

In this Cycle, we focused on the concept of Awakening, having just engaged in a Cycle of Sleep and quiescence. We took an approach partly guided by the imagery of the Tower card (XVI) of the Tarot deck. While it can be taken as representing disaster, destruction, or catastrophe, another way of looking at this symbol is to see it as representing irrevocable change. Disasters are unchangeable events that alter one's reality. For example, part of our model of daily life might presume that we live with our significant other in the same physical location, we regularly derive income from regular work activities, and so on; in other words, a model based on expectations of regularity and habit. The sudden death of a loved one or a natural calamity can enforce a radical change of this model.

However, what if this change is similarly radical, but something willed in nature, harnessing the energy of the Tower, so that we engage in practice that results in profound changes in our model of the Universe? Epiphany and catastrophe are in this way related, both being sudden, permanent, and impactful. Perhaps there is a certain coherence here that brings up the way in which awe and terror can be seen as jointly reflecting a similar emotional state.

To my mind, it is the process of Awakening that helps one realize that such a change may be due, and how it is possible even before it happens, so that a subjectively apprehended change can precede its expression in the objective universe. How does one purposely work towards awakening in a limited period of time? A bevy of religious traditions, esoteric schools, and the self-help industry provide multiple accounts on how to engage in this work, often in long-term fashion. Yet during the work of this Cycle I found that what I was calling 'Awakening' was describing a drastically shortened time frame encompassing both the identification of opportunities, needs, and possibilities for radical change, as well as its enaction.

My strategy for this Cycle was to engage in a triadic study inspired by Olav Hammer's *Claiming Knowledge*. I looked towards input from tradition, science, and personal experience to inform this process. As traditional practice, I researched and engaged in the process of jhāna meditation as promoted by Pa Auk Sayadaw, as described in the text *Practicing the Jhanas* (Snyder et al.). For scientific review, I read Thomas Metzinger's *The Ego Tunnel* - I had read it once before, but in a pretty cursory way. For experiential work, I engaged in regular dream work and automatic drawing processes. On occasion I would try to link these efforts, making drawings and then focusing on them with intent before dreaming, and then using recalled dream content to inform further drawings. I also engaged in a dream round with some other Initiates for a week.

I found the jhāna meditation fruitful as it helped to focus my concentration and reduce distraction in general. I am still engaged in this practice. There is this described phenomenon of the *nimitta* that arises that serves as a focus of concentration in the practice of *anapanasati* meditation (mindfulness meditation focused on the breath), in which there is apprehension of a visualized 'light' of sorts, a reflection of mind that persists after the cessation of sensory input. This has reinforced for me, outside of meditative practice, the need for constant efforts at reducing sensory, psychological, and cognitive 'noise', that prevent us from listening to ourselves - that prevents us from being awake.

What we consciously apprehend of our objective universe is a fraction of all potential stimuli, as well as the stimuli that we subconsciously attend to. We work consciously with a model

of reality that meets the limits and bandwidth of our working memory and attention. Metzinger puts forward the provocative notion that the soul is comprised of this phenomenal self-model:

*'My theory—the self-model theory of subjectivity—says that this subtle body does indeed exist, but it is not made of “angel stuff ” or “astral matter.” It is made of pure information, flowing in the brain...The subtle body is the brain’s self-model, and scientific research on the OBE [out-of-body experience] shows this in a particularly striking way.'*

Metzinger argues that this model is 'transparent' - that we do not typically realize that it is a limited model of self that we live through, one that provides us with various affordances that facilitate our engagement with the world. Through his text, he attempts to bring us some sense of metacognition by discussing how experience and awareness are altered in the setting of altered states of consciousness, drawing upon a variety of experimental data and interviews.

On the experiential end, my dreams were composed of myself engaged in mundane activities with the occasional strange detail or interaction - fairly par for the course. However, one exception to this pattern was a dream in which I dreamt that I was meditating, and that I had a vision of this mutating dark geometric star-like construct before me, fleeting in nature. As for the automatic drawings, what came out of this practice was a feeling of how random shapes and motions would create compositions that could then be interpreted; it felt like a kind of scrying, assembling higher level content from lower-level shapes/stimuli. I then took each of these drawings I took as being partly representative of myself. I enclose a few examples here.

One question I take from these efforts is: what if our souls are at least partly constituted by our subjective models of the Universe? Metzinger's work suggests this is the case with regards to how consciousness models reality. But perhaps a corollary is that we can in fact engage in personal soulcraft by modulating our personal apprehension of this model, a model that is created out of our own learning, our own experience, and our own experimentation. In this sense, immortality of the soul can be seen as the perpetuation of a model of reality. So perhaps various dominant cultures and ideologies can be seen as partly constituting our souls, which in my mind argues for greater exposure to various philosophies, experiences, sciences, and cultures, in order to break out of these baked-in limitations and to give us substrate to further define and create our own models/souls.

To summarize what I have gotten out of this Cycle's Work:

An appreciation for the reduction of noise.

The soul as model of reality.

Opportunities for self-assembly through the coordination of ideas and imagery/sensory input acquired in illustrative work.