what we call *love* (“sublime;” “parental;” “passionate;” “friendly,” etc.) are not solely intellectual or romantic concepts. They have enormous mental and physical consequences.

Chapter 50

Would You Happen To Know How To Start This Ptychographic FMRI?

The reader may wonder what the thought experiment's conclusion from last chapter really was. Was it to be more grateful when someone offers you herb tea instead of coffee?

It seems proven that a person in a bout of depression cannot remember any positive memories. These memories exist, but they will not be selected by a psyche set on letting through only helplessness and disappointments.

We can say that our sense of reality follows the same pattern.

Here, instead of *positive memories*, our "ungrateful guinea pig" cannot feel the blessing of having someone offering anything, and with a smile. All the more so, that type usually does not sense the discreet satisfaction of being.

That incapacity reminds us of the wasteful depreciation of the vivid, life filled *tedium*.

Our dearest *average atheist* will not let us connect *gratitude* with empathy and love without demanding some proofs: where in the brain can we find the *gratitude* area and what neurotransmitters would be involved in that network?

While we are cranking up our personal state-of-the-art ptychographic fMRI to prove our point, we can respectfully suggest that someone deprived of the aptitude to feel empathy or love could hardly be ever overwhelmed with gratitude.

A link between *gratitude* and empathy is a plausible estimation.

If *gratitude* implies appreciation, and if we, as *Philosopher's Stone Seekers*, have learned to appreciate the most abundant, albeit the most subtle wonders in life, we can surmise that an ocean of *gratitude* generates a steady flow of euphoria-triggering neurotransmitters!

Even current self-help best sellers list mental exercises designed to improve empathy. Therefore, a light training should as well improve *gratitude* and appreciation and hopefully that precious steady *flow of euphoria-triggering neurotransmitters*.

Would "*Within*" toot its own horn and claim that the previous pages about mining *tedium* represent different ways to train also one's *appreciation/gratitude*?

By the way, the reader may find awkward this obsession to convince an imaginary *average atheist* to espouse a certain spiritual regimen.

The *average atheist* wouldn't be just another facet of the author, would it?

Chapter 51

Nothing But New Skies Do I see

“*Within*” argues enthusiastically that since there are already scientifically or research-validated, recognized methods to improve empathy and metacognition (one’s awareness of the thinking process), there are similar techniques to cultivate or train one’s appreciation for life, awe and discreet satisfaction.

Stringing in the same sentence “scientifically recognized methods” and “training appreciation for life, awe and discreet satisfaction” attracts an automatic accusation of promoting a pink colored glasses fashion or to be a naïve proponent of a *best of all possible worlds* hypothesis.

Another book will certainly be devoted to presenting these “scientific methods.” “*Within*” must once again be limited to only a philosophical argumentation.

We start with an easy to remember popular formula:

Change how you see, see how you change.

Proust and others expressed the same idea with a “rhyme”:

***My way of traveling is not looking for new skies,
but having new eyes.***

And Nietzsche did not care to make new things. He preferred to make things new.

Retraining our mind to “see” a more radiant reality is not instantaneous.

What saves us is the supreme malleability of the consciousness.

The reader already knows that our training method is not a literal repetition of a certain text, but a systematic remembrance to “look up,” which means really “to be aware.”

Anything “systematic” may appear suspicious. Can our attitude be interpreted as obsessively dogmatic? Are we doing some type of deplorable *self-hypnosis* instead of truly transforming our consciousness?

Let’s start our answer with a historical example of *self-hypnosis* and see how our suggestions diverge slightly from it.

Émile Coué was a French pharmacist who tried to help World War I veterans severely affected by PTS. Of course, in those days, no one knew about Post Traumatic Syndrome, but Émile had

some success reducing the anxiety and the depression endured by the ex-soldiers who had to witness hell on Earth. He used a method combining the placebo effect and autosuggestion.

He is famous for his mantra he had his patients repeat many times a day: “Every day, in every way, I’m getting better.”

His attempts to reroute with his optimistic affirmation the traumatic memories imprinted in the veterans’ psyche were a way of using the consciousness *phenomenal malleability*.

However, the literal repetition of some words and movements seems to be somewhat different from, for instance, the *Hindu tradition of Love/Repetition of the Name* we have mentioned earlier. The Coué method, after a while, could lose its shine and some stiffness could invade again the patient’s mind.

Chapter 52

Madeleine Sprinkled Repetition

It would be inappropriate to compare a method aiming at reaching a *Philosopher's Stone* and Émile Coué's commendable attempt to relieve PTS victims' anxiety. But we can still use the *Taoist Bird/Mendel of Kotzk's Method* to add to Coué's patented comforting, positive *words and movements*, some techniques we have mentioned earlier in "*Within*."

Perhaps such variety could prevent the stiffening inherent to any repetition, since in our universe, *everything constantly changes!*

One could imagine sprinkling Coué's repetitions with regular breathing meditations; or for people allergic to them, brushing against infinites, as indicated in previous chapters. Experiencing personal *Proust's madeleine-dipping reflections* or Rousseau's *reveries* could be some exotic mental distractions.

A Coué's adept would certainly benefit from understanding and using profusely the *mirror that makes all Demons vanish*.

Next chapter, we shall also mention the *Blues Beat*, aka "the *Incongruous Smile*," a peculiar technique arbitrarily selected with the always capricious *Taoist Bird/Mendel of Kotzk's Method*.

It is said that Émile Coué asked his patients to pronounce his "mantra" twenty times a day.

That may seem like a lot, but it is far from being enough, as we have already come across the *Churchgoer Syndrome*.

Since we cannot humanly ask the reader to go through all the past chapters of "*Within*," let's recall the gist of that *Syndrome*. We wondered what could be the minimum spiritual cutout between praying fervently once a week, once a day, five times a day or living in a monastery or a nunnery.

We concluded that our goal being an *inalterable peace of mind*, it would be more logical to skip going to any praying place, and *be* that place.

All these considerations bring us to our initial comparison between an example of *self-hypnosis* and our humble suggestions to the reader.

The goal of a 20 or 2000 repetition dosage is to alleviate the suffering *in between* these repetitions.

Our training is to have our whole reality be awe inspiring, erasing by default any *in between*.

Chapter 53

Blues Beat, Incongruous Smile

We apply the elusive *Taoist Bird/Mendel of Kotzk's Method* not only to literary, scientific texts and art works, but also attitudes, behaviors...

For instance, at times, we witnessed acts of generosity or self-sacrifice that forced our admiration. In these cases, we did not “fly away.” We were just not at that level of accomplishment!

But these examples were duly noted.

We have also observed with the same curiosity some people whose comportment was counterintuitive.

They would respond to a difficult predicament with an unexpected sense of humor.

It has been written that when Mozart was at the lowest point in his life, his allegros were even livelier.

The *Blues Beat* consists in a rather uplifting rhythm making the listeners clap their hands, sway, hum in chorus. Have they realized that the lyrics are somewhat heartbreaking?

The *Incongruous Smile* is a way of greeting an apparently disastrous turn of events with an incredulous laughter: “*Really?*”

Our fascination for these responses comes from our obsession about “stepping out of the usual train of thoughts,” which is also a way of “looking up.” Here, these remarkable people are stepping off a “train of emotional reflexes.”

Some masters from yesteryears greeted existential trials as if they were messengers from the Beloved, who sniped, as we have already quoted previously: “*It is your pain that brought you to Me!*”

We are personally more inclined to use the *Philosopher's Stone's* properties, like adhering to the translucent *Infinite Present* in the midst of turmoil.

Also, it is possible that some *natural philosophy* can illuminate brightly the outskirts of *Senescence and Death*, so their brutal absurdity could be soothed.

Nietzsche's Zarathustra famously said:

Not by wrath, but by laughter, do we slay.

Come, let us slay the spirit of gravity!

Chapter 54

Let's Not Quite Get Ready To Rumble

The reader may have winced more than normally when the previous chapter floated the idea that the *Philosopher's Stone* could solve, therefore triumph of *Senescence and Death*.

People are pulling up their chairs to watch "*Within*"'s author in a ring against *Senescence and Death*. The betting on how many milliseconds it will last has already started.

One inescapable fact is that all human beings have these same elements in common: a consciousness and a limited life, susceptible to pleasure, but most unfortunately, to pain.

Today, we live already a few minutes longer than our forefathers, thanks to science. Down the road, science may be able to solve completely the scarcity of our time on this Earth. In the meantime, exactly like our forefathers, we can explore our consciousness, an apparently immeasurable realm.

At the risk of disappointing the virtual spectators around this imaginary metaphysical boxing ring, we must insist that the *Philosopher's Stone* focuses on the consciousness, not the physical limitations of our life.

Let's suppose that the reader becomes *self-realized*. That means the reader lives in the *infinite present*, without ever losing it. Her or his consciousness remains in that *dimension*. The fact that our writer is prone to losing it is irrelevant. We are just using the term *infinite*. How do we label anything within a consciousness? Is it more appropriate to call it the *silent present*, as we are speaking about a perception of *reality* where the "I" seems silent or perhaps transparent?

That selective *silence*, that odd *transparency* filters out our sense of time. Toward the end of this book, we are going to see in more details a thought by Marcel Proust:

The term "death" is meaningless because the one who stands outside of time does not fear the future.

Of course, it is possible that there is no *infinite present* at all; just a mere figment of your imagination. If that *figment* remains in all circumstances (since the *self-realized* reader never loses it), it deserves to be truly considered at least as a *remarkable present*.

If we were to sell a drug having the following beneficial effects: "suppresses all fears and insecurities; provides a polymorphic, permanent satisfaction," we would have a few avid customers. Why wouldn't there be the same demand if, instead of an expensive tablet, the mind could provide that "figment of the imagination" at will and without any chemical side-effects?

For the self-realized person,

The whole world is comprehensible; everything makes sense.

Even *Senescence and Death*?

Chapter 55

Big Size Tease

The previous chapter imagined that without any drug, our consciousness can “silence all fears and insecurities...”

At that accomplished stage, the “I” seems transparent. Let’s transpose that idea into a more “physical” reality. As we hypothesized that the “I” plays a central role in keeping us safe, it could be a little worrisome to think that, confronted to a real threat, the “I” would suddenly keep quiet. In other words, our limbic system would be then at rest. Wouldn’t that leave us extremely vulnerable?

Answering that pointed question should be one important theoretical part of “*Within*.”

From this chapter on, we will attempt to prove that our *Philosopher’s Stone* does silence *all fears and insecurities*, without exposing us to any added danger.

Actually, the term to *prove* is *proven* to be totally inadequate. We should rather write that we shall *argue*... that the whole universe focuses all its power to protect us!

If this is not a big size tease, what is?

It is easier to start our tricky argumentation from the end-point: a state of *absolute self-realization*. Since the author of “*Within*” has painstakingly built a whole existential system justifying its shortcomings, it cannot decently project itself in the role of a *self-realized* hero.

Like in the previous chapter, it is more convenient to ask the reader to be the lead who, after using appropriately “*Within*” as some type of fertilizer, has obtained a *Philosopher’s Stone* that never disappears.

Once the reader is in character, we can submit a few elementary questions to this new *self-realized* person. What do you do now? How do you spend your time? Do you talk about what you are experiencing? Do you wonder if you will be heard? Do you act as if nothing happened? Or do you remain seated like the statue of Buddha in a lotus position, irradiating peace through your mysterious smile and your *mudra*?

Or are you like Sri Sai Baba?

Sri Sai Baba talked spontaneously to everyone; attended stage plays and dances; listened to Gajjal (popular songs). However (doing all these things), he never strayed from samâdhi (inalterable peace of mind).

Chapter 56

Where the Reader Goes Out To Buy Some Bread

In the previous chapter, we were asking the reader, who became self-realized in no time, how someone existing permanently in the *infinite present* acts.

We were certain that our hero would reply: “‘*Within*’ warned me against the *Churchgoer Syndrome*. I know that *meditating/feeling* and *doing* are one and the same. Thus, when my “I” became transparent, it remained in that state whether I slept, ate, prayed, painted, sang, spoke...”

But to our utter dismay, the reader smiles: “What type of question is that?”

We would have liked to show that the “transparency” or “silence” only means that the “I” (and part of the limbic system!) go on a stand-by mode. A *self-realized person* is not in a state of catalepsy.

We have previously observed that most people, programmed since a very young age to react sharply to fear, and to anticipate perceived aggressions, potential threats and a whole host of feelings deemed “good” or “bad,” get confused if the “I” interrupts its quasi-permanent screeching. A feeling of imminent doom almost always ensues.

We are guessing it is not the case for a *self-realized person*. To demonstrate it, we are asking the reader, who is still immersed in the *infinite present*, to be kind enough to first perform a banal chore, like buying some food: “It is not even for you, but for a grumpy neighbor who is unable to leave his place today...”

We already admire the fact that his bad temper does not affect you the least. As you go to the store, stand in line, chat a little with a customer and a store employee, leave, deliver the errand, you only sense the wonder of being and doing.

Without the expressed volition of the “I,” doesn’t it feel as if you are acting without a personal will?”

That light thought experiment reminds us of the Taoist concept of *Wu Wei*, the non-action or the action without selfish purpose. In other cultures, many yesteryears masters were seeking the “pure action” that was called by some the “action for God”...

In the Bhagavad Gita, Arjuna is paralyzed by the potential consequences of his actions. His charioteer – the guide and driver of his “horses” – who is in fact Krishna – advises him:

Therefore do thy duty perfectly, without care for the results, for he who does his duty disinterestedly attains the Supreme.

Chapter 57

Pseudo-Philosopher?

In the previous chapter, we sang again the praises of a “transparent” *infinite present*. It was rather easy, since running some errands is not a very threatening proposition. The “I,” as well as the reactive limbic system did not have to be excessively excited.

It is time to consider a harsher situation. Instead of asking the reader to participate in a very uncomfortable virtual adventure, we will recall a story originally told by Vladimir Jankélévitch who experienced it during World War II.

However, as always, the *Taoist Bird/Mendel of Kotzk’s Method* did a number on its specific details. So, the hero of that testimony will go by the acronym PVJ, *Pseudo-Vladimir Jankélévitch...*

He left his room with dread in his heart.

He was going to meet someone at the other end of the city. To get there, he had to pass through many streets infested by Nazis.

His mission was doubly dangerous. Not only was he actively working for the Resistance, thus he was an enemy of the Nazis, but he was of Jewish origin.

Nowadays, younger people hardly know about these unbelievable but true events that happened in the 20th century, when a technologically and culturally sophisticated society went suddenly barbaric.

We would love to say that killing methodically human beings for no sensible reason is something of the past. We unfortunately cannot.

Brutal ignorance is incongruously still flourishing in the 21st century.

Our hero’s dread was quite understandable, as he walked cautiously to the meeting place.

Suddenly, he became aware of the June sky: a few white clouds stretched nonchalantly in an infinite blue.

In a small park, summer flowers were in full bloom.

After a couple of blocks, he was able to have a glance at the glisteningly sapphire ocean, at a distance.

Nature did not care about the cruelty of men against men.

Birds were chirping, a dog was barking, the air was mild...

At once, a perfumed breeze startled the philosopher.

It was much more than just the intellectual and tragic realization that the war was absurdly ruining, putrefying millions of precious lives.

The southern wind had dissipated all the noxious fumes in our hero's mind. He had slipped into a burgeoning present, without a trace of any threat anywhere.

Chapter 58

Where You Are Sent On a Mission In the 1940's

The reader may see in the previous chapter's story another version of Ann's *Certain Tuesday in October*. Here, instead of everyday *tedium*, the background is a most dangerous environment, to be sure. But the main character also *looks suddenly up*.

Actually, we chose that testimony for another reason. During his epiphany, there was *no trace of threats* in PVJ's mind. They dissipated at once.

In other words, the "blaring limbic alarm system" went quiet, leading to a *limpid reality*. Still, the hero of that illustration did not become an instantaneous victim or a more vulnerable individual. To our knowledge, after his sudden awareness of the *Infinite Present*, Vladimir Jankélévitch did not lose his mind, hopscotching toward the members of the Gestapo while singing Kumbaya. He completed his mission, and eventually survived the war.

That means that a lack of intense amygdalian outburst is not a sure sign of impending doom. That leads us to question altogether the necessity of these disturbing and uncontrollable flare-ups!

In the story, the same person, PVJ, "*left with dread in his heart,*" and "*walked cautiously to the meeting place.*" His apprehension was palpable.

However, when PVJ unexpectedly felt the *Infinite Present*, his uneasiness vanished.

From our vantage point, the same man performed the first leg of his mission filled with anxiety, and the other, after his suddenly clear vision of that day in June, in a more controlled, conscious, *appreciative* manner.

Let's now change the spiritual timeline, and place the "clear vision of that day in June" in the beginning of the story.

To do so, we can replace the initially apprehensive PVJ with *you*, our *self-realized* reader, already living in the *Infinite Present*.

Before you leave the apartment to start your mission, we want to probe your level of anxiety. For our theory, we need it to be extremely low. But before we get to inquire about it, you ask us how to circumvent the dangerous hotel area to get to the meeting place. Our surprise amuses you: "Why wouldn't I be prudent?"

Once in the street, as expected, the glorious June weather fills you with joy. You must correct that statement: "It is not *just* the weather!"

While you give an exhaustive list of the multiple components of your enjoyment, equipped with our sophisticated thought-experiment scanner, we do measure waves of excitement in you.

Indeed, your present is absolutely not a flat line! However, the most notable variations seem to occur during a bird song, a child's cry of pleasure, after the soldiers in uniform pass by you without noticing you and when all of a sudden the ocean becomes visible to you.

Chapter 59

Being Good Enough Has Its Limitations

At the beginning of “*Within*” we sang the glory of being “temporarily and literally at the end of a cultural line,” for we can examine everything that has been discovered by humans until today.

We also saw that at each stage of their evolution, humans thought they were the *end of the line*, the most perfect version of their species.

Of course, we are not able to see our current inadequacies, the ones that will make future generations shake their heads in disbelief.

Humans have a distorted sense of their importance, thanks to the “I,” that makes them relevant, complete. They are the center of the universe, while the universe progresses inexorably and unemotionally. Strangely, Evolution seems to follow exactly the same pattern.

It seems to be an eternal work in progress. A scientist quipped:

Evolution must be good enough

And since we are part of the Evolution...

From these broad considerations, we can question the necessity of having certain feelings that are currently integral parts of our “I.” Previously, we have called them “banal,” from an *Infinite Present* perspective. Less diplomatically, more polemically, we could qualify them of “archaic.” Among them, we can list anxiety, fear, anger, greed, prejudice, etc.

As we voice our doubts about their usefulness for an “evolved” mankind, or even for our daily life, we cannot help but noticing that yesteryears intellectuals had exactly the same reservations!

Let’s take *anger*, for instance.

A contemporary retired professional athlete, whose name was lost in the poor quality of the interview, claimed that when he was active, his anger “made him the best at competing.” And when he had to leave his profession in sports, he kept “his anger to fight for just causes.”

So, there would be a *good* anger?

“*Within*” has adopted the theory that assimilates anger to ignorance, with which we may be born, but that we should nonetheless eradicate as much as possible in us.

The virtual *retired professional athlete* attacks: “Doesn’t injustice make you angry? Don’t you want to fight it with all your power and determination, all your wrath?”

We must acknowledge that this argument deserves to be answered in details, next chapter.

Chapter 60

Are Gut Feelings Responsible For Putrid Stools?

The following sentence, engraved in an Egyptian tomb, more than 4 000 years ago, gave this advice:

Do not argue with someone consumed by anger, for he has lost his reason.

So the athlete who posited passionately “Doesn’t injustice makes you angry? Don’t you want to fight it with all your wrath?” has lost his reason?

People consciously fighting “for a BAD cause” are quite rare.

Anger submerges the world of men. “Good causes” and “justice” are always invoked at its source.

Knowing that “cognitive dissonance” exists does not make anyone immune to it, and “anyone” could include you, me and last chapter’s *retired professional athlete*.

Let’s be clear: we are absolutely not advocating passivity. But if possible, we would rather use two safeguards before acting. The first one is to be thoroughly informed on the reasons for our action and able to explain them patiently and peacefully. It can never be a “gut feeling,” since we all know that too many innocent victims have perished because of some “gut feeling” stirring their executioners.

The second one is to extend our mistrust of any “gut feeling” to all our emotions. Can we place ourselves in some type of *Infinite Present* before acting?

We have already bumped into the Taoist concept of *Wu Wei*, or for others, of “pure action.”

To the Bhagavad Gita verses that we have quoted earlier, the Taoist Bird/Mendel of Kotzk’s Method adds swiftly these classical Lao Tzu lines:

***A true soldier is not violent.
A true fighter is not angry.
A true winner is not vengeful***

As for our athlete who justifies his anger because he is “passionate,” the poet reminds us that

Passion is the flame that consumes me

...While anger burns everyone around me.

Chapter 61

Bonus Budo Spirit for Any Acquired Philosopher's Stone

The theme of an action purified as much as possible of “banal emotions” has been studied quite thoroughly by religious thinkers. There are also some athletes’ testimonies, a little hard to find in the *Taoist Bird/Mendel of Kotzk’s* peculiar catalog.

A runner confided:

Running is a way to lose all points of reference; to reach the deepest part in me, which is also the air I breathe.

How about a master swordsman who won all his duels? Miyamoto Musashi gave generously his secret:

I expose the Way of the Double-bladed Swordsmanship in a chapter entitled "Emptiness". This "Emptiness" means the annihilation of things and the realm of the unknown (...)

In "Emptiness" there is virtue and no evil. Wisdom has existence; principle has existence; the Way has existence; the spirit is 'Emptiness.'

The Budo spirit, which is supposed to fuel the perfect warrior, warns against anger, fear, selfishness, vengefulness, etc.: all infamous “banal emotions.”

It was said that acting or reacting emotionally is

blindly obeying your great-grand-father, your grand-father and all your most envious neighbors.

Composed in 1620 by Jacob Böhme, here is a different perspective on a fundamental unbalance, a “source of anger which bred “good and evil”:

It is not necessary for a man to search any further; for he is himself the essence of all essences.

That is why, since at his creation he diverted himself from his original order and thus awoke (in himself) another source, he thus only needs to reenter his original order and his original source and be reborn again. (...)

He must also extinguish the source of anger that he awoke and stirred in himself and which bred good and evil.

So, he must learn how to resist the wrath, walk in softness toward the source of light and love

Chapter 62

Are Those Promising Odds?

We have superficially examined *fear* when we have replaced PVJ by a *self-realized* person.

We can adopt a more metaphysical perspective.

Let's start with a fairly well-known riddle:

Four rabbis entered the paradise. (Another version said they went into the wilderness). They came upon what they were looking for. But when the first rabbi gazed at it, his body could not take it and he died. The second one gazed at it and he lost his sanity. The third one gazed at it and lost his hope. The fourth one, who came in peace, left in peace.

This story actually has been abundantly commented. Different schools of thoughts used that cautionary tale as a warning about the spiritual pitfalls that await the explorers of the soul (of the *consciousness*, for us).

It does reveal the terror that appears to be lurking around the “extreme” limits of our consciousness, where nothing is mapped. The tale quantifies it somewhat precisely: we have one chance out of four to succeed, and the same odds to become mad, or irremediably depressed, or to just croak.

In many religions, there is the same stark warning: if you get too close to the ultimate reality, you may be consumed.

Arjuna, having asked to see Krishna in all his splendor, became so anxious that Krishna had to quickly get back to his human form.

We cannot help thinking of the striking Nietzschean aphorism:

If you gaze long into an abyss, the abyss also gazes into you.

Of course, the reader should not fret, for the *Philosopher's Stone Seeker* can only *come in peace!*

Because the story states clearly that it is what one brings into this *wilderness* that counts.

And we do not explore with blind faith and wishful thinking, but with a deliberate curiosity.

Are we saying one must bring the *Infinite Present* into the *Infinite Present*?

Chapter 63

Bombshell in full sight

We boasted in the previous chapter that “we do not explore with blind faith and wishful thinking.”

Our curiosity assumes there is something to find. Isn't there some *faith* in that belief?

In the beginning of “*Within*,” its author claimed it followed the past and present spiritual masters. Doesn't this indicate also some *faith* that their conclusions are to be trusted?

Any exploration starts from a need. For us, transforming a so-so existence into a magical one was the incentive.

Now, our writer testifies after many others. Its purpose is to sketch a few indications on a *Treasure Hunt's Map*, without having any idea whether that fragile piece of (figurative) parchment will be found by anyone, let alone be useful.

In this paper, I wish to communicate my train of thought and present the facts that led me to this course, in the hope that the point of view elaborated may prove of use to some researchers in their investigations.

Let's thank Albert Einstein's Collected Papers for phrasing so well our author's intentions.

In an early chapter, we have copied:

Our goal seems to act like a magnetic field, irresistibly attracting relevant elements.

In a way, we exposed ourselves to the famous:

Give to a beginner a hammer, he will find that everything looks like a nail.

However, our *faith/curiosity* is of the essence that makes explorers and scientists: there must be something to find!

It is the opposite of the terrorized *blind faith and wishful thinking* that can only lead three out of four rabbis to a problematic ending!

The fourth rabbi has nothing to fear. He is *protected*.

Actually, compared to “blind faith and wishful thinking” and if we remember our promise to always attempt to remain rational, isn't that affirmation quite a bombshell of a contradiction?

Chapter 64

Epicurean Bread and Water

Here is the text that helped us compose last chapter's mild intellectual "bombshell" about some form of intrinsic *protection* woven by the Search:

Was there in the history of the world a woman more cuddled than me?

It seems like a legion of guardians have been watching over each single step that I ever took, as if they knew I was and will always be too clumsy to achieve happiness by myself.

The *Taoist Bird/Mendel of Kotzk's Method* brought it because it was written by a lady who had a rather harsh life. It reminded us of Epicure and, once again, of a *Gratitude/Appreciation* that helps humans tremendously to go through the vagaries of life:

Even though Epicurus was famous for saying

"I do not know what good is if the pleasures of eating, of loving and everything that charms the ears and eyes are taken away,"

he was very poor and usually ate only bread and drank water.

But he had this joie de vivre, the happiness of being, of participating to the grandeur of the universe.

One of his disciples said after his death: "Epicure's life was so sweet, so warm, so sensible that, compared to the life of most men, it appears like a myth."

Being joyful, "participating to the grandeur of the universe," appreciating... is indeed being grateful.

Our master Rumi asked this always pertinent question:

If you had the choice to live in a rose garden or in a place full of brambles, what would you choose?

He used to tell his disciples that, always looking for the essential, he often ignored some indispensable needs, like finding something to eat, or a shelter, etc. He noticed with amazement that these *indispensable needs* came, already fulfilled, "running after him."

These reflections lead us to examine the more metaphysical dimension of courage, gratitude and... chance!

Chapter 65

The Heroin Returns

Our new thought experiment requires the participation of our good friend, the Atheist Scientist, and of our very own heroin, Ann.

The reader may wonder whatever happened to her. Since we communicated to her the *Haikel's Exhortation*, Ann has pursued on her own her quest to live in a magical dimension.

As far as we can tell, she seems spiritually much more advanced than her creator, who protests that this sentence is preposterous, since there is no competition in the exploration of the consciousness.

Anyway, we display before our two subjects the film of the grand succession of events leading to them. It features notably the “astronomical number of expansions, accretions, explosions, phagocytosis, mutations, attractions, deviations, etc.,” necessary to the creation of who they are in theory: two sets of “40 trillion cells working in unison,” in a perfect equilibrium between “their genomes, their always changing environments, their microbiomes, their choices, etc.”

Ann's reaction is a loud “Wow!” She laughs: “I do feel special.”

Our Atheist Scientist comments: “There are some missing links in that show, but it does indicate very approximately the Laws of Physics, and the randomness of the events that goes from the Big Bang to us.”

Case closed. We thank our two participants.

However, soon after, unbeknown to our two characters, we place on their respective professional or personal path, a serious setback. In this second part of the thought experiment, Ann happens to be much more resilient than our Atheist Scientist.

The reader may fear that our conclusion shows an obvious bias: a very intelligent, rational, mature professional should not be more frazzled than a “simple, uneducated woman.”

It is forgetting that Ann, very much like Epicurus and Rumi, lives already in a special universe where the Laws of probabilities (not the Laws of Physics) are bent in her favor because she experiences so many simple “blessings.” In such dimension, any obstacle is an opportunity to use all the existential resources at her disposal (all the discoveries accumulated during her search) as a *pole*, for *pole vaulting* that obstacle (and then, letting go of it).

For the Atheist Scientist, the setback may not have such an inspiring meaning. Randomness is likely more desperately but logically...senseless.

Chapter 66

Seeker Membership Fidelity Program

We mentioned previously that Rumi “noticed with amazement that the *indispensable needs* came ‘running after him,’” already fulfilled.

However, it would be ill-advised to get all excited before this “bending of the Laws of probabilities in favor of the Seeker,” and to leave our daytime job just because we have, like Rumi, enrolled in the Seekers Program.

In a way, the *Music of Chance*,” to use the superb title of a book we have not read, is a continuous hum, quite different from the high sonorities of *sheer luck*.

It reminds us of the difference between the flagrant *Peaks and Valleys* of a normal human existence and the delicate mining of the *tedium* ore.

In order to examine such an essential component of everyday life, we will call back the testimony of PVJ; *Pseudo* because we do not know personally the real Mr. Jankélévitch.

Before and after World War II, Vladimir Jankélévitch was a professional philosopher. Contrary to us, mere *natural philosophers*, he officially received a salary for that title. As a professional philosopher, after the war, he had to try explaining how a “civilized” society could sink to a sub-human level.

We facetiously wondered if he became Ann, someone obsessed with making of an epiphany the model for a new existence.

To our great surprise, he did not write a book on modern *Philosopher’s Stones*. However, he seemed to devote a fair amount of his philosophical researches to a most subtle reality. One of his more evocative book titles was “The *je ne sais quoi* and the almost nothing,” where *je ne sais quoi* (literally “I do not know what it is”) is also “just a hint, impossible to define”.

The timid and fleeting glow, the flash, the silence, the evasive signs - it is in these forms that the most important things in life choose to be discovered.

What he found to be ever so tenuous seemed also infinite. For him, love has to be totally unconditional and absolutely not personal nor anecdotic; gratitude has to be eternal; generosity, modesty, humility have to vanish from our awareness. It is said that

Children conscious of their innocence are manipulators.

The person who wants to act generously only barter.

Chapter 67

Mother's Day in the Ethologist's House

Some people, a little nonchalant about their own *natural philosophy* are taken aback by the apparent disdain of *self-realized* masters for “banal emotions.”

As we know too well, any term has multiple levels of interpretation. For instance, the word “God” gives an automatic, furious rash to our cartoonish Atheist-Scientist, while for others it is a catalyst for defining humanity.

It would have been appropriate to place here a couple of examples of that “catalyst,” but the *Taoist Bird/Mendel of Kotzk's Method* brought us entire chapters by Spinoza.

We protested: “Do we look like scholars or something?”

We were left with a mere variation of the paradox of Anselm:

One cannot fathom God because God is infinite.

If for someone God does not exist, that is a thought, hence that person does not say anything about God.

Let's go back to the multiple levels of interpretation of terms used to describe *feelings*. They cover “banal emotions” as well as the extreme limits of the consciousness.

Once, we heard an Ethology professor giving an introductory class on “apparent altruistic animal behaviors.” She asked her students to think of examples of altruistic human behaviors. A woman yelled: “I would risk my life for my two children.” The professor quipped: “Nothing is less altruistic than the will to save one's own genes.”

The notion of a “pure feeling” has puzzled thinkers as much as the possibility of a “pure action” or *Wu Wei*.

The problem affects us directly, since our purpose is to explore the recesses of our consciousness.

If we reach the transparency of our “I” and then, if we must act, is that deed a mythical “pure action,” motivated by a “pure feeling”?

How would we know?

Indeed, we may not be able to answer that riddle, but our obligation is to genuinely try, as *Philosopher's Stones Seekers*.

Chapter 68

Recovering Innocence

If we do not quote our very own previous chapter, who will?

“Our obligation is to genuinely try” may not sound like a Shakespearian line, but it does lead us to another poorly defined concept: what is *genuine*?

To better understand what separates Rumi’s amazed and grateful carefreeness from a reckless fanatic, let’s recount a tale born in a Jewish ghetto:

In the communal room, next to the temple, Marian had finished her sewing chores. Usually, she would rush home with some food for her little family. But this time, Marian remained motionless.

Becky, Rabbi Joshua’s daughter, apologized: “It is not much food, but it is a harsh winter, and the temple has very few resources.”

But Marian was just so worried and dejected that she could not imagine better days ahead for her and her children. She could not go on.

Thankfully, Becky got from her father the gift of storytelling. She tried to cheer up the young widow with a tale:

“One hundred years ago, in this very city, the winter was even colder than the one we are enduring right now. There was a seamstress named Marjam who did not have enough work to feed her family. In those days, it was easier to go and work outside. Marjam was able to clean the stables for a rich family of goyim.

One evening, she saw the rabbi leaving the house across the street from where she lived. She yelled: “Rabbi, you should be wearing a thicker coat! It is not reasonable to be out with just a jacket.”

Later, her neighbor scolded her: the rabbi had only that one jacket to wear.

At once, Marjam started to gather all the scraps of fabric she could find. She also searched in the trash of the goyim and picked up a few old rags and some moth-eaten clothes.

During many nights, after she was done cleaning the stables and taking care of her children, Marjam would wash all the pieces, cut them, stitch them together.

Finally, she went to see the rabbi with the coat she had made for him and laughed: "I am a seamstress, after all!"

The rabbi examined carefully her gift: "Where did you get the fabric and what is this lining made of?"

Marjam blushed: "It is not the best looking coat, but it should keep you a little warmer."

The rabbi nodded: "It should, yes. Thank you, my child."

Marjam went back home, feeling very embarrassed: why did she have to brag about being a seamstress, when she could only make an ugly patchwork?

When she arrived at her house, she found in front of her door an old wooden bucket covered with what seemed to be one of the rags she had collected to make the rabbi's coat. When she pulled the rag, she discovered that the bucket was filled with golden coins."

Rabbi Joshua's daughter was delighted: her tale had pulled Marian out of her despair. The young mother thanked Becky with a big smile and went back home to her children with a bounce in her steps.

Less than a week later, Marian had pieced together two old coats she had kept from her late husband. She went to the temple and gave a very decent new coat to a surprised Rabbi Joshua, who thanked her profusely.

When she came back home, no old bucket was waiting for her in front of her door.

She showed some patience. A couple of weeks elapsed.

One day, she saw Rabbi Joshua in the street, wearing the coat she had made for him. He was all smiles: "You see, my child? Your coat fits me perfectly and it does keep me warm."

The rabbi noticed the stern look on Marian's face. He asked her if she was well.

The young widow recounted the tale Becky told her. She concluded: "I guess your daughter only wanted to distract me. I thought she was giving me an advice. I misunderstood."

Rabbi Joshua smiled: "Becky was indeed giving you an advice. But you must keep in mind that Marjam did not know that story."

Chapter 69

Would You Prefer A Linear or An Infinite Present?

The previous tale defines quite adequately what “being genuine or authentic” could be.

“Knowing the story” is liberally given to all of us. It is usually a highly satisfying intellectual construct, transmitted to us by some tradition; something obvious that we fully understand.

But *living that story* is literally *exploring* what is solely ours to discover. Nobody before us has ever stepped on that particular path!

When we learn something from a text, a model is etched in our mind.

The connection between that model and reality could be roughly assimilated to a child who, watching a movie on pirates, decides that sailing is easy.

Living that story borders the *Infinite Present*, which a spiritual master described...

As vast and undefined as Death

That is striking enough. Of course, “death” is just how our “I” interprets the sudden loss of our past, present and future, as we usually know them. It is not a literal loss of life.

In the *Infinite Present*, there is no *past* filled with our scars, successes, disenchantments, etc. There is no present, as the coordinates of space and time where an observer sees us do not matter to us. And since the future is a mere projection of what we know of the past and the present, that projection cannot be formed.

The common and linear past, present and future tattooed on our “I” are described in this text by Marcel Proust’s “Time Regained,” here awkwardly stretched by a translator:

In the everyday present, the senses are oblivious of the essence of things. There, the intelligence dries out the past, in the expectation of a future forcefully built with fragments of the present and the past, but carefully deprived of their reality, and reduced to what serves to attain the most trivial goals.

Ignorant the linear *past, present and future* of the “I,” the *Infinite Present* is, must we repeat, a most personal dive into what has yet to be explored.

We must be singing a melody never heard before

Quite some time ago, Pythagoras wrote about *the music of the spheres*. Could that *music* be somehow in harmony with our very own *melody never heard before*?

Chapter 70

The Rainbow Dazzle

When Rumi's disciples heard their master marveling about his needs miraculously met, they hopefully did not misunderstand him, like Marian misinterpreted Becky's tale. Rumi never "tempted his God." He testified, very much like Epicurus, that life is incredibly favorable for passionate seekers.

Of course, a shallow listener may just stall on the word "miraculously," equating it with horror to a strict denial of the Laws of Nature, like Jesus famously resuscitating a dead man.

But for Rumi or Epicurus, who were just *feeling the happiness of being, of participating to the grandeur of the universe*, no Laws of Nature had ever been broken.

Rumi and Epicurus exist in a universe statistically coherent.

Where one element is abundant, the chances to encounter the said element are logically high.

Let's recall that, during our quest for the *Philosopher's Stone*, our plan included appreciating every moment of our life. We have already quoted Jankélévitch's

Everything can become an opportunity for a consciousness on the watch.

Our goal, as we transcribed it earlier, is to *continuously, incessantly* be aware that...

Sunsets, profound musical harmonies, "exquisite pleasures invading the senses," etc., are continuously, incessantly taking place.

In other terms, the more one can appreciate, the more there is to appreciate.

We can practically train our mind to use systematically the *Rainbow Process*, where we understand the physical nature of a rainbow without ever losing our child-like feeling of awe.

In the Tagore's inspired story, the fish jumping out of the water to eat a bug, the refraction of the rays of light, the location of the boat, the accuracy of the photoreceptor cells in our two characters eyes, etc. are physical events that the Poet's awareness assembles in a "miraculously" meaningful mosaic.

The *Rainbow Process* allows simple facts to dazzle.

Chapter 71

Enters the Camel!

There is nothing supernatural in the Tagore's inspired story. There is only *natural* magic.

Now, let's imagine one possible sequel, where the poet goes back to the capital. He composes a series of poems around his adventure, crossing a lake in the middle of nowhere, with a boatman as a colorful sidekick.

His book becomes an instant classic, commanding an instantaneous Nobel Prize in Literature.

At that point, "*Within*" astute reader asks a most important question: "Does this new Nobel laureate, after his literary exploration of the message brought from the lake's depths by the shimmering fish, find an *inalterable peace of mind*?"

According to most masters from yesteryears, such an outcome is unlikely. They usually do not value much fame and fortune. In fact, they recommend staying away from them.

Some rich and famous thinkers may take umbrage with that opinion. They will see in it the mere "jealousy of the impotent". These intellectuals attribute their success to their innate excellence. Feeling superior, they find natural to claim that the spoils must go to the winners (them) and merciless elimination to the vanquished (the others).

For them, it is indeed appropriate to chase fame and fortune, notoriously ephemeral but clearly gratifying.

Quite unexpectedly, our masters reply with a rather trite saying:

I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.

If we translate the religious language into a more prosaic one, in terms of *time and attention*, making money, collecting honors, being respected, etc., divert a big chunk of our inner resources.

Yesteryears masters double down on Matthew's quotes:

No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other

Again, we can transpose a word or two for our own reflections. Here, instead of “masters,” we prefer noting that the consciousness does not normally multitask. It selects one “universe/reality” to live in, and vehemently rejects the other.

As a little aside, if the “consciousness does not normally multitask,” we know that it can *superpose*, which is a process perhaps opaque to the *rich and famous thinkers*.

Now, let’s go back to the reader’s very pertinent question; can the poet of *Shining Fish* fame and Nobel Prize laureate become *self-realized*?

If most yesteryears masters answered negatively, there are also a couple of interesting perspectives we should mention, as early as next chapter.

Chapter 72

Where to Stop?

In the previous thought experiment, most of yesteryears masters doubted that a poet suddenly endowed with honors and money could reach a state of permanent enlightenment.

Actually, for one of these masters, the failure was not due to some depletion of the famous poet's spiritual energy, but to an unavoidable complacency

A Sufi master reminded his pupils that when the Angel came to take the Prophet Mohammad to the Divine Throne, he gave him this directive for the celestial voyage: "Do not attach your heart to anything or anybody, for you are only to see the Throne. If you attach your heart beforehand, you will stop your progression".

Mohammad agreed enthusiastically. At some point during the flight, Mohammad voiced his gratefulness and his admiration for the angel, who replied sternly: "I told you not to get attached to anything or anyone."

That teaching reminds us of the following Tibetan tale:

My child, I am too old to climb with you the Sacred Mountain, but remember my words, as you go up.

If you succeed going to the end of this first steep trail, you will see a hamlet. It is a knight's station. There, you can spend a lifetime learning how to master your body, your breath, your mind.

They say that the most advanced knights are invincible.

You will be tempted to stay. However, if you continue your ascent, at the end of another long trail, you will see a big house. It is a library, with everything that has ever been written. You could spend a lifetime and learn all there is to learn.

However, if you continue your ascent, at the end of another difficult trail, you will see exquisite houses with outstanding looking men and women, musicians and painters and all sorts of artists. You will be tempted to stay there and enjoy their harmonious but exciting company.

However, if you continue your ascent, the clouds and the fog will surround you.

It is the point you want to reach, but know that before you, almost everyone stopped at one level or went back down without reaching the top.

Finally, there is another argument, that time in favor of our suddenly famous poet.

We have already quoted that illustration of someone who acts without losing the *Infinite Present*.

Sri Sai Baba talked spontaneously to everyone; attended stage plays and dances; listened to Gajjal (popular songs). However (doing all these things), he never strayed from samâdhi (inalterable peace of mind).

Similarly, in the Symposium, a protagonist said:

I do not include Socrates, who is able either to drink or to abstain, and will not mind, whichever we do

For the inconsistent author of “*Within*,” getting paralyzed by wealth and fame is likely to happen. But it is totally conceivable that the hero of the Tagore’s inspired tale would consider his new status with amusement, perhaps using it to help others, while essentially remaining in the ever-changing *Infinite Present*.

Chapter 73

Panic in the Lab

This book's pseudo-antagonist characters, like the "rich and famous thinkers," "Professor So-And-So," the "atheist scientists," or even the author itself, prone to invasive self-deprecation, may remind the reader of Don Quixote charging windmills.

All these characters appear to be different facets of the author. If we eliminate a case of literary schizophrenia, does it mean that our guide for the *Philosopher's Stone Quest* needs to constantly convince itself of the validity of its own theories?

To answer that question, we need to reassess "*Within*" situation.

In a unidimensional universe, there would be a line with ignorant people (that we all are at birth) at one end and the *self-realized* few at the other end. In between, there should be everyone else, including the *Philosopher's Stone Seekers*.

The problem is complicated by the fact that for us, the process of acquiring the Transmutation Stone transforms the *Seekers*. They do not go from one end to the other. Progressing in an atmosphere saturated with ignorance and self-realization, they must reposition their consciousness at each moment. Could we say that an *inalterable peace of mind* is obtained by shifting smoothly through all the states of consciousness?

Let's illustrate these rather obscure concepts by putting in our experimental lab an obvious guinea pig: our author. We must make sure that it has just quoted a sentence it loves. It is beaming with pride: "This time at last, the reader will be convinced about the importance of the inner research"!

Now, let's put across its path a setback. It does not have to be a harsh criticism of its book. Let's overwhelm it with a wave of trivial responsibilities. Our writer panics. It is not that it suddenly doubts its system and its soothing, hand-picked cosmogony. It just has no access to them, for its consciousness is entirely besieged by urgency.

We can actually surmise that, contrary to our author, a self-realized master (or even the author itself, in a better disposition and in another experiment) would consider the quandary, pick the solution deemed the best at the time, implement it, fully accepting its consequences, without a shadow of regret, and without ever losing the *Infinite Present*.

Writing these few lines took a few minutes, just enough time for the severity of the situation in our lab to subside; so much so that our writer wants to move on to the next chapter.

We cannot help throwing Confucius's remark in its direction:

"The wise man is calm; his heart is full (and content)

The man (who does not think) is always overwhelmed by worries

Our valiant guide "*de la Trise Figura*" shakes its head, swearing that one day, it will learn from its mistakes.

For its defense, it remembers Ronsard's sentence:

We have the right to be wrong

But the Duty to acknowledge it.

It (our author) has to learn, perhaps forever, since...

Evolution is a learning algorithm

What is truly essential is that the *Infinite Present* is there, waiting, never stained by any detour, as "forgiving" in its purity as during the very first "encounter."

If I get lost, You always come

Master Eckhart has often marveled about the eternal newness of what he called "Presence," and what we call *Present*.

Farid ud-dîn 'Attar said:

Your heart must be free of anthropomorphism as well as of agnosticism, indifferent to interpretations and exegeses,

Sometimes immaterial and transcendent, sometimes held down by the ties of this earth;

Sometimes conscious, sometimes not,

knowing the two states in order to reach perfection within one state and within the other state.

Chapter 74

Where the Author Falls in a Risky Speculation Trap

Feeling confusedly that the end of this very book is near, our dearest villains, the “rich and famous thinkers,” “Professor So-And-So,” the “atheist scientists,” and the author’s most obscure nemeses close ranks to throw at “*Within*” a couple of flaming darts:

The first one points at the mystifying number of definitions that are supposed to qualify the *Philosopher’s Stone*: is it an *inalterable peace of mind*, the nirvana, the *Infinite Present*, a permanent bliss, *nothingness*, the source of all enjoyments, *a remembrance*, looking up, *an ocean of happiness*, a mere perspective, *a consciousness always on the watch*, a universal consciousness, *a sleight of consciousness*, our consciousness (period), *the silence of the “I,”* a geyser of satisfaction, *a fairy dimension*, natural philosophy, *a constant superposition of opposites*, the supreme yoga, *the sacred*, the essence of all religions, everyday infinite, *the blur*, the Tao, or something else?

We can answer without the slightest hesitation that it is all of that to a mild extent, but mainly *something else*. We have already spent some time lamenting the infinite gaps between knowing, understanding intellectually, experiencing, and then transcribing a concept.

Master Eckhart said:

Sometimes I have called it the guardian of the spirit, sometimes I have called it a light of the spirit, sometimes I have said that it is a little spark.

But now I say that it is neither this nor that; and yet it is a something that is more exalted over 'this' and 'that' than are the heavens above the earth. So now I shall name it in nobler fashion than I ever did before, and yet it disowns the nobler name and mode, for it transcends them. It is free of all names and void of all forms, entirely exempt and free, as God is exempt and free in Himself. It is as completely one and simple as God is one and simple, so that no man can in any way glimpse it.

Did we shut up our *dearest villains*, extinguishing at once their first *flaming dart*?

They are the stubborn type and retort that “quoting little-known people does not prove anything.” Furthermore, they accuse “*Within*” of luring its readers with the promise they could automatically enter “a blessed dimension, curiously invisible to logical minds.”

Obviously, all our chapters about acquiring a different perspective and modifying one’s consciousness did very little to convince them.

We can still propose a risky speculation...

Chapter 75

Where the Author Sinks Even Deeper In the Speculation Trap

The criticism at the end of last chapter could be swiftly answered: “*Within*” only lures the reader into *trying* – not *accepting* - different perspectives.

That argument triggers in our imaginary skeptics a predictable counter-argument: why invest any time and reflection into something as farfetched as *trying to have a different consciousness*?

Such discussion can go on a loop for the longest time.

Therefore, it seems reasonable to stop obsessing about *imaginary intellectual enemies* and other monstrous windmills, since encountering any of them in these advanced chapters is rather unlikely.

However, instead of refining the conclusion of its current work, our author gets fixated on this nebulous assumption: “We were able to freeze the universe in a thought experiment. Why couldn’t we use that technique to prove to our illusory opponents that we do live in an enchanted world?”

At that point, the reader is expecting to be showered with half a dozen quotes expressly delivered by the *Taoist Bird/Mendel of Kotzk’s Method*. But this time, the writer makes everyone’s blood – even its own - curl with that proposal: “What if we could even prove we live in the *best of all possible worlds*?”

A few centuries ago, Voltaire masterfully destroyed *the best of all possible worlds* theory. He wrote a tale where he made his character, *Candide*, fall prey to the most horrible deceptions, violence, cruelty, injustices... It was then easy for Voltaire to hammer sardonically: (Are you sure this is) *the best of all possible worlds*?

Defending that defunct theory does not appear to be a winning proposition. Moreover, our writer has always been careful to avoid any mention of an “Intelligent Design.” Could it possibly prove its point without having recourse to a *leap of faith*? Can it only use arguments palatable to its wonderfully logical *adversaries*?

The answer is unequivocally positive. We just have to define a system of reference.

Chapter 76

Mature Guinea Pig Requested On the Launching Pad

For humans, the universe can hardly be deemed *the best of all possible worlds*, since *Senescence and Death* governs its ceaseless transformations.

Actually, even the 21st century zeitgeist notes that Nature and Evolution do not form any longer a majestic river flowing inexorably toward a “better” direction.

We have already come across these contemporary aphorisms: ***Evolution must be only good enough*** and ***Evolution is a learning algorithm***.

So far, in total agreement with Voltaire and our *antagonist* friends, we have acknowledged that our universe is certainly not *the best* possible. Since we are enunciating evident observations, let’s add another one: it is not that we were given the choice (to live here)!

Now, let’s start our thought experiment. As usual, we need a guinea pig. In the atheist scientist clan, we are spotting a still active professor in biology, who happens to be 112 years old, an age perhaps adequately ripe, because we must freeze the universe just before his passing away.

Pr. AS (for Atheist Scientist – at the last minute, we turned down Atheist Steadfast Scientist) is actually addressing an audience, and is vehemently confusing the essence of religions - which is a philosophical or metaphysical questioning - with a distasteful and uninformed refusal to understand the world. He gives unimaginatively a myriad of examples of the abuses of the Clergy throughout History.

We want to object that identifying religions to Churches is like compiling all the errors ever made in the name of Science, and claiming: “This is why one must hate Science!”

But the venerable professor’s physical demise being near, we remain respectfully quiet and let him finish his lecture.

Once the metaphysical freeze has been engaged, we have a stunning view of that man, smiling, immobile in front of his admirers... and 10^{h*j} events, starting (again arbitrarily) with the Big Bang. His 40 trillion cells are *still* in equilibrium between “his genome, his always changing environment, his microbiome, his choices, etc.” We see now Pr. AS as the center of the universe.

The woman in white, in the front row, happens to be Pr. AS’s daughter. If we pass in her “life cone,” we see that she is equally the center of the universe. It is not an optical illusion since both of them exist for us.

Now, we move to about twenty years ago, when Pr. AS was so sick that he almost died.

And sixty years before that dramatic event, his vindictive and suddenly unbalanced first wife aimed a gun at his back. He never knew he was that close to losing his mobility, perhaps his life.

As in a previous thought experiment, each point in the professor's "life cone" appears as a transition point, an infinite present, aiming at existing in relation with all the other events in the universe.

Is there a pattern in this prodigious complexity? We are sorry to report that our untrained brain, while tempted to answer affirmatively, cannot define that pattern.

Let's turn on the volume, so we can hear the professor's "I" inner commentaries during each episode.

For instance, through his grave sickness, there was this long but varied and irregularly interrupted lament.

And when he was 32, unaware that his first wife was aiming a gun at him, his "I" was busy imagining in very fleshy details, what he would lasciviously do to the new intern in his lab.

The conclusion of that thought experiment is that each *infinite present* composing Pr. AS's "life cone" participates in the making of *the best of all possible worlds*: no matter how the "I" perceives it, he exists as an entire *world* blossoming in/from/for an inexorably changing universe.

Chapter 77

No Character Was Harmed In the Writing of This Chapter

Pr. AS clears his throat: “I don’t mean to interrupt your boisterous conclusions, but why on earth do you need to have me dying in your thought experiment?”

In a still frozen universe, he goes to the extremely low point in his life, when he was 92. That year, he almost died, like the time his ex-wife, unbeknown to him, was about to kill him. He nods: “I see your point. In your jargon, *my “I”* in both cases did not know any better. From that perspective, my existence seemed to have a vitality of its own.”

We want to interject that what he called “vitality” could be, “in our jargon,” the *Infinite Present*. But Pr. AS is now at the point where his “life cone” opens up to the whole universe. He is trying to make out the catastrophic transition point.

Could Rumi’s song of separation console him?

When the reed has to becomes flute

But Pr. AS shrugs: “Nah, you certainly don’t need my passing away. It does not help defining your *Infinite Presents!*”

Before leaving the chapter, he has these vengeful words:

The quest for what you are expecting to find is never truthful

Here, the author of “*Within*” could have joked: “Note to myself: next chapter, find a more docile character.” But instead, it destroyed the previous pages in a frightening fit of frustration.

How could that happen after dozens of chapters laboriously written about being in an *Infinite Present*? Shouldn’t its training have filtered out these messy impulses? In pseudo-neuroscience-gabble, that would mean that its poorly programmed amygdala should have been better regulated by now, right?

The reader frets the author is going to respond despondently, with a poor impersonation of Augustine’s *Confessions*, while pouring on its head a few pounds of ashes.

But this sequence turns out to be another cautionary repetition of the meaning of “*Within*” motto:

Acquiring the Philosopher’s Stone is repositioning one’s consciousness between ignorance and self-realization.

Such *repositioning* is an endless process: the ignorant/beginner and the self-realized are a particle spin away from each other.

The author, caught red-handed as an ignorant/beginner almost at the end of its book, has to shake its head and just laugh, goodheartedly if it can.

Chapter 78

The Return of the Masked Guinea Pig

We need to reassure the reader who may have mixed feelings before the spectacle offered by the author in the previous chapter. Moreover, once already, in our thought experimental lab, the compiler of “*Within*,” visibly overwhelmed, tried to finagle its way out of the reader’s scrutiny by quoting Ronsard:

We have the right to be wrong - But the Duty to acknowledge it.

It is in any case rather worrisome to think that *Philosopher’s Stone Seekers*, at the end of their journey, can find themselves back to square one, as true beginners all over again!

Actually, these two examples of less than acceptable behavior from a spiritual or philosophical guide should be extremely comforting. If one of the worse learners in the history of mankind, who forgets at once everything it has painstakingly accumulated, can always recuperate all of it - and a tad more - as soon as it remembers to “look up,” imagine what the reader can do with the same abundant material!

Also, our writer seems comfortable with a never-ending process, a little like what Farid ud-din 'Attar describes:

Bayezid Bestâmi said:

“Even if you are offered the degree (of religion) of all the prophets, do not accept it.

Ask to go further; raise your goals; because, if you accept any degree (of religion), it will become for you a closed gate which will stop you on your way.”

It is a personal choice. After all, the author’s consciousness being obviously different from the reader’s, their respective *Philosopher’s Stones*, which are the catalysts used to loosen and make more limpid their consciousness, must also vary.

“*Their consciousness, uh? I can see clearly through your little game. I am accusing your book to be nothing but a panpsychist pamphlet in disguise!*”

This booming voice belongs to Pr. AS, reentering the stage. He hammers:

“What? Do plants *perceive* your so-called *Present*? Do they have a consciousness? What about prokaryotes, or even viruses? There are chemicals that can avoid some

substances and be attracted by light or a certain temperature. Do they have a consciousness too?"

The reader observes warily the *Taoist Bird/Mendel of Kotzk's Union* gathering hundreds of quotes on Anima mundi, integrated information theory, etc., as ammunitions for our author, who has turned apoplectically purple and is ready to counterattack.

Chapter 79

Is Joy Made Of Charm Or Up Quarks?

Fortunately, the reader does not have to worry about a deluge of vengeful quotes from the author, who remains surprisingly calm. Being accused of *panpsychism* may have not been the worst insult thrown its way.

Moreover, *panpsychism* is only one of the countless hypotheses coloring all the existing cosmogonies. There are actually many more outlandish theories than a vague and universal “consciousness” infusing the whole reality.

Who wants to hear about combinations of quantum physics and qualia; of synaptic and vacuum energy, etc.?

So far, all these interpretations flourish vociferously, since it is quite impossible to verify them. Until science comes up with a definitive, undisputable proof deciding which one is correct, we should consider all *cosmogonies* like subjective, delightful, individual compasses.

We came across one interpretation suggesting that dark energy is made of “pleasure energy.” The commentator who was presenting that theory was quite critical and found hilarious that suggestion.

Nonetheless, we carefully catalogued it in our *nescience* library.

As we saw earlier, satisfaction, pleasure, bliss, joy, etc. are all powerful *Messengers*, inviting humans to the philosophical quest.

For instance, our heroin, Ann, experienced the decisive *Certain Tuesday of October’s Bliss* as well as a smaller joy, the *Unexpected Dessert a Stranger gave her*.

Pinhas of Koretz, among others, said:

All joys come from Heaven, even a little joke if this joke is said in a spirit of true joy.

We have also seen how being joyful, “participating appreciatively to the grandeur of the universe,” is related to *being grateful*, an essential *Philosopher’s Stone component*.

Besides, joy has a close connection with the absence of fear:

Heraclitus sang:

Come in with confidence

Here also are the gods

Who could not be intrigued by the songs of joy and hope composed by the pilgrims Tukaram and Kabir, or by the disheveled dance of David?

Wearing a linen ephod, he was dancing before the Lord with all his might

Speaking of *sacred dance*, we must of course mention our master Rumi and his followers, the Whirling Dervishes.

There is also this image, glimpsed in a movie about Orpheus:

A young man at dawn, on top of a cliff, strums his guitar, gazing at the sky and at the ocean. As if he was waiting for a bird to perch behind him, he smiles widely and starts singing with a melodic voice.

The musical notes transform the dark silver into gold, calling the sun to rise up on the horizon.

His mission accomplished, the young man rushes or rather dances toward a favela. There, it is as if his presence could light a smile on everybody's face: children, old and sick people, anxious men and women...

As he walks, he calls all of them by their name, and they laugh.

Poor alleys across the mess of dirty shacks open up like the grand avenue for the holiday parade.

He says: "Anyone has a song for me? No? What a pity! But I have one, and it could be a new one!"

If one breathes joy, who needs a *Philosopher's Stone* or even the nirvana?

Chapter 80

Marcel Proust's Newest Rival

We have insisted at length that a fair amount of training/conditioning of the consciousness is necessary to find a *Philosopher's Stone*. Finding it should automatically trigger *joy*; as well as the process of *training/conditioning the consciousness*, actually!

To illustrate that statement, we are bringing back Ann. After a quick look at our last few chapters, our heroin shakes her head: "Are you really singing the benefits of joy and satisfaction? What is next? Are you going to courageously denounce *Senescence and Death*?"

We have not created that character to be sarcastic. Before we could correct that glitch, she whispers: "My mother was diagnosed with a major depressive disorder. Do you sincerely believe "*Within*" would be able to help her?"

In the real world, the answer would be a prudent but realistic "Who is listening to *natural philosophers*, anyway?"

In this book though, Ann goes to visit her mother. After listening to three hours of nonstop complaining, Ann gets up to look for an aspirin.

The elderly lady, who happens to be in a bored state, searches her daughter's bag to entertain herself. She finds a copy of "*Within*," opens it right at a quote from a certain Milton:

Staring at your truth makes you blind

She thinks: "That makes a bit of sense," and decides to read on:

"For a depressed person, life has one dimension: an endless gloom.

Where does it come from? Is it from outside, in the form of a long series of bad breaks? Is it coming from inside, i.e. our genes or a sudden anomaly in the production of neurotransmitters?

Joy being multidimensional, it is of course the ideal remedy against depression. It is then imperative to produce it at will, by the means of everything we have discovered and listed in the previous chapters."

The lady is in the midst of desperately leafing through "*Within*," when her daughter gets back. Instead of accusing her mother of indiscretion, Ann realizes at once that it is the first time in years that the elderly lady shows some form of intellectual interest: "It says here we can produce joy at will. I cannot find their bleeping recipe for making it. Help me!"

“Mom, did you know that I figure in this book? And my role is as big as some old stars named Marcel Proust and Jean-Jacque Rousseau.”

“Really? Do tell! These people know how to produce joy? And you do too? Are you bleeping kidding me?”

Chapter 81

Time Slave

Ann says: “Let’s see what “*Within*” can do for someone with a major depressive disorder.”

And she leaves us abruptly with her mother, whose first name happens to be Anne.

What a curious turn of events! Anne, at once on the defensive, does not even wonder who we are, while we try to keep our composure. We certainly cannot pretend to be any kind of therapists, but we assume that fatigue usually increases the amount of gloom in our vision of life. Thus, our first concern is to make Anne as comfortable as possible. Unfortunately, our efforts to appear considerate and well-intentioned are not well received.

Quite aware that Mrs. Anne’s “I” appears like a concrete tower of unhappiness, we must use wisely our writing pass to communicate with her. It could be ethically questionable to shamelessly transform that lady into an open-minded, graceful fairy tale princess. However, we are allowed to use some accessories.

We display in front of Mrs. Anne a dozen bags identical to her daughter’s. The elderly lady can leisurely open any of those, and peek into a very colorfully illustrated quote about joy and satisfaction.

Thankfully, the game appeals to Ann’s mother who pulls out a first quote:

Joy: the wick of the powder keg.

Anne shrugs: “What does it mean? Let’s look at another one.”

No amount of money could make a happy person richer.

Anne smirks: “Give me some money, and I will tell you what I think... Next!”

Laughing is the signal among humans that everything is safe.

Anne yelps: “This fool has never been made fun of. These sentences suck. Let’s try a last one.”

If you enjoy a pleasure because that pleasure is limited and is going to end sooner or later, you chain yourself to Time.

You become a shackled slave who will forever lack the freedom to enjoy pleasure for what it is.

Anne has a mean grin. Her commentary wants to be extremely corrosive: “That is too stupid. Like there is a pleasure that does not end! That is too stupid!”

We take advantage of her brief silence, undoubtedly preceding a salvo of synonyms of “stupid,” to try:

“Yes, pleasures are limited in time. But the sentence is not about that. It is about the way someone enjoys a pleasure.”

“You enjoy it or not. There is no other way.”

“We beg to differ...”

Chapter 82

Faiths Face-Off

Who is voicing this pointed accusation? “You did ‘shamelessly transform your character into an open-minded fairy tale princess’!”

We protest that the episode featuring Anne is actually a transposition of an event we did witness.

The details could be juicy to recount. But it is rather important to first explain our *faith* that “the concrete tower of unhappiness” could crack.

As usual, even if we use a religiously charged term (*faith*), we will be careful to avoid any irrational intervention, operating beyond the laws of physics.

In a mathematical universe, the exception is not the norm, obviously. But in life, the exception is the crux. It is how a decisive mutation occurs; how an asteroid influences the fate of a planet, etc.

On the other hand, in a quantic universe, the observer plays a role, influences what is observed.

Living in a mathematical *and* quantic universe, we do not even need teleology (where the purpose justifies all causes) to account for the miracle of existing.

We can imagine that someday, a highly functional mind will describe and quantify how the observer/actor influences an event; how variations are mathematically, quantically and macroscopically interconnected. (Here, “the macroscopic” plan is the human scale.)

In the meantime, we do *feel* such connection. We can give some examples if we are asked. But talking about it does not give it any more credence! Therefore, rather than *talking* about it, which is intellectualizing it, we are better off, at a personal, pragmatic level, exploring that *feeling*; *immersing* ourselves in it.

This *immersion* allows us to get, before any action, to a point where all possible outcomes are potentially available, and where fear is absent.

That *faith/hope* is an intrinsic element of the relatively neutral *Infinite Present* and should not be confused with *blind faith*.

Even though we tried to address that topic in previous chapters, we feel compelled to bring up another story to describe the vast scope of *faith/hope*, while denouncing the always dangerous *blind faith*.

Chapter 83

Hopscotching Into the Lotus Position

Gautama went famously in a forest with the purpose to remain in meditation until he understood this world of misery. According to one legend, all the fierce animals that roamed in these parts saw him, but carefully stayed away, making sure not to trouble his concentration.

That story is going to be our thought experiment lab to differentiate *blind faith* and *faith/ hope*, which is an intrinsic element of the *Infinite Present*.

We should also have two “control” participants around Gautama: Boudin, a very enthusiastic priest, who takes religious precepts literally and himself seriously, and Pr. Atheist Scientist, aka Pr. AS for his friends, representing the necessary dry voice of reason.

Let’s replay the background story. Gautama is entering the forest without a thought for the fierce animals inhabiting it. After a while, he becomes Buddha, while lions, tigers, venomous snakes, etc., have continuously ignored him. That last fact triggers some disagreement between Pr. AS and Boudin. One sees it as an incredibly fortunate, random event; the other as an effect of the Buddhist meditation power.

Our lab only studies consciousness and its complex networks. In that system of reference, the danger never existed since it did not enter Gautama’s mind at any point.

Whatever motivated the animals to stay away from the sage could be analyzed by others. We do not have the “instruments” to join their speculations. We can only observe that for Gautama everything makes sense and the fact he was kept out of harm’s way is just an element participating to that logic.

Particularly excited by that idyllic vision, Boudin is champing at the bit. He wants in! Believing he is at the level of Gautama, he hopscotches to the Bodhi Tree, where a scorpion is about to sting him. He protests: “I mean no harm as I came as a friend of nature in its wholeness!” From the corner of his eyes he sees some huge, undefined shape, lurking in the bushes. He hesitates “Wait! Can we start over the whole thing?”

Pr. AS smirks: “See? The law of average: Gautama was spared for whatever reason. Now, it is back to normal.”

Our state-of-the-art mind-probe was monitoring Boudin’s thoughts when he entered the forest. It recorded something like an ear-splitting “Charge!” cry, composed mainly by confused fear sublimated by an exalted recklessness: *blind faith!*

Chapter 84

Before Cones Collide

After last chapter's thought experiment, Pr. AS has this jaded comment: "Boudin exemplifies indeed an absurd *blind faith*. But Gautama was not conscious of any danger. Therefore, he did absolutely not illustrate your so-called *faith/hope*."

Noting that Gautama is already a rather defined character in our culture, it would be a little shocking to hear him recite "*Within*" simplistic dialogues. It could be less outrageous to transform him into Gautawithin, a fictitious but self-realized stand-in for Gautama.

Before his departure for the forest, we warn Gautawithin about the dangers awaiting him in the jungle. At first, he thanks us and decides to stay put. But the members of his family, his neighbors, perhaps the mayor of the city, plus a series of curious incidents conspire to keep him extremely busy.

As spiritually gifted as Gautawithin may be, he does need some distance to *understand everything*. There is a simple reason why *natural philosophers* do not become automatically self-realized beings. It is called *everyday struggles*.

That is why a weary Gautawithin comes back to ask us what the dangers prowling in the forest are, exactly.

We dutifully repeat what we have learned, but we must acknowledge it could be considered hearsay.

"I will be cautious," smiles Gautawithin, as he leaves to sit down under the Bodhi Tree.

Pr. AS and Boudin, holding hands in an awkward harmony, ask that we place a scorpion near him, and some huge, undefined shape, lurking in the bushes.

We must reluctantly yield to their requests.

Gautawithin inspects carefully his seat, sees the scorpion, greets it and guides it away with a tree branch. Then, while in meditation, he does feel a presence near him. As he is already in nirvana, he remains immobile until he realizes that the commotion was due to two frolicking monkeys.

He has the brightest smile. But Pr. AS and Boudin protest, again in perfect unison, demanding to replace the mischievous primates by a 600 pounds tiger. "You must do it in the name of science! Even your reader is agreeing with us."

To spare our reader from being put on any hot seat, we give in, once again.

Interestingly, our “instruments” can detect that when Gautawithin sees the big cat coming deliberately towards him, his adrenalin is liberally flowing and his “I” is in high alert, as it should! Our hero looks away, evaluating his chances to escape toward the path he came from, if he could somehow distract the animal. His whole being is ready for the next move. Since he cannot look directly at the tiger, he squints, almost closing his eyes and waits. When the tiger stops, he slowly gets up...

Pr. AS objects coldly: “I would not find logical that your character survives an encounter with a tiger.”

Must we remind him that this thought experiment is not meant to show Gautama as a tiger whisperer? Our purpose is to illustrate what could be *faith/hope* for someone immersed in the *Infinite Present*: as long as life is springing, all possibilities are present.

Pr. AS is impervious to such reasoning. So, we must bring to his attention a previous thought experiment, where he was featured prominently. He remembers at once how hypnotized he was by the *transition point* where his “life cone” appeared to dissolve in all the other events in the universe.

Gautawithin puts a comforting hand on Pr. AS’s shoulder: “You see how alike we are.”

Chapter 85

Rain Dance and Politics

Last chapter, when Gautawithin “put a comforting hand on Pr. AS’s shoulder and said ‘You see how alike we are,’” the old Homo sapiens that we are mutated into a new, evolved, *more humane* species.

Is that statement bold enough?

To elaborate, we need to fill our thought experiment lab with the following characters:

A slave owner and a slave; a Khmer Rouge and a Cambodian civilian; a cardinal belonging to the Roman Inquisition and Giordano Bruno; a wealthy, conservative person and a starving beggar; a rapist and his victim; a Chinese soldier and a Tibetan nun in the 1960’s; quite unexpectedly here, Louis Pasteur’s colleagues when they rejected his theories and Pasteur; an armed Nazi and a Jewish family; Cortés’s soldiers and indigenous villagers in the Americas; a gang member with a gun and an unlucky passerby; Socrates’s judges and Socrates; occupying soldiers pillaging an enemy’s village; a school bully and his or her victim; Al-Hallaj’s judges and Hallaj; a racist and the man of the color he hates...

The reader interrupts our “scientific” arrangements with a seemingly innocent question: “Isn’t our lab close to maximum capacity?”

The objection is fair. Now, all the victims must utter to their counterparts: “If I bleed, aren’t I bleeding exactly like you?”

The other side answers negatively without any hesitation.

Cognitive dissonance rules! The “I’s” of all these executioners give a plethora of reasons to justify how different they are from the disgusting wrecks on the other side.

If, among all the tragic characters summoned for our thought experiment we have also invited Pasteur, it is to remind the reader of Max Planck’s quip:

Science progresses funeral by funeral.

Likewise, when we see two stanch political opponents debating, even if one party is more logical, more in tune with the real needs of the *polis*, the society in a deeper sense of the term, nothing will ever come out of the debate.

All in all, there is a better chance for us to choreograph an instantaneously successful rain dance than to have an unfair politician or a mistaken scientist opening his arms and sobbing: “I cannot believe how wrong I have been all that time!

When an ancient myth involves a miracle, some people read it literally. They believe in the event historicity.

The *natural philosophers* see in the very same myth a symbol they can use for their inner quest.

For instance, if Jesus has healed a blind man or has resuscitated a dead one, two thousand years ago, it is a nice tale. But for a mystic, Jesus’s true message has the power to give sight to people who are blind to another dimension. Being spiritually impaired has always been rampant, as we know:

Staring at your truth makes you blind

And there are all these men and women, rigid in their beliefs based on hatred. Nothing can move them. Their minds look frighteningly invaded by *rigor mortis*, the cadaveric rigidity.

Imagine now a superior being who has the power to cure spiritual blindness and melt this horrible rigidity into an open mind, limber, filled with curiosity and compassion.

That occurrence would be one million time more incredible than curing a body, and should truly be qualified of “miraculous.”

After this little reminder, let’s go back to our packed lab and finish our thought experiment.

Chapter 86

Rapid Geneless Mutation

Gautawithin “put a comforting hand on Pr. AS’s shoulder” when the scientist remembered seeing his own *life cone* fading in the steamrolling density of all the universe’s events.

Actually, what he saw exactly can only be indirectly estimated by our thought experiment “instruments.” We know that Pr. AS was speechless, which must mean that he was deeply troubled; and that Gautawithin’s presence reassured him.

We also know that it was not the dramatic imminent dissolution of his “I” that affected him most. It was its mysterious chore: what was that quickly elapsing “I” made of, exactly?

Gautawithin’s “You see how alike we are?” was much more than the true but dialectically inefficient riddle “If I bleed, aren’t I bleeding exactly like you?”

It abruptly awoke a formidable craving *to know*.

Our semi-antagonist character, who is supposed to be 112 years old, wondered if in all these years he even noticed once how “alike we all are?”

The proximity of the transformation of his *life cone* may have helped the question to be more visceral than intellectual.

Pr. AS was at last ready to have a true “heart to heart” conversation with Gautawithin, or even with Boudin, or for that matter, with any human being. The “miracle” described in the previous chapter had occurred: his mind was limber!

Consequently, in our packed though experiment lab, we just need to extrapolate what has just happened and show to all “the executioners” something like the end of their *life cones*.

So close to a most critical transition, their “I” would seem to melt like a meteorite pulled to the center of the sun. But that *formidable craving* would still emerge. Will their victims, also present in the lab during that thought experiment, be able to put their hands on their shoulders to reassure them?

And now, isn’t it tempting to extend the same “technique” to all the oppressors currently living among us? That is how humanity could rid itself of all genocides, pogroms, slavery, greedy exploitations, violent coercions, intellectual and spiritual rigidity, etc.

It would be as if our species has mutated into a *more humane* one!

The most beautiful part of that idea is that it is about to happen!

We are not even daydreaming. We are not thinking of using any fictional universe-freezing superpowers!

It may not be instantaneous, but this *mutation* could actually happen this very century.

Chapter 87

The Race to a Geneless Mutation

In the previous chapter, we have imagined that, exposed to the proximity of a life-boggling event, a mind mutates by becoming limber.

Of course, outside of a thought-experimental lab, injecting the vision of the evaporation of a *life cone* could appear technically challenging. Thankfully, there is a more common procedure.

Let's replay in slow motion what happened to Pr. AS. After his many decades of atheist-scientist existence, his attention got eventually polarized by an essential question.

Now, how can we get real contemporary actual or potential *torturers* to have their attention *polarized*, when we do not have any sophisticated *life-cone* projector at our disposal?

It just so happens that "*Within*" is dealing with that very *essential question* and it is answering it.

At that juncture, we are expecting the reader to yell almost hysterically: "I knew it! I am reading the pamphlet of a sect claiming it can create a superhuman race just by reciting some lines!"

Actually, all the concepts contained in "*Within*" are common knowledge.

Thousands of authors discuss as we speak the same topics, in many forms.

"*Within*" would love to see in its theories a case of *vertical synchronicity* where, from ancient myths to the most sophisticated 21st century cosmogonies, all the various *natural philosophers* echo each other and culminate in that unique opus.

However, it is infinitely more plausible to consider that "*Within*" reflects a *horizontal synchronicity*, where its ideas can be found in a multitude of places, forms and contexts. That means that, right this instant, "the executioners" are already "assailed" by *essential questioning*."

Humanity has been and is currently badly scarred by familiar ignorance, which incites "the common ignorant and potential executioners" to act brutally and swiftly. Will their minds open up before they initiate a new senseless war or another genocide?

The unconditional fans of the *Infinite Present* know that sooner or later, humanity will mutate into a more *humane* species. Wouldn't it be a delight to see that in this lifetime?

Chapter 88

We Plead Again Lack of Knowledge

In 1881, Friedrich Nietzsche wrote:

The most important result of the past efforts of humanity is that we need no longer to go about in continual fear of wild beasts, barbarians, gods, and our own dreams.

In our century, we can add to that still relevant list that we no longer need to fear dualism and pseudo-scientific cosmogonies, natural killers of personal poetry for the benefit of pure materialism and its goon, *imbecile randomness*.

Imbecile randomness being as arbitrary as *Willful intervention*, we plead lack of definitive information to stay as far away as we can from both. These theories are not very helpful in our lifelong *quest for an inalterable peace of mind*.

One interesting consequence of rejecting the dogmatic *Imbecile randomness* is the elimination of its intrinsic unpredictability from our daily lives.

Meaninglessness is one terrible anxiety provoking factor

Instead of *Imbecile randomness* and *Willful intervention*, we progress in a background of hard to decipher awe-inspiring clues.

Moreover, our goal is to breathe as much as we can an *Infinite Present*, which excludes *Imbecile randomness*, thus fear itself!

Here, the reader may feel that the repetition rate and the volume of our vehemence are rapidly increasing. The proximity of this book's end could explain that frenzy.

The remaining pages should contain a few chosen items from the *Taoist Bird/Mendel of Kotzk's* large reserve. They are supposed to clarify somewhat some concepts we have already touched on, earlier.

If this chapter started with the mention of the purely materialistic, currently popular pseudo-scientific cosmogonies, it is because "*Within*" sings the praises of what is subtle, easy to ignore for people unwilling to explore what is... within.

How can we prove anything, even a permanent smile if

Satisfaction cannot be stored

Staying faithful to the quest of what leaves no trace is not always easy in a society imbued with thick “materialistic,” “physical” references.

Here is an observation apparently simplistic, but meaningful on several levels:

*If you have found a few nuggets of gold, there is no need to think
or to have others think it is the biggest gold mine in the world.*

You still have the gold

What the *Philosopher’s Stone*’s adventurer has found may not be the nirvana. It is still the nirvana, in the sense that this “*inalterable*” *peace of mind* is only *flexible*. It is still a *peace of mind*.

If Buddha or a contemporary self-realized person comes one day to affirm with exquisite kindness that our system is unequivocally not the nirvana, and if, due to our organic ignorance, that radiant being cannot communicate directly the *real* nirvana, the system described in this book remains an inexhaustible source of discoveries. We still have *the (spiritual) gold*.

Chapter 89

The Ass of the Fable

The *Taoist Bird/Mendel of Kotzk's* coffers are overflowing with material about what we have labeled the *Infinite Present*, but that has certainly many different names in other places and times.

The reader may have a doubt and wonder if it is really a nomenclature problem: how do we know that all these thinkers, so different from us and from each other, were talking specifically about the *Infinite Present*, so essential to “*Within*”?

The answer is unequivocally: we have no idea!

Quite simplistically, all human beings are confronted to *Senescence and Death*. It is truly the classical Sphinx's riddle: if you do not answer it correctly, you are devoured.

Seen from a distance, 100% of humans have failed to give the right solution since all of them have died, and a very sizable proportion of them went to their demise in unsavory circumstances.

However, if we adjust our perspective, we realize that it is not only 100% of humans, but 100% of everything that had to endure the same seemingly catastrophic transformation.

From that vantage point, the Sphinx's riddle makes more sense in the following form: “Is there a meaning in all that?”

Like every human being that has ever grazed this planet, the author of “*Within*” had to answer the riddle. It has gathered some information, brewed it through its personal experience and it came up with an enthusiastic testimony: “Yes, there is a meaning. An inner search deserves to be undertaken to find it.”

Of course, the *gathered information*, the *personal experiences*, as well as its *brewing technique* are not universal but desperately individual. Therefore, one way to convince others its declaration has any weight could be, for instance, to take a cane and turn it into a serpent, which it cannot do well at all.

Unexpectedly, our reader yells suddenly: “Numbers 2:21-35! I now believe!”

Not certain how to interpret that intervention, the author of “*Within*” marvels nonetheless over this very rare dialogue, almost in real time, between a writer and a reader.

While an “I now believe” coming from nowhere seems a little suspect, it could be interpreted as a call for more explanations: “The reader is invited to just look inside. Nowadays, the process

may be called 'metacognition.' But the simple, systematic commitment to be aware of one's own thoughts is incredibly rewarding. Please, do try! There is no doubt in my mind you will also encounter the *Infinite Present*... Wait... What? Why are you staring at me like that?"

"If you had even a nugget of *inalterable peace of mind*, shouldn't you kind of glow?"

"I do, inside... At times."

"It is true that while I was reading "*Within*," I thought "This is indeed miraculous!" In `Numbers 2:21-35,' there is also a speaking donkey."

"That is so incredibly mature! Do you see me laughing?"

"Don't lose your peace of mind! *You still have the gold*, don't you?"

Chapter 90

May I Borrow That Mountain?

We have mentioned earlier that the *Infinite Present* is “relatively neutral.”

Let’s imagine a consciousness entering a soothing dimension where it is stripped from the torments of past traumas and humiliations, even the most recent ones. It is also rid from any trepidation fogging the uncertain future.

The *Infinite Present* erases as well the *common* present, inhabited by a multitude of odd concerns, like “Wait until I tell that to my friends!” or “I am so upset that X, Y or Z is not here to share that special moment with me,” or “Where is my camera when I need it?”

The *Infinite Present*, located beyond the emotions so near and dear to the “I” could indeed be qualified of being “neutral.”

Vladimir Jankelevitch wrote:

Every real occasion is a hapax; that is it has no precedent, no reissue, no foretaste or aftertaste; it does not announce itself by warning signs and does not know a second time.

The word “hapax” refers to a word that appears only once in a book or in the works of an author. For us, it is an event that only appears once in the universe, as it is perceived through our ephemeral consciousness.

Appreciating such “neutrality” is not obvious. The difficulty is rather well illustrated here by Paul Valéry:

What to do with a mountain?

I often complain that I am not able to enjoy something without feeling inside the temptation to do something with it. To paint it, analyze it - assimilate it - in the biological sense: to feed (from it)

Many thinkers claim that in order to appreciate the existence, one needs a “developing pigment,” For them, it has to be a brightly colored, indispensable layer of *peaks and valleys*.

The *Infinite Present* saves us from such a wasteful intermediary.

Chapter 91

Exit *Within*. Enters *The Quest for The Inalterable Stone*

Most epic sagas crisscrossing our cultural heritage can be perceived as multilayered. There is always a literal, colorful tale, filled with action, desires, struggles, vengeance, etc.

But at times, when the children are asleep, the storytellers would lower their voices and say with a mysterious glance: “There is another meaning to that story...”

Before starting “*Within*,” basically a compilation of *natural philosophy* around a spiritual quest undertaken by an odd reader/writer team, our author thought of hijacking *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, a wonderful example of multi-level tale.

Another possibility was to use the initiatory pattern drawn by the medieval Chrétien de Troyes, whose heroes would come across the ultimate prize almost by chance, lose it because they are not in control, and eventually find it again after a painful odyssey.

There are also the classical stories where a prince/princess (like the Little Ash Boy or Cinderella) is suddenly destitute, victim of some evil plot designed by malevolent usurpers. After dozens of fantastic adventures, the young heroes regain their throne and become the best sovereigns in the history of the world.

So, the tentatively titled *The Quest for the Inalterable Stone* first draft started like this:

People who want to feel emotional (angry, resentful, vengeful, intolerant, etc.) find reasons to be even more emotional than those sharing their emotions: reinforcement of violence.

The destitute young hero confronts the lowest feelings prevailing in society

The makers of fortunes have a second love of money as a creation of their own, resembling the affection of authors for their own poems, or of parents for their children.

They suffered as much as they devoted themselves to suffering

Saint Augustine

Hence they are very bad company, for they can talk about nothing but the praises of wealth.

Plato

The hero adopts blindly some of these biases

*But the things come into existence only when our neighbor confirms them with a smile
And what he does not envy,*

we forget them swiftly and so easily"

From R.M. Rilke

Not being recognized by anyone is like not seeing one's reflection in the mirror. It triggers indeed an unbearable pain,.

Solitude comes when we are not *loved*

If you are lonely when you're alone, you are in bad company.

Sartre (?)

*If the lover lives one day it is like a candle
That means in tears and in fire*

Farid ud dîn 'Attar

He does not want to love anymore, the one who runs away from pain

The one who loves must eternally feel the hollow absence and keep the wound open

Always

From Novalis,

Isn't the 'will to know' a confrontation with your fear of the unknown? Isn't it for you the need to make it more familiar? Don't you want to conquer (the unknown), making it yours?

From Nietzsche

Angel! Here, then!

Here I show it to you

Here and again!

So that standing before your eyes, it comes to being and is finally saved!

May it be, then! And standing forever!

From Rilke

(The spiritual man) is like a famished man who does not only want the knowledge of (delicious) foods but who strives to eat them

From Milarepa

The hero struggles with solitude

At some point, the hero "falls in love," but it is an ambiguous feeling, reaping savagely apart the prince/princess beliefs

Now, the hero fully embraces the spiritual quest.

The trials of existence start to make sense for the hero

"Raise, great winds

Come, zephyr

Blow on my garden so the scents can be smelled

From "The Song of Songs"

The hero eventually understands:

*Always pay your tribute to this mother
Sanbhavi, who, in the shape of the ego,
standing on the South-East petal gives to
Bharrava (Felicity/Absolute Reality) the
flowers of selfishness.*

From Abhinavagupta

*And what happens to the soul when she tastes
more joy to find or find again what she likes,
rather than possess it constantly?*

From Saint Augustine

And the conclusion, well phrased by
Augustine...

Chapter 92

Exit *The Quest for The Inalterable Stone*. Reenters *Within*

On the threshold of the spiritual treasure, a cluster of carefully chosen *Taoist Bird/Mendel of Kotzk's* extracts was already awaiting the young hero of the tentatively titled *Quest for the Inalterable Stone*.

The first quote had to be the paradoxical:

*He who knows (the Tao) does not (care to) speak (about it);
he who is (ever ready to) speak about it does not know (the Tao)*

The prince/princess had of course to meet somehow our Master Eckhart:

*'Tis there, 'tis here,
'tis far, 'tis near,
'tis high, 'tis low
yet all we know
is: This it's not and That it's not.
It's clear, it's bright,
it's dark as night
Immobile, bare,
'tis flowing there.
As a child become, both blind and dumb.
Thy own self's aught must turn to naught.
Both aught and naught thou must reject,
without a trace of image, time, or space.*

Among the wise literary gems, the hero was bound to encounter this sentence from "The Sutra of the Perfect Awakening":

Son, all these obstacles are the Ultimate Awakening. Non-changing consciousness and ever-changing consciousness are themselves the Liberation!

That text was translated by Lilian Silburn who wrote the following lines about what is, for us, the secret of the *Philosopher's Stone*, no less:

The timeless Awakening can only take place within our sense of time through the Instant, so that the Deliverance occurs in an Instant, but (also) at each and every Instant (...)

Deliverance is realized thought after thought, instant after instant.

The vigilant attitude (not to conceive and project but to remain in the Instant) is rather an absence of vigilant attitude.

And there is also an excerpt of a commentary on a superb text from Marcel Proust's *Time Regained*.

Proust describes a being that feeds only on the essence of things. It is its only sustenance, its delights.

The observation of the present cannot satisfy (this person), because the senses are unable to capture the essence of things. For Proust, this incapacity is due to the potent, functional, restless intelligence he calls "utilitarian."

That intelligence decomposes reality, assigning as worthy to be considered only what fits its needs, squeezing dry what the past could have offered, designing a future composed of fragments from a present and a past carefully stripped of their reality.

But if a sound, a smell, heard and inhaled in the past, are heard and smelled anew, both in the present and in the past, real without being current, ideal without being abstract, at once the permanent, usually hidden essence of things is liberated.

And this person's true self, which at times seemed inert, dead, comes back to life when it receives that heavenly food.

In order to be felt and appreciated, that instant, unshackled from the chain of time, must then free that being from the chain of time.

Such person can understandably be confident about the nature of the tremendous joy felt at that moment. While the simple taste of a madeleine does not seem enough to explain logically the causes of that joy, its evidence renders the term "death" meaningless. For the one who stands outside of time cannot fear the future.

The author of the nascent *Quest for the Inalterable Stone* tried very hard to mix Proust's detailed observation and its exotic epic.

It obviously did not succeed. That failure, for better or for worse, led to "Within" current format.

Chapter 93

Here Is Something to Peck On

The previous commentary of Marcel Proust's *Time Regained* summarizes perfectly the relationship between the "I" (here the "*utilitarian intelligence*"), *the Infinite Present* (here the "*instant, unshackled from the chain of time*") and the "*tremendous joy felt in that instant.*"

However, after that passage, Proust added that this "trompe-l'œil" (an optical illusion) that connects a moment of the past "incompatible with the present" does not last.

Would that mean that Marcel Proust and the author of "*Within*" are significantly diverging?

Actually, that question is not too relevant, because the illustrious French classic has just been *phagocytized* (again), a process we have explained in an early chapter.

We should repeat that our goal is not to attempt any blasphemous analysis of famous novelists, celebrated philosophies, scientific theories, etc. Our purpose is *only* to find the *Philosopher's Stone: an inalterable peace of mind.*

Every thought that has preceded us is fair game. We need it to fuel our research.

Scholarly studies on Proust, Relativity, Taoism, etc. will never owe us any decisive insight.

The verb "to owe" brings to mind a pointed question. The reader surely understands the desire to gather as much information as possible as well as new inspirations from very different sources. But one may wonder about the necessity to write an entire book about a personal quest. After all, "*Within*" preaches an individual approach to philosophy and posits that, because of the gap between understanding and feeling, the communication of the *consciousness cartography* has to break down very fast.

Moreover, we were very recently reminded that

He who is (ever ready to) speak about (the Ultimate truth) does not know it

Enjoying what it has discovered, hopefully an *inalterable peace of mind*, should be sufficient, shouldn't it? Does it have to trumpet it and write a whole opus around it?

Our author's protests it did not do it for the sake of creation, but for... nourishment? It explains that in some cultures, when a person salutes another one, they salute the God they see in each other.

Our cultural background being a little different, it is more spontaneous for us to salute the human being in the other one. We recognize that this being is set on the same ephemeral journey, having to answer the same Sphinx's riddle with, for horizon, the same *Senescence and Death*.

By the way, was there a time when we saw in that inexorable course a competition or a race? How absurd is the image of a race to dying?

The beauty of living in the 21st century is that we can fathom that a particle or a cell is individual and part of a vast network at the same time.

It is indeed natural to be appreciative of our singularity as well as of the network without which we would not exist.

In our quest of the *Philosopher's Stone*, we have been and are still currently helped by the knowledge of the whole humanity. Isn't it only normal to give to another curious mind something to peck on?

Chapter 94

Masters of Clay and Glass

There is this famous adage:

When the disciple is ready, the master appears.

Some people may start yelling, sooner rather than later: “Hey, master! I am ready! You can come!”

But the maxim seems to address the readiness of the researcher, not the automatic arrival of a master of flesh and bones.

It would be tempting to have Ann illustrate that point but, according to a persisting rumor, she became self-realized since the last time we saw her for some thought experiment.

Instantaneously aware of our quandary, Ann intervenes: “I can certainly clarify again the author’s blurry theories. But first, I should justify why it is relevant for a character to testify about her experiences, especially on the topic of readiness.

I came originally from a story created by a British thinker. In “*Within*,” I became the epitome of a *simple* person, without much of an education or an interesting life.

I had the distinction to be intrigued by an event, uncommon but certainly not life-changing, like having a child or inheriting a great fortune.

My author made me curious, but stubborn. My mind was “*filled with gloom and rancor*.” I would easily jump to conclusions, voicing loudly my displeasure when proven wrong, bumping accidentally upon new concepts, but paradoxically prompt to fight these newly found ideas. The adverb “reluctantly” described usually my way of progressing philosophically and spiritually. As I evolved, I turned more skeptical. To top it off, I was made “*allergic to meditation*”! Once, I got to use the *Mirror that makes all Demons vanish*, but that did not prevent me from doubting myself. As a “simple woman,” I was set up to confront famous literary icons, neurophysiologists, atheists-scientists, etc.

And now I would be magically “self-realized”? Do we need any more hints to affirm that I, Ann, am undoubtedly the author of this book?

This is very much like Chuang-Tzu dreaming he was a butterfly, or the butterfly dreaming it was Chuang-Tzu.

All the pitfalls and providential help that I encountered did happen, except than in the life of my author, they would often occur in a less romanticized form.

I cannot recall one of the essential notions found in “*Within*” that it did not first reject as preposterous.

Indeed, every bold “eureka” statement pronounced in this book came after long and sometimes uncomfortable ruminations.

Most initial intellectual rejection, marking its banal ignorance, were thankfully followed by a personal questioning.

Reflections, experimentations on oneself equate to “the disciple getting ready,” and an understanding that did not exist before constitutes “the appearance of the master.”

That is most certainly this author’s path.

Personally, I would have expressed that concept of self-readiness in a more accessible way. Milarepa said more tellingly:

When the jug that contained what is most precious to you falls down and shatters, that jug becomes your master.”

By the way, since I find myself with the writer’s quill, I might as well help out the stoic reader who is still hoping to receive a more concrete *Philosopher’s Stone*. Many pages ago, the author of “*Within*” admitted: “The *Philosopher’s Stone* cannot be transmitted by words.” That commendable awareness did not stop it from composing 90+ chapters.

If I do not put an END to it, who will?”