

## Chapter Two

### Four Ages of Human Evolution

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- Historical Overview
- The Age of Taurus
- The Age of Aries
- The Age of Pisces
- The Age Of Aquarius

At one time human nature was split in two, an executive part called a god, and a follower part called a man. Neither part was conscious.

--Julian Jaynes, 1976

It's clear that members of surviving primitive hunting and gathering bands possess sensing abilities foreign to most of us, abilities to sense underground water in desert areas, to find directions and locate position on cloudy days, and, in some cases, to "view" game animals that are out of range of the conventional senses.

--George Leonard, 1978

Who in the outside world has worked wonders, raised the dead, expelled demons? No one. Such deeds are done by monks. It is their reward. People in secular life cannot do these things, for, if they could, what then would be the point of ascetic practice and the solitary life?

--John Climacus, 700ad

Cosmic Consciousness is . . . a consciousness of the cosmos, that is, of the life and order of the universe. . . . There occurs . . . an indescribable feeling of elevation, elation and joyousness, . . . a sense of immortality, a consciousness of eternal life . . .

--R. M. Bucke, 1901

The Age of Pisces dawned with the story of a man who rose from the dead, but was no ghost. He could eat bread and drink wine, and still had the marks of the nails in his hands. Yet there was something startling about him. Sometimes he shone whiter than snow and could walk through walls. His disciples found they could speak in their own rude tongue and be understood by Persians and Medes. They had the same powers as the risen man. They gave the blind sight, made the lame walk, and they could even cast out devils. Whole towns emptied, as the god-struck followers retired to caves and stone huts in the deserts of Egypt, Syria, and Palestine.

Now with Aquarius on the horizon, we hear some of the same themes. People who have been declared dead have returned to tell us of the brightly shining beings they have seen and the transcendent feelings and convictions that have turned their values upside down. Others are able to see us all as shining egg-shaped auras of light, and by manipulating them heal our solid bodies of flesh. A white buffalo was recently born in Wisconsin-possibly in fulfillment of a Lakota millennial prophecy. People are experimenting with lucid dreaming, out-of-body journeys, and shamanism. Others claim to be "downloading" wisdom from aliens,

intergalactic beings of light, who are beaming love and exotic knowledge onto this planet from distant stars or "mother ships." Their message--despite its techno-jargon--is structurally almost identical with Gnostic mythologies that flourished two thousand years ago.

What is going on here? Is New Age enthusiasm a throw-back to earlier ages we thought we had passed? Does the prospect of a new century, a new millennium, a New Age, bring out the most hare-brained concoctions of the human mind? Does an impending series of zeroes in our reckoning of the years remind us of death and put us on the lookout for the evidence of something eternal?

A century ago when the impressive figure of 1900 loomed in the immediate future, Europe and America witnessed a spiritualism craze. People gathered around tables in Victorian parlors to hold "seances" in which the spiritually gifted contacted the souls of the dead and relayed their messages to the living. One of the most extraordinary of these mediums, a certain Mlle. Hélène Smith of Geneva, claimed to have discovered former lives in fifteenth century India and on the planet Mars. She brought back marvelous stories from the red planet about its advanced technology at a time when astronomers had discovered what appeared to be "canals" in its surface -- possible evidence of an intelligent civilization.

The Swiss psychologist Theodore Flournoy studied Mlle. Smith intensively for five years and published a book on his findings, *From India to the Planet Mars* (1900). Although only three years earlier he had confessed that the Martian language the medium spoke had a strangeness and consistency that inclined him to accept its extraterrestrial origins, by the conclusion of his work he had determined that the seemingly extra-planetary tongue was a syllable-for-syllable encoded version of French. Once the system for transforming the sounds of "Martian" into those of Mlle. Smith's own language were uncovered, all the idioms and slang of contemporary French speech were clearly revealed.

Flournoy showed, too, that every one of Hélène's amazing factual references to fifteenth century India could be found in her father's library. Everything was due to "cryptomnesia," "hidden forgetting." Facts she had long forgotten reappeared when she "shifted her consciousness" into seance mode. Information she thought she derived from extraterrestrials and journeys through time turned out to be nothing more than what she could have told us herself a few years earlier -- before she forgot. *From India to the Planet Mars*, therefore, became a classic in twentieth century psychology, showing that events experienced as taking place "outside" the observer can be fruitfully shown to arise from "within."

It also raised a fire-storm of criticism from the offended believers in the factual reality of spiritualist claims. Flournoy only *seemed* to have debunked their favorite medium. Actually, he was a narrow-minded and benighted rationalist. Was the New Age was about to explode into action 100 years ago until it was smothered by the scientific obsessions of the dying Old Age? Were the Martians speaking only to be muzzled by the psychologists?

Now that a New Age mentality has gained some real strength, perhaps we will finally hear what they have to tell us. Or are we indeed inclined to fool ourselves at the end of centuries and millennia? For we are faced again today with claims resembling those of Hélène Smith: astral journeys to distant stars, channeling the wisdom of aliens, and the like. New Agers speak of angels, totem animals, and aliens who perform gruesome experiments upon humans

by the tens of thousands. And if we try to speak of psychodynamics, archetypes, psychic energy, and the self, they hear us denying the reality of their experience. "Your angels are *nothing but* unconscious projections," they hear us say. They want none of it.

A patient of mine was taken on a guided imagery journey to a planet in the system Sirius, where she was told that this foreign orb was her home planet. She is not really an Earthling; she is a Sirian sent here to instruct the rest of us. When I pointed out that she could view this intergalactic journey as a dream that describes how painfully alienated she feels everyday in her dealings with her associates, she smiled indulgently. "You can look at it that way if you wish," she said; "but you only have part of the story."

I have no doubt my attempted interpretation had merit, and it is also true that an alienated person needs to find a new identity. But from Sirius? As a Jungian analyst, I want to see this story *symbolically*. But my patient insists on its literal truth. Am I muzzling her as Flournoy did his Hélène? Would not someone who had *really* traveled to Sirius have been "monumentally shocked"? Would it not have rearranged her lifeworld? Surely it should have become the central issue in our meetings for months thereafter. In fact, however, it has not. I have heard nothing more about it. Although muzzling cannot be excluded, the Sirian visit must have played some other role in my patient's life.

Evidently it functioned as a declaration of her belief in the New Age. She wants to believe she is part of a revolution in human consciousness, one of a new breed already living in the new Aquarian world. Her trip to Sirius proves to her that she has the psychic powers that identify her as part of that elite. New Agers speak of a giant leap forward in human evolution that has barely begun. We will all be changed in the twinkling of an eye, perhaps in the year 2000ad or perhaps when the stars show that the Age of Pisces has yielded to that of Aquarius.

The New Age embraces a mythic form of history in which the order of the cosmos directs our destiny and may be read in the sky. They say that Pisces has been a narrow-minded and contentious age. They point to its logo, a pair of fish swimming in opposite directions, symbolizing duality, contradiction, war, and the rationality of right versus wrong. They hope that Aquarius, the Water-Bearer, is about to wash us clean of our contentions and open the way to a new harmony -- a Global Village on Spaceship Earth; a new paradigm of wholeness and ecology furthered by decentralized networks of communication; the fall of jealous, controlling governments; and especially transpersonal "psychic" powers that will so far transcend our old consciousness that we will have no more interest in our petty disagreements.

They are certainly right about one thing. Our relationship to the zodiac is changing. Astronomy verifies the starry facts involved. Somewhere around 2200ad, the rising sun on the first day of Spring will find itself in the sign of Aquarius. For the last 2000 years, the sign of Pisces has stood at the horizon on the first day of Spring. These are observable facts having to do with the movement of sun and stars and the wobble of the Earth's axis. But the New Age interprets them in a mythic manner. Just as an individual born in the sign of Aquarius may be expected to have a different conscious attitude from one born in Pisces, so now the entire planet is expected to change its outlook.

## Historical Overview

The mentalities of Pisces and Aquarius are only two astrological steps in the evolution of human consciousness. If we wish to make sense of the expected New Age changes, it will help to move back a couple of steps to the Age of Taurus (4400bc to 2200bc) and follow human consciousness as it changes from Taurus to Aries and then to Pisces. This will give us a context in which to understand the nature of New Age claims.

To put it briefly, human consciousness in the Age of Taurus and before was characterized by a dreamy sort of "Cosmic Consciousness," an awareness of the cosmos as a whole and one's own participation in it. Six thousand years ago and more, our ancestors were unaware of the clear distinction we make between knowledge gained from the five senses and that derived from *dreaming*, *seeing*, and *imagination*. Although unable to think conceptually as we do, the ancients had certain advantages that we have lost. They could find game animals, water, friends, and enemies, not only by close sensory observation as we would, but also *imaginally*. They just "knew" where to dig for water or in which direction the deer were grazing.

In the Age of Aries (2200bc to 1ad), this ability was largely lost. Aries was a chaotic age, full of war and displacement so that people had to be cunning to survive. They had to develop a more thinking-oriented approach to life, and gained it only by suppressing Cosmic Consciousness.

This suppression has continued through the Age of Pisces (1ad to 2200ad). As logic and analysis have been raised to a high art, Cosmic Consciousness remains not only forgotten, but its occasional manifestations have fallen into distrust and ridicule. Imagination has become for us the touchstone of irreality. Only scientific verification can be trusted. Our experimental precision has given us technological advances but has also snuffed out the flame of spirituality.

The Age of Aquarius (2200ad to 4400ad) is expected to see new developments in the use of Cosmic Consciousness. Many of its enthusiasts, having little acquaintance with history, believe this to be the first large-scale manifestation of the mystic talent that will ever have appeared in the history of the human race. Clearly they are mistaken, but it remains to be seen whether Cosmic Consciousness in the New Age will be used for new purposes.

The phrase, "Cosmic Consciousness," was made famous by Canadian physician, Richard Maurice Bucke, who had a monumental experience of great spiritual power in the late nineteenth century. He found himself suddenly and without warning taken up from the ground in a ball of light, where his mind was opened to the vastness of the cosmos and his own kinship with it. I have known people who have had such experiences and been scared half to death. They feared they might be going insane and treated the experience as a great secret to be hidden at all cost. As a result, they felt themselves isolated from the rest of the human race, alienated, cast out, unworthy to pretend to normality.

Bucke took the opposite course. He began a lengthy study to find others, living and dead, who had had similar experiences and found about a hundred of them -- interviewing his contemporaries and digging other testimonies out of libraries. In 1901 he published *Cosmic*

*Consciousness: A Study in the Evolution of the Human Mind*, a book that deserves to be called the first New Age argument for the evolution of consciousness. Darwin's *Origin of Species*, he said, confined itself to changes in anatomical, bodily form. It needed to be expanded to show how the human species itself is evolving from "simple consciousness," the mere registration of the world, through "self-consciousness," the awareness of personal identity, to "Cosmic Consciousness."

Cosmic Consciousness is a third form which is as far above Self Consciousness as is that above Simple Consciousness. . . . The prime characteristic of cosmic consciousness is . . . a consciousness of the cosmos, that is, of the life and order of the universe. . . . There occurs . . . an illumination which alone would place the individual on a new plane of existence, . . . a state of moral exaltation, an indescribable feeling of elevation, elation and joyousness, . . . a sense of immortality, a consciousness of eternal life, . . . a conviction . . . that he has it already. . . . Our descendants will sooner or later reach, as a race, the condition of cosmic consciousness, just as, long ago, our ancestors passed from simple to self consciousness" (pp. 2f).

"Cosmic Consciousness" is a wonderfully descriptive term, but the evolutionary hypothesis is clearly bunk. For the fact is that Cosmic Consciousness is not a new talent appearing in some specially-favored individuals in the last few centuries of the Age of Pisces. Evidence from the Age of Taurus and before demonstrates that Cosmic Consciousness is very likely as old as humanity, older for sure than self-consciousness. The Age of Taurus marked the end of the time when, according to Julian Jaynes, "human nature was split in two, an executive part called a God, and a follower part called a man. Neither part was conscious."

### **The Age of Taurus**

Jaynes' argument (*The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*) is based on our two-sided brain. Studies on individuals who have lost the connection between the two hemispheres show that the right side is intuitive and comes up with images of a holistic nature and strong emotional charge. It is the source of Cosmic Consciousness. The left brain is logical and conceptual; it is the source of language and reason.

Jaynes presents a mass of compelling data showing that Cosmic Consciousness was gradually lost during the Age of Aries -- and with great regret. He calls this the "breakdown of the bicameral mind." When the "bicameral" or "two-roomed" mind was operating naturally, in the Age of Taurus and before, people had *imaginal* access to a greater Cosmos through the right side of their brain. At that time the left side had barely begun to develop. Writing had not been invented. People "thought," perhaps, mostly in images.

We get a taste for the difference in function between the two sides of our brain whenever we drive on a heavily trafficked interstate while carrying on a discussion with our passenger. The ideas we consider, as well as the rhetorical devices we use to get our point across, are handled by the rational left half of our brain. This is what our pre-Taurian ancestors had not developed. Simultaneous with the discussion, we are driving. We maintain an ever-changing picture of the traffic flow -- the steady progress of the mass of dependable drivers, sticking to their lanes, maintaining a constant speed. Speckled throughout are the wanderers, the laggards, and the ambitious. We see the whole picture at once, ahead, behind, and alongside. Ourselves in the middle, moving with and through this dynamic whole. We make decisions without thinking, right foot moving between accelerator and break, hands on the wheel, eyes swinging between windshield and mirrors. This complicated work is being done by the right

side of the brain as though in complete ignorance of the discussion going on between the inhabitants of the front seat.

Six thousand years and more ago, people lived exclusively in that right-brained driving mentality. They saw themselves moving with and through the flow of nature: landscape, weather patterns, the movement of animals and people. This was already a Cosmic Consciousness of a sort. People were immersed in the world and nature and felt themselves kin with it all. They surely were part of the oneness of the natural world. But there is more. The smaller cosmos of the natural world was riddled with gaps through which the Voice of the goddess spoke the wisdom and painted the images of a greater Cosmos.

Jaynes insists on the auditory nature of that Voice. In an age when people were not "consciousness" in any modern sense, they could not contrive narrative descriptions of themselves and "had no analog selves to 'see' themselves in relation to others. They were what we would call signal-bound, that is, responding each minute to cues in a stimulus-response manner and controlled by those cues." Jaynes finds compelling evidence in cuneiform inscriptions from the earliest centuries of Aries that those "cues" were experienced as the Voice of a goddess.

"The goddesses . . . who are the seven children of the brood of Bau that were begotten by the lord Ningirsu, to *utter* favorable decisions by the side of the lord Ningirsu."

The goddess Ninegal is praised as "*counselor*, exceeding wise *commander*, princess of all the great gods, exalted *speaker*, whose *utterance* is unrivaled."

A powerful dramatization of what it must have been like to live in this pre-Taurian world emerges from the diary of American photographer, Loren McIntyre, who in 1969 was lost in the upper Amazon region of Brazil and captured by a band of Mayoruna Indians. Living in a nearly inaccessible jungle near the headwaters of the Amazon River, the Mayoruna were untouched by civilized developments we might liken to the Age of Aries. McIntyre found himself in a world very close to Cosmic Consciousness. His story was published twenty-one years later by his Rumanian explorer friend, Petru Popescu (*Amazonian Beaming*), and McIntyre furnished the Foreword.

Although not mistreated, apart from having his artifacts of civilization destroyed (camera, watch, sneakers), McIntyre knew the Mayoruna would not let him escape. At the same time, he was not sure he wanted to flee, as survival seemed more likely in the company of these naked denizens of an ancestral world. He was worried, though, because there was a tension in the group he could not comprehend. The Mayoruna seemed up to something that made no sense. Every morning they rose, burned their village, moved a few miles into the wilderness, and built a new village.

McIntyre's communicating ability was limited to several European languages, while the Mayoruna knew no tongue but their own. Consequently, spoken exchanges of information were out of the question. Feeling the need to establish some kind of friendly, non-verbal contact, McIntyre noticed the Headman sitting cross-legged, crafting an arrow, and sat down beside him in an identical posture and began his own handiwork. Once he was thoroughly immersed in the rhythmic motions of braiding a belt from strips of palm twine, he distinctly, although inaudibly, *heard* a message from the Headman: *Some of us are friends*.

Could it be that he had actually *heard* this unspoken communication? It seems to be a minor instance of what Jaynes calls the Voice, only this time emanating from another human, not a god. For McIntyre this was an unimaginable event, and it caused a "monumental shock." He struggled within himself for a while, trying to assimilate the experience, and eventually pulled himself together enough to attempt a reply. But as the message he received was not exactly verbal or auditory, he rejected the idea of simply speaking words within his mind: *I'm also a friend; you can trust me*. Instead, he tried to *feel* the sentiments of that thought, to fill himself up with friendliness. He held that feeling a few moments and then waited to see what would happen. In his mind the thought formed: *I know*. "Maybe just the feeling of that answer, with words in English hurrying in to illustrate it." In a short time, the Headman rose and offered the white man his nearly finished arrow. McIntyre accepted it as a gift, a tangible statement that communication had been achieved.

As the days passed, he began to pick up more and more of this silent "beaming," primarily from the Headman, but sometimes also fragmentary thoughts from the tribespeople as a whole, emerging blurrily out of a kind of crowd murmur. "I felt I couldn't tell exactly when a communication started, but it probably built to a point when I 'found it' at the surface of my mind and was forced to apply my own words to it."

At times he wondered if he was going crazy. The ability to communicate by "beaming" delivered a disorienting shock, but his rational attempts to explain it away were opposed by two undeniable facts. The messages were consistent, and he had no alternative but to trust them.

Events eventually proved that the community was dealing with an attempted political *coup*. The hostile and enigmatic man McIntyre had been calling "Red Cheeks" intended to seize control of the community. He realized this the day Red Cheeks and his three followers were found dead with poisoned arrows protruding from their chests. But the Mayoruna continued on with their aimless journeying as though nothing had happened. The "beaming" told him the Headman was orchestrating some kind of return. The Mayoruna were *traveling back to the beginning*. But what "beginning"? It obviously had something to do with death, otherwise why the apparently aimless wandering from day to day after burning the village every morning? McIntyre gathered also that this was some kind of *magical* journey and that the Headman himself was uncertain of success but had no alternative.

The journey culminated in a ritual enhanced by the ingestion of hallucinogenic plants. McIntyre's own hallucinatory experience is the only evidence we have for what it must have been like for the Mayoruna.

What I see in front of me changes. Though I keep watching a three-dimensional landscape of trees, secondary roots, and hanging parasites so dense that my eyes can't conquer more than a hundred yards of it, a re-arrangement happens. Nothing disappears from the picture, and nothing is added, except an extra depth. The hundred yards of distance suddenly look as extended and spacious as a few hundred miles.

He concludes that despite his life's work of exploring nature beyond the reaches of civilization, he had never really been "part of nature" as he had imagined. Not even the Indians in their daily life were merely "part of nature." All of us humans have "always belonged to a vaster space."

Although the language barrier prevented any ordinary sort of verification of McIntyre's observations, it seems clear that the attempted *coup* had posed a threat to the static, harmonious world of the tribe, and that to restore themselves they had to reconnect with their origins in Cosmic Consciousness. They had to kill off their former, *coup*-tainted existence in a series of deaths (the burning of one village after the other) until they had moved back to a mythic beginning, the time before time began, which was opened to them through the ingestion of their hallucinogenic drugs.

In the language of Julian Jaynes, they had to open their inner ears to the Voice. Evidently even these children of nature, untouched by civilization, who had not lost the capacity for telepathic "beaming," had to follow a strenuous and uncertain regimen in order to open a gap between the small cosmos of the natural world and the greater eternal Cosmos. It is reasonable to conclude that even in the rather placid and static world of our pre-Taurian ancestors, it was the headmen, the shamans, and the kings who had the most reliable access to Cosmic Consciousness.

### **The Age of Aries**

The monumental event that inaugurated the Age of Aries in 2200bc was an agricultural revolution in the Middle East. Before this event, people lived by "subsistence." Each family and village produced just what it needed to survive from year to year, with perhaps a little over to trade with its neighbors. People in the Age of Taurus lived in harmony with the seasons of the year and the life-cycles of the plants and animals who shared the world with them.

Around the dawning of Aries, changes in climate and advances in social organization made it possible for food to be grown in far greater abundance than a village could consume. This development set large portions of the populace free to pursue other occupations. Most of them migrated to the larger towns and trading centers, which grew haphazardly at alarming rates. The Age of Aries was therefore dominated by some of the earliest cities in human history, great urban collections of the rich, the skilled, and the poverty-stricken. Kings and professional soldiers held the civil power; priests and religious specialists worked at aligning the visible world with the world of the gods; merchants and traders amassed riches that enabled massive building projects; and the preponderant majority performed slave labor or became outlaws and predators. The world was organized from the top down as a hierarchy maintained by brute force. Royal ambitions led to wars between the city-states, resulting in large scale displacements, migrations, and slavery.

All of this was unknown in the thoroughly rural life of Taurus. Six millennia back in the prehistory of our species, the world was suffused with life and power, and the gods were very near. A Sumerian proverb from the Age of Aries suggests the quality of consciousness those people had: "Act promptly, make your gods happy!" It seems to mean, "Don't *think*, maintain the spontaneity of your Cosmic Consciousness." Such advice would only be given to people who still had some memory for Cosmic Consciousness, but tended in their everyday lives to rely on the left half of their brains. According to the maxim, left-brain thinking was dangerous business because it silenced the Voice of the gods and made them "unhappy."

If the Age of Taurus is symbolized by the heavy, slow-moving, earth-bound bull, Aries represents a bursting out of ambition and aggression that races up mountain peaks like a ram. Cosmic Consciousness weakened as people had to struggle with lawlessness and insecurity inside the new cities as well as with frequent brutal wars between them. They had to depend more and more on the calculations of their left brains. The world of the gods lost its naive immediacy and was for the first time formulated in left-brain language.

Because the gods no longer spoke through the Voice that had been available to every individual, the truths of Cosmic Consciousness had to be expressed in a new form. Great narrative epics were elaborated and written down for generations yet unguessed, saying, in effect, that the gods have spoken to our ancestors and this is their message. In the bible, for example, God walked in the garden with Adam and Eve. He also walked with Abraham and bargained with him over the destruction he intended inflict on Sodom. He spoke with Isaac, Noah, and Moses and laid down the laws which his people had to follow if they expected their God to protect them.

The bible, the Zoroastrian *Yashts*, the writings of Confucius and Lao Tse in China, the Vedanta scriptures of India -- all of these implied a tragic Fall had occurred in the distant past. The sin of Adam and Eve excluded them from the garden and their intimacy with God. In China, the Tao, the cosmic order of the universe, had become forgotten and had to be remembered through meditation. According to Hinduism, the vast majority of us live in ignorance (*avidya*). The scriptures were written to awaken us to the truth that *Thou art That*. Our true identity is the *atman*, no bigger than a thumb, that dwells within us all. Furthermore, the *atman* inside each of us is no different from *brahman*, the energy that pervades all that is. What we see in the natural world is nothing but the veil of *Maya*, an illusion that hides an invisible, greater reality. Each of these scriptures elaborated codes of conduct, designed to restore order in a chaotic world and to open our eyes and ears to timeless cosmic truths.

Jaynes sees the change in consciousness during the Age of Aries reflected in the art work of the ancient Middle East. We can see the figures of kings and their counselor-gods carved on ancient steles, great monoliths recording successful wars and outlining codes of conduct. In the beginning the kings are the associates of the gods, gaining wisdom effortlessly-directly from a divine Voice. They are depicted standing side-by-side with their divine counselors, listening for the inspiration needed to give moral and political direction to the people. But by the end of the age, when the Fall had become an undeniable fact, the kings are on their knees begging for guidance. Uncertainty regarding Cosmic Consciousness had become the rule, whereas it had been the exception only two millennia earlier.

After the Fall from Cosmic Consciousness, people had to become devious to survive. A new attitude was celebrated in the wily hero Odysseus, who tricked and out-witted his way from thralldom to the goddess Calypso (very likely an image for the static realm of the cosmic goddess who brooked no opposition to her Voice), through multiple life-threatening adventures, until he could reach the safety of home. Consciousness of an "I," separate from the world and the gods, emerged from these chaotic conditions. Cosmic Consciousness belonged, now, to a mythic past. In the waning years of Aries, history and philosophy emerged as the first indications of a new, critically conscious way of being. The "rational animal" was born.

## The Age of Pisces

By the beginning of our own time, the Age of Pisces, even the great mythic narratives had fallen into question. The rational bureaucracies of the Greek and Roman empires organized cities and towns under the religion of the emperor. Local gods lost prestige, and the imperial divinities took on a distant and political meaning. This caused a massive crisis of identity, and people began to seek out elements of the old Cosmic Consciousness that had survived in the countryside. They devised "mystery religions," some of which used drugs, dance, and music to attain oneness with the universe. Even the conquerors invited holy men from the vanquished territories of the East to teach them the old religions.

In the transition between Aries and Pisces, a great enthusiasm for Cosmic Consciousness emerged between 200bc and 200ad that called itself Gnosticism. Christianity has spoken disparagingly of Gnosticism as though it were merely one of many doctrinal heresies belonging exclusively to its own history. This is a narrow, erroneous view; for there were Jewish Gnostics and pagan Gnostics as well as Christian Gnostics, and the last group were late comers and decidedly not the majority.

The central idea of Gnosticism was *gnosis*, a kind of emotionally charged knowledge of the heart, a direct experience of the divine, and indeed of the greater, eternal Cosmos. *Gnosis* was a natural capacity of every human being. We had it before we were born and will have it again after we die. But now, during our earthly sojourn and exile, we tend to forget our origins and destiny and remain ignorant of *gnosis*. We forget on account of the heavy stupidity of our body, with its unruly instincts that seduces us into believing no more than we can see, hear, smell, taste, and touch. The huge underclass of the world is content with this sensory knowledge and very likely slaves of its instincts. Gnosticism called them the *sarkikoi*, the "flesh people." They were benighted, sorry wretches who had not the slightest inkling of spiritual realities.

The mid-level component of human nature was the soul (*psyche*) and its capacity for the visionary knowledge of *seeing*, *dreaming*, and *imagination*. The Earth's rather small middle class who had discovered their souls were called the *psychikoi*, the "soul people." They lived a higher form of life than the flesh people and had a genuinely spiritual form of consciousness.

The elite, the Gnostics properly so-called, had gone beyond the soul and gained access to the spirit (*pneuma*). They were the *pneumatikoi* or "spirit people." In addition to visionary knowledge, they had *gnosis*, direct knowledge of the One. They had seen through to the source of the two worlds -- the natural world and the eternal Cosmos. For them, *gnosis* was the complete form of Cosmic Consciousness, and they did their best to disseminate its mysteries.

Although scholars have discovered a great variety of Gnostic maps of the greater Cosmos, most of these grand images share a common structure. Generally the Earth is seen as the kernel of a series of concentric spheres, each becoming more purely spiritual as we move outward. The ultimate source of the Cosmos is the ineffable One, who is pure Light. The One "emanates" the Cosmos like rays of light from a sun, each ray and fragment of ray becoming an individual Being of Light. We humans, too, have been emanated and are

Beings of Light. We are the most material of ensouled beings, but inside each of us is a genuine spark of eternal Light. Beings in the spheres furthest from the One are comprised of increasing impurity (matter) -- so much so, that even above the human realm, Beings of Light can forget their origin and destiny. Some of these, called Archons, have set up little fiefdoms for themselves, wielding absolute power over spheres occupied by lesser beings for their own power and glory. In at least one Gnostic sect, the Yahweh of the Jews is identified as the Archon, demiurge of the Earth.

Based on the story of Jesus, a man who demonstrated monumental powers over life and death on account of his close kinship with the highest divinity, early Christianity was filled with Cosmic Consciousness. The Christ who rose from the dead, passed through walls, and appeared transfigured on Mount Tabor, where he shone whiter than snow and conversed as an intimate with Elijah and Moses, could even be seen as the prototype for the spirit people of Gnosticism. He was co-eternal with the One, "emptied himself of his divinity" in order to become the Light of the world, and reveal to us all our spiritual origin and destiny. His most eloquent Apostle said, "I live now, no longer I, but Christ lives in me."

No wonder Christianity's struggle for self-definition found its first opponent in Gnosticism. According to Christianity, the Gnostics over-emphasized the in-dwelling God, the Holy Spirit, to such an extent that individuals were encouraged to draw their own cosmic maps, derived entirely from their own personal visions. *Gnosis* could be abused and so many variant doctrines elaborated, that the Truth itself could become as diffuse and unmappable as a patch of fog. Christianity fought Gnosticism by insisting on a single map of the cosmos, revealed through a linear historical process that began with Adam and led through Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, the prophets of Israel, and culminated in Jesus of Nazareth. Only the Church that succeeded him, the Body of Christ on Earth, had the authority to distinguish truth and illusion; and it employed the new disciplines of history and philosophy to accomplish this.

Even by the end of the second century, when it had won its struggle for self-definition against the diffuse pressures of Gnosticism, there still remained a tension in Christianity between mystical experience (*gnosis*) and the officially defined dogmas articulated by those rational but mystically-inclined scholars we now call the Fathers of the Church. By the end of the third century, Christianity knew itself; but for the world at large, living within the political structure of the Roman Empire, it was just another minority group, a "mystery religion" with its roots in the rebellious land of Israel.

It rose from its status as a mystery religion to the religion of the empire through Emperor Constantine's vision in 313ad-right out of Cosmic Consciousness-a cross-like image accompanied by a Voice, "In this sign shall you conquer." Two streams of Christianity resulted from this event. A mystical form kept Cosmic Consciousness alive among the very few, while a legalistic and philosophical form tied its wagon to political power and sought to translate Cosmic Consciousness into left-brain language for the purpose of creating a theocracy to control the majority.

After that momentous visionary event in 313, Christianity was established as the dominant religio-cultural form of Western Civilization. Rational elaboration of its doctrines was left in the hands of theologians for at least a thousand years. The vast majority still deserved to be

called the "flesh people," as they carried on a dreary daily struggle for existence, tempered only by theological promises of a more blessed and rewarding life to be enjoyed after death. Earthly life was an exile from heaven, a sojourn in the realm of matter, where God was testing their mettle -- to see if they could act *as though* the eternal Cosmos were more real than the material hardships apprehended by the senses.

Gnostic aspirations persisted, however, among an elite, men and women who left the cities to gather in and around monasteries where they hoped to live an unfettered spiritual existence. One of the most significant of these was a certain John "Climacus," John the "Ladder Man," who lived some fifty years in the Sinai desert and at the end of his life, about 700ad, summarized what he had learned in one of the most influential books of Christian mysticism, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*. For the past 1300 years, this book has been read aloud during Lent in all Orthodox Christian monasteries. Thus it provides us not only a window into the spirituality of the Dark Ages, but reveals one of the most important sources of modern Christian mysticism.

John Climacus lived most of his life at the foot of Mount Sinai, where legend locates the encounter between Yahweh and Moses and the carving of the Ten Commandments. I climbed that mountain in my Earth Shoes in March of 1977, while on a tour led by Israel's Archaeological Society. It is little more than a very large, round-topped hill with a fairly gradual slope, but it impresses its visitor profoundly. It is absolutely silent up there on the summit, with tawny brown rock and sand stretching in all directions and a sparkling blue sky overhead. I thought as I stood there that God had never left this spot.

At the foot of the mountain stands the Monastery of St. Catherine, possibly little changed from the days of the Ladder Man. But as far as I was concerned, it was just another building. The week I was there, the Jews were eating matzo in honor of the Passover and their own forty years in this desert, and the monks of St. Catherine were celebrating Holy Week -- the one week of the year visitors are not allowed inside to view the magnificent mural of Christ's transfiguration at the top of Mount Tabor. I was not sorry. I had no interest in entering the building. I wanted to be outside in the desert. The stone huts the anchorites had inhabited centuries before were still standing, scattered about on the sides of the low hills, clustered around tiny stone chapels, and looking for all the world as though the holy men and women would return at any moment.

I knew this is where I would have lived, had I been born thirteen centuries earlier, on the *outskirts* of monastic life, communing with the God who seemed palpable in the very air that filled this sacred land. I wanted no roof and no walls to stand between me and that eternal Being. Above all, I wanted no intermediaries and no organized community life to moderate and temper God's presence. I would have lived outside that monastery the way I live outside the New Age, savoring its presence but keeping my own counsel, following my own path.

John Climacus must have felt somewhat the same. He spent his first three years rather near the monastery in a small community under the direction of a man he himself selected for his holiness. After the completion of this "novitiate," he retired to a place called Tholas, some seven miles from the monastery walls, where he lived pretty much alone for the next forty years. Near the end of that period, he spent two years inside the walls of St. Catherine's, as the guest of the Abbot. Finally he was elected, against his own protests, Abbot of the

monastery, where he lived his last few years and wrote the *Ladder* at the request of the Abbot of a monastery located at the southern tip of the Sinai peninsula.

Based on the biblical image of Jacob's vision of angels ascending and descending between Heaven and Earth, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* is a thirty-step catalogue of the virtues a monk must attain and the vices to overcome. It reveals John Climacus as a consummate Director of Souls, whose central concern is the personal obstacle each individual has to surmount in order to climb that ladder and gain union with the One. He begins with and returns constantly to the virtue of obedience -- an emphasis that may perplex a modern reader inclined to pre-judge "perfect obedience" as a kind of infantilization. But John's notion of obedience can only be understood when we remember that a monastery is an entirely voluntary institution.

Why do people join? He gives three reasons: some have hit bottom in their sinfulness and are searching for a higher principle on which to live their lives, others are convinced of the reality of the Kingdom of God and enter a monastery to devote themselves to it, and a few are after oneness with God in love. All of these people are convinced of the reality of *soul*, but find that they are soul people only intermittently. They wish to live in and through their souls more consistently. They want their gaps opened so they can *see* the eternal Cosmos every day and every moment of their lives.

Obedience is more than following rules. It is a spiritual and emotional attachment to one's director, somewhat in the manner that Carlos Castaneda was bound to don Juan. In the early books Carlos is frequently ready to give up his work out of conscious fear or disgust, but he always returns because something within him is gripped by this irrational process and will not rest until it is satisfied. Carlos is "obedient" to don Juan, but "obedience" seems a paltry word to describe his fascination and unconscious conviction that a monumental transformative process is involved. In much the same way, Climacus recommends an obedient attachment to a director uniquely suited to free us from the flesh world and open our eyes to the world of the soul.

Clearly the Ladder Man began directing souls long before his election as Abbot. His forty years of anchorite isolation had to have been interrupted daily by monks seeking his guidance. In the course of those decades, transforming himself and directing others, he became the don Juan Matus of his day, a master of the spiritual life, possessed of such vision and cunning that he could accurately *see* the people whose souls he directed. He looked right through their gaps and glimpsed the lifeworld in which they were living, knowing it thoroughly, grasping how it could be "stopped" so that they could step out of it and enter the greater Cosmos.

He helped them accomplish this "stoppage" by assigning paradoxical tasks. We might think of how Carlos was directed to find his "spot" in don Juan's ramada. He spent an entire night moving from place to place within that open-air porch, questioning, doubting, and searching until he finally fell asleep in the precise location where he felt most at peace. On another occasion, he was asked to gaze at a bush until he could see not the foreground of its leaves and stems but the background of its shadows and gaps.

Similarly, Climacus tells the story of a certain Isidore, a monk who had belonged to the

ruling class of Alexandria and proved to be "a troublemaker, cruel, sly, and haughty." He was ordered to stand at the gate of the monastery and bend his knee to everyone who passed in or out and say, "Pray for me, Father, because I am an epileptic." This was his only occupation for seven years, and when at the end of that time he was invited to rejoin the community, he begged to be allowed to continue at the gate, for he knew that death was very near. His request was granted, and he died ten days later, "humbly and gloriously passing on to the Lord."

While he was still alive, I asked this great Isidore how he had occupied his mind while he was at the gate, and this memorable man did not conceal anything from me, for he wished to be of help. "At first I judged that I had been sold into slavery for my sins," he said. "So I did penance with bitterness, great effort, and blood. After a year my heart was no longer full of grief, and I began to think of a reward for my obedience from God Himself. Another year passed and in the depths of my heart I began to see how unworthy I was to live in a monastery, to encounter the fathers, to share in the divine Mysteries. I lost the courage to look anyone in the face, but lowering my eyes and lowering my thoughts even further, I asked with true sincerity for the prayers of those going in and out."

We might read this story as describing the effects of a living *koan*, much as a Zen master assigns an irrational problem to be meditated upon for weeks and years ("What is the sound of one hand clapping") until the aspirant's habits of thought have been thoroughly frustrated and a transforming intuition emerges through the gap. The world of Isidore's Alexandrian arrogance had to be "stopped," as don Juan would say, before he could encounter the monumental shock that the soul's Cosmos lurked humbly at the inauspicious gate.

Modern readers of the *Ladder* will be struck by the primitivity and ignorance of most of those seventh century monks. Isidore's learning and familiarity with giving orders surely will have justified his arrogance. As long as he lived among them, he could not help but be reminded of his own excellence. From the viewpoint of the natural world, his arrogance was justified. If his old world had not been "stopped," the monastery would serve only to reinforce his complacency. He would have gained nothing by leaving his position of power in the city. But because his director had seen through the arrogant veil of his Maya, he was given a task that opened the eyes of his soul.

The *Ladder* was written for flesh people who had not merely "heard about" soul, but who had intermittently glimpsed its reality intruding into their daily lives. They wanted to experience it as something that lives within them, controlling their lives and yet responding to their will. They entered the monastery in a spirit of impotence, realizing that they could not accomplish this transformation on their own, but looking for guidance from more accomplished soul people.

For flesh people, sin is a breaking of the rules that will incur the wrath of God; they flee sin out of fear. Soul people see things differently. For them, sin is a distraction that makes us overlook the gaps in our consciousness and hides the life of the soul. What soul people call "sin" is too subtle for flesh people even to notice. What flesh people call gluttony is an overeating that is dangerous for the body. Soul people, by contrast, convict themselves of gluttony even in the midst of their fasting. For any interest in food that distracts us from the experience of God's presence may lead to further forgetting.

I once was sitting in my cell having become slack. Indeed I was thinking of leaving it. But some

visitors came, and when they began to praise me for leading the life of a hesychast [a practitioner of "stillness"], my slackness gave way to vainglorious thoughts and I was amazed by the manner in which this three-horned demon stood up against all the others.

In this personal confession, Climacus reveals his own continuing struggle with the ego-centered demands of the flesh world. For the monk of some attainment, "flesh" is a much subtler thing than the gross temptations of gluttony, lust, or avarice. It has to do with what stands in the way of recognizing the nearness of God. "Stillness of soul is the accurate knowledge of one's thoughts and is an unassailable mind." One who knows one's thoughts, *sees* through the gaps and encounters God. "If it happens that, as you pray, some word evokes delight or remorse within you, linger over it; for at that moment your guardian angel is praying with you."

The most disturbing images from the *Ladder* occur in "Step Five," where Climacus takes us into the "Prison," a building located about a mile from the main monastery and to which monks retired in obedience to fight the grimmest battles with their flesh. Very likely some of these men had been frankly insane before their consignment; but after a few days or weeks in that place, it is hard to imagine any would have been judged "sane" by modern standards. The Ladder Man spent thirty days there, and his descriptions imply that these were the men whose only hope for trailing along in the humblest ranks of the soul people was to act as though their body did not exist. If many of them were not insane when they chose to enter that place, we must conclude that it had to have been some monumental glimpse of soul that kept them there.

With knees like wood, as a result of all the prostrations, with eyes dimmed and sunken, with hair gone and cheeks wasted and scalded by many hot tears, with faces pale and worn, they were no different from corpses. Their breasts were livid from all the [self-inflicted] beatings, which had even made them spit blood. There was no rest for them in beds, no clean and laundered clothing. They were bedraggled, dirty, and verminous. . . .

Believe me, brothers, I am not making all this up.

Often they came to the great judge, to that angel among men -- I mean the shepherd [the Abbot] -- and they would plead with him to put irons and chains on their hands and necks, to bind their legs in the stocks and not to release them until death -- or even afterward.

In the context of the seventh century, these men were pursuing their souls at the most basic and literal level. Thirteen centuries later, now that our eyes are on the dawning of Aquarius, an institution like this "Prison" would not even qualify as a psychiatric hospital for the hopelessly insane. During the course of the Age of Pisces, human consciousness has undergone an immense change. In the early centuries of our present age, human beings struggled with their instincts in a manner that leaves us confused and horrified. Surely we have not risen above our addictions to drugs and sex; we witness drive-by shootings and ethnic cleansings. But we can no longer countenance the literal denial of our bodies and our instincts. Something very important has transpired.

In a word, that "something" was the Renaissance, the rebirth of Western Civilization, the rediscovery of the world and our bodies, the resurgence of interest in the pre-Christian scholars of Greece and Rome. The foremost figure of the Renaissance, the Italian poet Petrarch, tells a very important story about climbing a mountain. In 1336 at the age of thirty-two, he ascended Mount Ventoux with his brother Gherardo and had a monumental

experience that caused him to give up his self-described "dissolute" life in Avignon. Titus Burckhardt (*The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*) describes that moment:

His whole past life, with all its follies, rose before his mind; he remembered that ten years ago that day he had quitted Bologna a young man, and turned a longing gaze towards his native country; he opened a book which was then his constant companion, the *Confessions* of St. Augustine, and his eye fell on the passage in the tenth chapter: "and men go forth, and admire lofty mountains and broad seas, and roaring torrents, and the ocean, and the course of the stars, and turn away from themselves while doing so." His brother, to whom he read these words, could not understand why he closed the book and said no more.

What a double difference we have here. Seven centuries before, Climacus would never have climbed that mountain. He would have seen it as an idle distraction from the life of the soul. Seven centuries later, we -- with or without Earth Shoes -- would take the majestic view from the summit as a lovely reward for the labors of climbing. Petrarch devoted his life to demonstrating that Christianity had nothing to fear from the natural world or the great classics of Greece and Rome. He did this bravely and with the most sincere conviction, even though his soul was torn by the temptations that world stirred up in him. He stood on the cusp between the first half of Pisces and the second, where the beauties of the natural world constituted a soul-shattering challenge. He led us into this world, but had to remain silent about what he saw.

The natural world was the LSD of the early Renaissance, the great mind-blower. It is as though Western Civilization woke up one morning and said, "My God, just *look* at this world we've been living in -- how can we have been so blind?" From this point onward, it was no longer possible to treat our body as a corpse. Physical beauty became an ideal to be sought. The arts burst out of their mystical fixation and began to explore the bodily realities -- first of biblical and mythological themes and then of the natural world for its own sake.

*Gnosis* did not die, however. Indeed, it could be mentioned again by name. For although the Ladder Man devoted his life and his book to the pursuit of that mystical knowledge, he dared not use a word reeking of heresy and paganism. *Gnosis* remained, but in the second half of Pisces, it has gained a connection with matter. Alchemy was one of the most long-lasting and significant manifestations of this tendency. Every alchemist worked in two rooms: one for experiments (*laboratorium*) and one for prayer and study (*oratorio*). They sought to produce a material object that would not only transmute lead into gold but that would transmute themselves as well, and open their eyes to the greater Cosmos. In the following anonymous text, the author is describing what he saw when he dropped consecrated red wine into a vessel of alchemically prepared rain water:

Then put in two drops, and you will see the light coming forth from the darkness; whereupon little by little put in every half of each quarter hour first three, then four, then five, then six drops, and then no more, and you will see with your own eyes one thing after another appearing by and by on the top of the water, how God created all things in six days, and how it all came to pass, and such secrets as are not to be spoken aloud and I also have not the power to reveal. Fall on your knees before you undertake this operation. Let your eyes judge of it; for thus was the world created. Let all stand as it is, and in half an hour after it began it will disappear.

By this you will see clearly the secrets of God, that are at present hidden from you as from a child. You will understand what Moses has written concerning the creation; you will see what

manner of body Adam and Eve had before and after the Fall, what the serpent was, what the tree, and what manner of fruits they ate: where and what Paradise is, and in what bodies the righteous shall be resurrected; not in this body that we have received from Adam, but in that which we attain through the Holy Ghost, namely in such a body as our Saviour brought from heaven.

The alchemists were aspiring soul people, and in their Cosmic Consciousness many of them *saw* a biblically correct map of the cosmos. For others, fragments of the biblical map were jumbled together with stranger visions. A new Gnostic plethora of cosmic structures lay uneasily side by side. Their *gnosis* was inspired by the physical wonders they produced in their laboratories: the marvelous fact, for example, that the elusive liquid metal, quicksilver, would violently boil away and form a red powder (oxide of mercury) which could then be converted back into shiny rolling spheres of seeming silver when heated gently.

In their view, the substances they manipulated were the *souls* of the metals and salts. They wrote not of "common mercury" but of "our Mercurius," and they treated him as a helpful but dangerous trickster. In the end, though, their laboratories caused the downfall of alchemy. For they made real physical discoveries, isolated elements, determined some of the properties of what we call chemical bonding. Eventually they gave birth to modern, scientific chemistry with its mathematical certainties so that it no longer made sense to speak of the souls and spirits of sulphur, mercury, and water.

The modern world began in the last quarter of the Age of Pisces, when Lavoisier isolated oxygen and Isaac Newton emerged from his alchemical laboratory and laid the mathematical foundations for modern physics. Marvels of a purely natural order succeeded and overshadowed those of the visionary realm, leading to technological inventions unimaginable a few centuries before. The industrial revolution led to a new growth of cities, with renewed chaos and anonymity. Cosmic Consciousness was all but forgotten again.

The history of philosophy in the second millennium of Pisces provides the clearest evidence for how mystical claims have become more and more problematic for us. Back at the beginning of Pisces, Christian theologians borrowed Plato's distinction between the sensory world and the eternal world of ideas and renamed the latter Heaven and its guiding principle God. They borrowed from Aristotle some more scientific-sounding notions. God was the "Prime Mover" of the cosmos and the "First Cause" of everything that exists. These conceptions went unchallenged for most of the Age of Pisces -- refined perhaps, but never seriously questioned.

The rise of mathematical science, however, brought about monumental changes. Rene Descartes made significant contributions to both realms. He founded analytical geometry and advanced algebra. We are still learning his ideas in our junior high schools. But his most radical views are to be found in philosophy, where he introduced the notion of "universal doubt." Challenged by recent discoveries in mathematics and science, he wondered, "What can I know for certain?" The one thing he could not doubt was doubt itself. From this arose the most famous conclusion in history: "I think, therefore I am."

His goal was not to deny God, Heaven, and the afterlife, but to give them a firm and reliable foundation. So from his unshakable certainty that he existed and was thinking, he moved step-by-step to admit the existence of God as the First Cause and the reality of the physical world as a thoroughly mechanical structure entirely divorced from the mind. Subjectivity ("I

think") and objectivity (the outside world) became two separate realms connected only by the intervention of God. An all-good God would not let us be deceived. A deep loneliness was implied in Descartes' philosophy. Our subjectivity isolated us from one another and from the clock-work world outside us. Only the somewhat ghostly notion of God could keep us connected.

Subsequent thinkers accepted the distinction between subject and object, but had problems with Descartes' invocation of God. Hume asserted the only thing we can be certain of is the fact that there is an unbroken stream of subjective images and ideas. We cannot even be certain that there is something called a mind which contains them, for the mind itself is just another idea. This was "radical skepticism," and it awoke Kant from his "dogmatic slumbers." Kant demonstrated in a manner that has never been successfully refuted that the world we see, hear, taste, smell, and touch depends entirely on the nature of our perceiving apparatus. What we know is simply what appears to the senses: the "phenomenon," that which appears. We may believe that there is an actual "thing itself," independent of our sensing it, but we can never know what it is.

What a radical change has occurred! For Climacus the real was the visionary cosmos, and the sensory world was a devilish distraction. For Kant, knowing certainty is limited to the sensory world, and the visionary cosmos is a matter of belief. Only morality requires this belief, not knowledge. Nietzsche represents the end point of this modern development, which he called the decline of metaphysics. (Aristotle: *meta-physics*, that which lies beyond the physical world.) Nietzsche announced the "end of metaphysics" and the "death of God." He argued we can no longer pretend to know or believe anything that lies beyond the world we live in. The Platonic world of ideas, which Christianity "baptized" as Heaven and God, is no more than an illusion we have been clinging to for centuries in the vain hope that it would give meaning to our daily lives. It does not. We are being dishonest with ourselves if we think it does. In actual fact, all we have is our daily life.

It would be a mistake to believe that philosophers like Descartes, Kant, and Nietzsche have been a series of demonic Pied Pipers leading us all to perdition with their mesmerizing ideas. The great philosophers have not invented their theories whole cloth, but given shape to the consciousness of their time. They have placed in compelling literary form what everyone else has been thinking. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have inherited not only the books left behind by these "dead white males," but a way of thinking and seeing the world that those books merely articulated. We may try to deny the secularization of our worldview by joining fundamentalist sects that reassert old dogmas as revealed truth. But even those who do so continue to live in a mechanical world put together like an intricate clockwork by a Prime Mover who is an object of belief rather than of knowledge. The philosophers who sank the ship of Piscean metaphysics have merely been our spokesmen.

### **The Age Of Aquarius**

Like it or not, we are the children of that syphilitic young aesthete, Friedrich Nietzsche. Because "God is dead" for us, transcendence exists only here, in human creativity. The "Overman" *recreates himself*. Nietzsche, the self-styled nihilist and anti-philosopher, rehabilitated that ancient dissolute, Dionysus, the god of intoxication and frenzy, who lives within us all as the spirit of creativity. Having lost our God, Heaven, and afterlife -- at least

in the sense that no one fails to doubt them any more, at least in our most depressed and honest moments -- we search again for transcendence and hope to be intoxicated with the direct experience of Cosmic Consciousness and thereby recreate ourselves.

Today, more than 10,000 *networks* of New Age groups are trying to recreate themselves in retreats, workshops, and training programs on such Cosmic Consciousness themes as meditation, shamanism, and aura manipulation. Most remarkable are those that center their interests around UFO phenomena. By one reckoning, some 9 *million* Americans have experienced abductions by extraterrestrials in flying saucers, some of them discovering in the process that they themselves are "part alien." Others claim to be in telepathic communication with benevolent aliens who are sending us rays of wisdom and love which we are to "download" into our DNA structure and thereby discover our cosmic identity. The gods of Taurus seem to have returned.

To be fair, however, it must be admitted that New Age enthusiasms for what lies outside sensory verification are not trying to stand on the limb that Kant so decisively sawed off 200 years ago. They are supported, at least in part, by a new form of science. Newton's clockwork universe, which originated "universal doubt" and "radical skepticism," has itself been identified as a misleading abstraction by twentieth century science. It still works, as long as we confine our interest to the movement of large bodies, like planets, billiard balls, and molecules. But if we want to look at what comprises molecules or at movement that approaches the speed of light, Newtonian physics is useless.

Matter itself has become questionable. It used to be the only thing we "knew" for sure -- whether as the objects of scientific certainty or the devilish distractions of the flesh people. Now it seems that matter may be just a peculiar form of energy. Furthermore, when we observe matter, we seem to change it (Heisenberg's "uncertainty principle"). Subjectivity and objectivity are no longer two separate realms, as Descartes believed and as the vast majority of us still take for granted. They seem to be related aspects of the same thing.

At the end of the twentieth century, all bets are off. In one sense we know the world better than anyone on Earth has ever known it before, and we have the technological advances to prove it. No generation before our own was able to send people to the moon, cross the Atlantic in three hours, observe in real time events taking place thousands of miles away, or manipulate a mind-boggling mass of data efficiently with computers. But in another sense we know this world perhaps no better than our pre-Taurian ancestors.

As a species we have spent the last 6000 years suppressing a natural human faculty located in the right sides of our brain in order to discover ourselves as conscious subjects. If the New Age has anything revolutionary to offer, it must be the possibility of integrating rational methods with the visionary observations of Cosmic Consciousness: opening up our critical minds to a world of much wider scope and applying our conceptualizing abilities to the domain of Cosmic Consciousness. This is a very exciting prospect, although dangerous. Cosmic Consciousness was suppressed for good reason. We need to look very carefully at what it is and where its dangers lie.