

**The Strange Workings Of God**

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I woke up all at once and sat bolt upright in bed. Sweat poured off my forehead in thin rivulets that followed the contours of my face. My skin felt cold against the unsatisfactorily heated air. I looked at the clock, 2:35 glared at me, the digital numbers harsh to my sleep deprived eyes. It was the dream again, the same one that had been returning night after night for almost a week, distorting my sleep patterns and making my tottering life miserable. Normally I rarely dreamed, and when I did it was standard fare, nothing particularly memorable or bizarre. I actually used to feel a little jealous when my friends would recount crazy stories of three headed unicorns reading The Grapes of Wrath while hippos smoked cigarettes and waited for taxis.

Now I was having a bizarre dream of my own and I didn't feel up to telling anyone about it. There were a lot of reasons for this I guess, but mostly it was the nearly overwhelming sense, sometimes for hours after the dream was over, that I was supposed to do something as a result of the dream. The dream itself wasn't disturbing, it was a little boring. But once I woke, once the anxiety began to rise, it was clear that this particular brain concoction wasn't just the psychic pipes giving themselves a cleaning. There was expectancy; innuendo. And maybe, just a hint of menace.

I had no idea what I was supposed to do, but whatever it was, while I wasn't doing it I felt the way I had as a kid, sitting on the sofa watching television or reading a book while I was supposed to be emptying the dishwasher or mowing the lawn. I felt as if any moment my Mother would start yelling at me to go do something productive.

My feet swung to the floor and I rubbed the palms of my hands against my eyes. Small white lights danced merrily in the darkness from the pressure of my palms. I thought about how we can never see the insides of our eyelids even though we look at them more than any other thing. The only way to see your eyelid is to put a light really close. Then, if you hold it just right, you can see the blood vessels that run under the skin. Dreams too, come from the darkness that lies behind our eyelids. And God, sometimes he comes from behind there too. And when he does, the questions suddenly become more difficult than the answers.

I padded off toward the bathroom, nearly tripping over the half invisible form of my black lab Misha who was lying curled up on the floor, probably plotting how to take over the entire bed and the comforter in a single move. It was only a brief glimmer of green from her eyes that alerted me. They had probably been open and watching me since the moment I woke up. I lunged uncontrollably in another direction, so as to avoid squashing her. As seems to be unwritten law, my foot managed to find some unidentified, but painfully sharp object on the floor, which threw me further off balance. I finally crashed onto the floor in a heap, arms akimbo. I lay there, looking at the back of my eyelids, chuckling softly to keep from getting really pissed off.

I had only been lying there a minute before Misha began attempting to bathe me with her tongue. She was clearly happy that I was up and playing fun games like fall in a big heap on the floor. This was a game that she had played many times with the kitchen linoleum. She was losing to it by several thousand points. I reached up and scratched the fur behind her neck. Misha growled, in a somewhat pathetic, but disgustingly cute imitation of her best friends, Jubal and Weeza, my two cats. They had all grown up together and since she was a puppy Misha liked to growl softly in the canine version of purring.

Getting back to my feet I made it the rest of the way to the bathroom safely and flipped on the light switch. Again, the small white lights danced in the unnatural glare of the fluorescent light, only now they were superimposed on the world. I wondered if what I saw with my eyes open was more like what I saw with my eyes closed than I wanted to admit.

For the first time since I woke up, my mind went back to the dream. The whole thing consisted of a single symbol, floating against a background of the deepest black I have ever seen; asleep or awake. In college several friends and I had gone into a cave. Inside a large central chamber we had turned out our flashlights and gone staggering around in the total darkness amazed at how quickly we lost our bearings. That darkness was noon on a summer day in Florida compared to what lay beyond the symbol in my dream. I was familiar with the symbol, having seen and studied it in school. But, knowing the origins of the symbol made its appearance in my dream even stranger.

It was the Sepher Yetzirah, the Tree of Life, a symbol that has its origins in the mysticism of Judaism. The symbol was an immensely complex metaphor, one that people often study for their entire lives, like chess. Although I recognized it, I couldn't figure out what it was doing in my dreams. I may have been many things, but I wasn't Jewish. I had dated a couple of Jewish girls, but that had been years ago. I couldn't help finding it extremely odd that I would be dreaming of Jewish mystical symbols.

I was not a religious person. I liked religion. But I also liked philosophy, and psychology, and politics, and a half dozen other disciplines. If anything my religious beliefs tended towards philosophical Hinduism mixed with philosophical Taoism, Buddhism and a heaping helping of Discordianism. If I were to use a single word to describe my religious philosophy it would have to be "Maybe." I was raised Catholic and held the kind of scorn for the church that only a child raised Catholic can feel towards it. That I had narrowly avoided the dogmatic brain blender that was Catholic school, was a blessing that I thanked God for when I was feeling sarcastic.

Interpreting and thinking about recurring dreams was fine, but I had a job interview in the morning. After a week of not sleeping for more than an hour uninterrupted my eyes were sunk into my head just about as deep as they could go without putting undue pressure on the frontal lobe of my brain. I had been unemployed for four months and the need for a job had crossed the plains of desperation and was nudging its way into manic despair. Without sleep this would surely show in the interview. Nobody wants to hire a desperate manic woodchuck who looks as uneasy as a redneck in a Reggae bar. As I looked into the mirror I saw that a manic woodchuck was precisely what I looked like. I didn't need a tea leave reader to know that this was not a good omen for tomorrow.

My job distress had become so acute lately that I would have understood perfectly well if I was having recurring dreams about bill collectors, four headed federal loan monsters, or falling uncontrollably down an endlessly dark and cold tunnel. These images would, in the bizarre logic of dreams, make sense. But a static image of a Jewish mystical symbol? I considered briefly calling one of those psychic hotlines and hotly demanding that they explain everything to me immediately. Screw with their

heads for a change. My distinct, unsettled feeling bothered me as well. Why did I always wake up feeling so unsettled, clammy nasty sweat clinging to my face. I reached down and turned both water faucets, waiting for the water to get tepid, one finger gauging the temperature. I splashed water into my eyes and feel much better, at least physically. I patted Misha on the head, reassuring her that everything was OK. I went into the kitchen, tossed her a treat and went back to bed.

I woke up three more times in the night. But after each, I would only reach over, wipe the sweat away with a dry part of the blanket, roll over and fall back asleep. The sleep wasn't terrific, but I made it through.

Actually, I made it through a little too much because I woke up late for my interview. I had lost the usual half-hour cushion I liked to give myself to get adjusted to being awake and had to fly out of the house at nearly a dead run. Even when I hadn't been plagued with the dreams of Rabbi's I had been a very slow riser. Add to it my recent sleep deprivation and my motor was slower to start than an old Pinto in a Minnesota winter. I thought a shower would help but it didn't.

I lost any trouble I had waking up the moment that I stepped outside the house. The first breath was actually painful, it felt as if there was a thin film of ice on my teeth. The wind whipped around and through my clothes as if I had decided to go out naked. I thought of turning around and climbing back under the covers, humans were not meant to go outside in weather like that. Shit, polar bears shouldn't have to go outside in weather like that. Of course, if I didn't go out and get a job I would be living in such weather 24 hours a day, a prospect that sent me running for my car, desperate to escape the cold.

Because Chicago had decided to become a frozen tundra, my car decided that it didn't really want to start. I had to sit there and try to turn it over for five minutes before it finally sputtered into life. The radio was still turned up as loud as it would go, just like I left it the night before. The sudden blaring noise scared me so badly I jumped and hit my head on the roof of the car. It made a dull thwack sound and I had check my head to see if a bump was going to come up.

I reached out and grabbed the radio's volume knob, twisting it too far to the left, cutting the sound completely. This sudden lack of sound, where it had once been so overwhelming, made the silence nearly as loud as the music. I reached out again and put the radio at a low level, it came as no surprise that there was no music, only commercials. I put the car in gear and the engine immediately stalled. Cursing I flipped the car into neutral, restarted it, and tried again. This time the gear caught, and the car, as reluctant to venture out into the cold as I was, sputtered off toward the train station.

In the past couple of years, special waiting huts had been constructed along some train routes, where heat lamps, mounted into the ceiling can be lit, warming the air to a temperature that was bearable, at least for your head and torso. Your feet remained cold no matter what. I sat under the bright glare of the heat lamp thankful to the wonderful people that had constructed this small shelter against the cold. On my way out of the house I had grabbed a book about Kabbalah from one of my bookshelves. I took it out of my oversized winter coat pocket and began flipping randomly through the pages. I stopped at a passage that I had underlined when I read the book in college. The words made my stomach feel very odd as I read them. I couldn't quite place the emotion, an intense disquiet, I guess.

The passage said, "The doctrine of creation was built on a theory of emanations and asserted that the world derived from the transcendent and unknowable God through a series of increasingly material manifestations (sephiroth). The sephiroth from the central image of Kabbalistic meditation, the Sephiroth Tree of Life, which describes the path of descent from the divine to the material realm, and the path of ascent to the highest level of spirituality. Each sephiroth is a level of attainment in knowledge, corresponding to energy centers in the body, and is also divided into four interlocking sections, or Worlds which constitute the cosmos: Emanation, Creation, Formation, and Action or making. Through contemplation and meditation, similar to Eastern Yogic disciplines; the Kabbalist ascends the tree of life. The sephiroth also comprise the sacred, unknowable, and unspeakable personal name of God: YHVH (Yahweh), the Tetragrammaton. So sacred is the Tetragrammaton that other names, such as Elohim and Jehovah are substituted in its place in scripture."

A sudden loud noise from outside brought my eyes away from the book. In the near distance a headlight was approaching. I leaned close to the window, my breath immediately fogging it, trying to see the color on the train's sign. The color represented the different lines, I needed red, and was happy when I saw that very color in the train's indicator window. As I gathered my stuff together my eyes were inexplicably drawn to the window. In the frost, quickly fading into transparency was the Tree of Life. The symbol from my dream. It vanished in the glare of the heat lamp as I watched, leaving me to wonder if I wasn't perhaps going a bit bonkers.

When I rode on the train I always brought my camera, an old 35mm job without a computer that can be reprogrammed to guide missiles. There was a great deal of graffiti along the train line and some of it was actually quite beautiful. For a moment, I considered whipping it out and trying to catch a picture of the condensation before it was completely evaporated. But somehow, I was sure that even if I tried to take the picture, even if I could get the camera out on time, there would be nothing when the film was developed. It would only be a clear window, perhaps with my own reflection holding the camera visible in the glass, suddenly making me a ghost. No, the camera would stay in its place until I needed it.

I had a pretty big scrapbook of my favorite photographs that I had started several years earlier when I lived on the North Side. I also had photographs of graffiti that I had come across in Boston and New York. The latter was where I had found my favorite piece, the name Bob Dobbs, painted with an abstract color palette that would make Kandinsky drool. Beneath the name was a Meerscham Pipe, the kind you see in tobacco stores in the mall, only this one was a bright shade of green and had racing stripes painted along the side.

Many of the photographs taken from the train were snapped through the window, the train barreling past. Often the images blurred slightly, an effect that I have come to appreciate a great deal because it adds a note of chaos into the photograph that is missing from the pictures taken from a tripod. The ones where light has been sampled carefully and the F-stop corrected were always nice, but they were rarely great.

I always rode in the front seat of the train to facilitate picture taking. In order to avoid the mildly treacherous trip between cars I walked to the very front of the platform so that I could get the front seat. The train came pulling up with a great fanfare of whistles, screeching brakes, and sparks spitting wildly from the infamous "third rail" the track which contained the electricity the train used to run its engines.

The train ride from the suburbs to the city was quite boring when you sat in a middle car, the only view being the beige and orange seats and the bizarre advertisements that offered to file bankruptcy for you for the low price of 350 dollars. If you have 350 dollars, pay your damn bills with it. That was the middle of the train, the front however, was at least a little more amusing. It was the world's tamest roller coaster ride. You really did get going pretty quick, no European train speeds, but pretty fast for being in a tube. From this seat you also had the best view of the graffiti, it flew past too quickly if you in a middle car. The only problem was that the front seat was attractive to a lot of people and sometimes it was hard to get the coveted seat. Only this morning the train was not in the least crowded and the entire front half of the lead car was empty until I arrived. I plopped down and pulled out my camera, fiddling with the settings, adjusting for the low light. I slid back on the plastic and, propped my feet on the corrugated steel wall in front of me. I decided to give some thought to the dream and the passage I had read in the book, "The sephiroth also comprise the sacred, unknowable, and unspeakable name of God: YHVH."

Most crucifixes have these letters, YHVH, carved into the plank above Jesus' head, and sometimes, under his feet. It is safe to say that your average Catholic is unaware of the mysticism inherent in those four innocent letters. The most difficult part of the mystery is the fact that the "hidden" name of God was just that, hidden. It is unlikely that the letters YHVH have any currently meaningful relation to the actual name. Far more likely is the scenario that YHVH was a code. If you were the head Rabbi living 2000 years ago, your predecessor would have given you the secret formula that would change YHVH to the correct name. It is highly unlikely that there is a single person in the modern era who knows what that formula was.

I was jolted out of my thoughts by the realization that I remembered the camera, but I forgot my resume. I had a disc in my backpack that had a copy of my resume on it, but all of the paper copies were sitting on the counter in my kitchen. A kitchen that would not be mine for very much longer if one of these wanker employers didn't hire me. The voice of Dale Carnegie rang out in my head, "Positive attitude young man, it wins the race." I shook the thought away. If I made it early enough, very unlikely, but time is relative after all, perhaps I could schmooze somebody into letting me use their computer and printer for a moment.

The dream was the furthest thing from my mind. My thoughts were predominantly on the acid cramp in my stomach and the low scale panic that threatened to overtake my thought processes at any moment. The train pulled out of my stop, picking up speed as it overcame its own gravity and got itself moving. For some reason I thought about Muhammad, trying to tell Allah's angel that he didn't want to be a prophet. Essentially, the angel kicked his butt and told him if Allah wanted him to be a prophet he would damn well be a prophet. Muhammad, being a wise man, then accepted the angel's offer and got to writing. Then, as fast as it came, the thought was gone, like the train rounding a bend in the tunnel.

It bothered me that the job that I was scampering around and stressing myself out about was a job that under normal circumstances I would never take. Who-ever-the-fuck INC. was hiring low level data entry accounting monkeys for one of their approximately three million identical office buildings to be found in and around the Chicago Metro area.

The only positive aspect to the job was that this particular box of cubicles was located downtown, which automatically increases the hourly wage by a few bucks. If you lived frugally it would bring me enough money to keep eating. I was single and had no children. There is also the not so insignificant question of whether punching numbers into computers is a living or a long prolonged death, like a terribly cheesy Seventies horror film. Apparently, for millions of people the answer was yes, punching numbers into computers was indeed a life. I, in a self righteous hauteur, felt sorry for them. They, being employed while I was not, probably felt the same way about my "lazy freeloading ass."

The subway rumbled loudly over the track, rocking back and forth with the predictable rhythm found on all trains. Electricity flashed brightly from beneath the train lighting the tunnel like a disco, the lights inside the train trying to keep time with the sparks from below, but succeeding in only causing a mild nausea in those who try to find the rhythm.

They call the train system in Chicago the El, so named for the elevated tracks that snaked above the streets of the city. The underground section of the train was also the El although it wasn't elevated. I thought the downtown area, where the El was a subway, should be called the UN or the Und. Actually, downtown there are El's and UN's simultaneously.

This was how mundane my thoughts had been when my life changed completely.

One moment I was playing with vernacular and the next I felt my eyes being dragged out the window. It felt like invisible hands had taken my face and forced it to look out of the window. Then it was worse, the hands reached through and directly manipulated my eyes, rolling them to a spot on the wall. Before I saw it, I knew it was there. It called me, I could hear it whispering. As surely as there was no alien voice in my head the moment before, there was one there now. Although I knew what I was going to see, in another way I didn't. It was like the psychology experiment where the guy runs in with the banana and everyone in the room sees it as a knife, even when their eyes should be reporting fruit instead of a stiletto. On the wall, painted red, was the Tree of Life, the same symbol that was plaguing my dreams.

I felt the entire world slow to a crawl, a loud whooshing sound filled my ears. I was suddenly immensely paranoid, and I felt as if every eye in the car was on me. That everyone knew that I had seen something, understood something that people were simply not supposed to know. Everyone in the car would devour me, directed by God, or Satan, whatever force it was that kept the mystical knowledge of God from the bulk of humanity.

The graffiti was painted in a dull flat red. It was unremarkable, without flourish or special decoration. Although we were cruising down the tunnel at nearly forty miles an hour, and I could not have seen it for more than a second or two I felt as if I had all the time I wanted to examine this particular piece of subway art. Suddenly, in a preternatural voice words blared out as loud as anything that I had ever heard. The voice was on the second line when I realized I was hearing the Lord's prayer. It seemed very odd at the time that a Christian prayer would blare out at the viewing of a Jewish symbol, but I was suddenly starting to believe that there was less of a difference in religions than I had previously thought. When it came to mystical iconography, anything was fair game. For a moment I thought to look around for Ganesh, why not throw in an elephant God, just for variety? Before I could though, the sheer volume of the voice cut the thought short. The voice was huge in terms of volume, but the phrases it used were oddly familiar. It took me a moment but then I had it. William Shatner. James Tiberius Kirk. TJ Hooker.

God sounded like William Shatner? Weird.

Then, as quickly as it had begun, it was over. For a long time I just sat in my seat. To keep myself stable I slid my hand down to the hard plastic side of my chair and grabbed it in an iron grip. I waited for something to happen, and when nothing did, I waited for a while longer. I was just sitting in the front seat of a train, William Shatner had said what he had to say.

The sight of the graffiti and the invasion of Kirk had happened close enough together that there could be little doubt that one was connected to the other. The graffiti had been identical to the dream except for one major difference, in the graffiti the ten sephirot were labeled with their respective names. In my dream I knew what they were, but the words weren't there. Something was wrong about the graffiti though. I couldn't put my finger on what it was though. I knew subconsciously, but it hadn't trickled into the part of my brain that liked to know why it knew things. That's the problem with the subconscious, it knows everything that you know, only it doesn't necessarily give a fuck if you know it.

The Tree of Life was painted about 250 yards from my downtown stop. I didn't get off. Instead I stared at my feet, trembling inside, trying to understand what had happened. By the time I looked up again I was approaching the North Side. I looked at my watch and saw that I was already late for my meeting. I had to admit to myself that I wasn't going to make it. I had effectively lost another job. I considered what it would sound like, trying to explain to my prospective boss that I had missed my meeting because I was somehow being haunted by Jewish mystical symbols and blaring renditions of Christian prayers.

I felt stunned, shell-shocked, and unable to act. I was aware of how recycled the air smelled, of the rocking of the train. I avoided the eyes of the other passengers, a task made much easier by my location in the front seat. There was only one other person, in the adjoining seat on the other side of the aisle who could see the distraught look on my face or the sweat that was running down my face in spite of the cold day. I had ridden the train to the downtown stop many times, and I had never seen that particular piece of graffiti before. It was possible, I supposed, that I just never noticed it. But this seemed unlikely, the "Tree of Life" isn't a very well known symbol and seeing it painted in a subway, even under normal circumstances, would have stood out in my mind.

I stayed on the train riding it all the way north to O'Hare, the last stop on the line. By the time I reached O'Hare I had formulated a plan. My mind turned to other things, drifting as I looked out the window, allowing myself to relax. I questioned briefly if I was crazy, I had just heard the booming voice of Captain Kirk reading the Lord's Prayer, and I had to admit it was a fair question. I should remind you, I am not a religious guy. I was not the kind of person who God talked to, even now that he had, I found the imposition annoying instead of some divine miracle. "Stop bothering me God." I thought, "Go solve death or something. Cure Cancer. Leave me the fuck alone, I really don't want to hear it."

Only now, I found my own cavalier attitude a little scary because there was a large part of myself that knew without doubt that the voice I heard had been the voice of God, reading a prayer about how wonderful that he is.

Either I was having a really weird experience or I suddenly went crazy and nobody bothered to warn me about it. I always thought my head was under lousy management, but to have your sanity just call in sick one day, without any warning, why that was just unforgivable. The alternative however, well that didn't sit too well with my brain either. My choices were limited so I decided to go back to the graffiti and see what happened the second time I faced it.

The train rumbled to a halt at the O'Hare station. The accompanying screech coming all the way forward into my consciousness, causing my eyes to draw together. I had the queer sensation of my ears, sick of being abused, try to push themselves a little flatter against my head. I marched across the platform to where a train was heading back the way I had come. I jogged ahead and slid into a waiting car seconds before the doors slid shut.

This was a game that the conductors liked to play with the passengers. At almost every stop somebody runs onto the platform at the last minute, trying to catch a train that is obviously going to leave any second. They only sit still for 30 seconds at the outside, unless the cars are very full, then you get a little longer. On cold days, the El always ran late and missing the train meant waiting some indeterminable amount of time in the freezing cold until the next one deigned to show up. The conductors knew all of this of course, and so they would often "not notice" that you were coming as you ran toward the train full tilt, yelling and waving your arms as you did so. "Oblivious" the conductors trigger the doors and it's up to you to out-race the mechanism and get as much of your body into the train as possible. As long as you can get the trunk of your body into the door you're fine. But if you are forced to stick in a leg or an arm, you'll get to ride in the train, but you'll also get a nasty crack on the forearm or calf for your trouble.

In order to regain my front row seat I would have to go all the way through the train to the front car. I had come straight across the platform and the front of one train was on the same side of the platform as the back of the other. As a result I had to walk through the entire train in order to get back into the front of the car. I wanted to be up there in case another piece of graffiti was painted on the southbound tracks. side of the platform for one side was the back of the other.

I made my way through car after car. I was accosted once, and politely asked twice, for spare change by heavily dressed homeless people. Their numerous layers were pungent, but hopefully successful in the retention of heat. I gave some pocket change to the polite ones and only looked away and attempted an arcing semicircle around the accoster. Unfortunately for me the aisle was very narrow, I didn't have a whole lot of extra room to arc into. The guy, dressed in a long black overcoat, the ends tattered badly from age and constant use grabbed at the front of my jacket and told me to give him two dollars. He was obviously more than a little fucked up, even at this hour of the morning. His hands closed too early, and the backs of them skidded down my jacket, sending the surly bastard to the ground. I kept going, only looking back once.

The guy had pulled himself into an open seat and was staring at his shoes, mumbling to himself. As the symbol of the tree had reminded me, the world exists from opposites, the fluctuation between any and all polarities created a great deal of chaos and order in nearly equal measure. Most judges would argue that order was winning, but not by much. Chaos was having one hell of a fourth quarter. I breathed a sigh of relief once I reached the front car, the heavy metal door banging shut behind me.

The front seat was open again and I thankfully dropped into it, happy that I would no longer have to try to execute the drunken lurch that is walking on the El. I pondered getting off the train just south of where I had seen the symbol and then walking down the tunnel to get a better look at it. Instead I decided that it would be better to first ride all the way to the southern

end of the line, looking for a repeat of the symbol. There was no shortage of graffiti, but none of it concerned Jewish mysticism. I took pictures of three different pieces, two of the pictures might even turn out to be pretty good. Concentrating on taking the pictures took my mind off the day that I was having, so I was grateful for the distraction.

Inevitably, I reached the opposite end of the rail line. Once I again hunched my shoulders and went out into the whip cold. This time there was no waiting train, and because the station was in a very poor area of town, there were no warming huts either. I would have to wait.

And so I stood and waited for twenty minutes. I pulled down my hat, trying to trap as much heat as possible under it. My several layers of clothing were supposed to keep out the cold. They didn't seem to be working, the air simply cut straight through them like I was wearing a lightweight muslin cloth instead of Gore Tex. Standing there, freezing, I looked across the 90/94 expressway at the dilapidated buildings of the Robert Taylor homes. They were mostly boarded up and gutted now. Soon they would be replaced by outrageously expensive lakefront property, all of the neighborhoods former residents displaced for the umpteenth time. The site of the buildings angered me. Gentrification. The thought of the rich pigs who were on their way made me even angrier.

Poverty on the South side of Chicago was thick and clinging. It was an environment that tried to choke the hope from people's eyes and was too often successful. I considered the tree from my dreams, the tree that had shown up, so unexpectedly in my life this very morning. The Tree of Life is supposed to contain all opposites, but the wisdom was in the middle pillar, in the balance between having nothing and having everything. This kind of balance was distinctly absent in most of the landscape that has been unfolding itself as the train made its way north and then back south.

Affluent suburbs have become ghettos. And ghettos, in turn, become affluent suburbs again. But not until they have become run down enough to make buying them in enormous chunks feasible. Not until they are so rundown from the layoffs and cutbacks that the houses become lost causes. Not until the people that live in them lose the pride that comes from having a place to call your own.

In its own way the richest areas of the north suburbs were just as dangerous as the poor in the south. Only the danger in the north was of a different character. Its affluence led to hubris, which created blinders which damaged the sight and attitudes of the often otherwise good people who lived among the imported hand made rugs and tailor made shoes. There was no large city in America that didn't elicit these thoughts as the redundancy of the human misery became numbingly painful to contemplate. The polarity was visible in the very architecture of the buildings.

This couldn't be what any God had meant for life to be. Unless of course he has an exclusive contract with GE or Nike. These days it seemed that anything was possible and everything had become permissible. God could go on Oprah and apologize, he would be forgiven. Oprah would say his inner child God wasn't be nurtured and Doctor Phil would prescribe everybody some Prozac.

Anyone who doesn't see that she is running a weird self-help church isn't paying attention. I admit she might not even know she's doing it. But she's doing it just the same. We have somehow entered a world that has no way to define what intent means. And responsibility, why nobody is responsible for anything. Even the CEO's of big companies, the guys who shape the direction of business, claim to be slaves to the market. The market, being a fictional thing, isn't talking.

If you throw a rock you will can hit a PHD psychiatrist who will tell you that we are chemical machines that have to be fixed with Ritalin and Prozac. People cannot help their actions because their brain chemistry is all whacked out. Throw another rock and you will hit another PHD psychiatrist who will insist that primal screaming, chakra reorientation, or inner child nurturement is the true and magic answer. Again the tree creates opposites and again the wisdom lies in the middle.

It came down to this. Until recently, technology and progress had been seen as the divine will of God, at least to the European ancestry that has come to dominate the entire world's idea of what constitutes existence on the planet. (To the great detriment of the rest of the world and humanity in general.) Yet, for all intensive purposes, with a very few exceptions, we are in exactly the same situation socially at the turn of the Second Millennium as we were in the middle ages. There are Lords and there are surfs. The surfs are people who have to work constantly for their existence. Which is, in itself not necessarily bad. There is nothing wrong with work. But it should be something that is interesting, stimulating, something that is both productive and engaging.

In America, we don't define existence by the presence of basic physical needs, food, water, shelter, and love. In spite of the fact that these basic items are missing, especially love, we now define ourselves by our THINGS, our STUFF. Our focus is in the world of Malkuth, earth has been separated from its parts, materialism is king. We have actually traveled by means of Lingam (George Carlin: The bullets, and the bombs, and the rockets, are all shaped like dicks.) to Yesod, associated with the moon, a feminine force. This should have taught us an important lesson concerning our place in the grander scheme of things.

We had a perfect object lesson, helping us understand that there is a larger universe that makes us a single thread in a much larger tapestry. That indeed, we are wasting away, eating at ourselves like cancer, instead of spreading out into the universe and allowing evolution to continue. We have, almost everyone agrees, gone as far as we can in this limited two-dimensional view of our own existence. The new picture is so much more exciting, so much more worthwhile, that our lack of spiritual growth to parallel this remarkable advancement physically has legitimately baffled most of those willing to try to examine it.

I checked my watch, it was 2:35. I had been almost three hours since I had skipped past my downtown stop. All the time since, while riding along, I had been looking for a repeat of the symbol, another incarnation to make what I had seen seem less unique, less powerful. Only there was nothing. None of the graffiti brought that same sense of responsibility, of necessity that had come with the sight of the tree. I decided to sneak into the tunnel and try to get a good picture of the Tree that had so affected me.

The train sat at the Roosevelt stop, the last before I would again pass the tree. I sat debating on whether I should get a second look at the red lines of the tree before attempting the dangerous trek into the tunnels on foot. Besides the obvious danger of a train smashing me into an unrecognizable lump, there was the further danger of arrest, and the ever humming specter of the

third rail.

I decided to get off the train. There was no point in wasting time; besides, I wasn't in a big hurry to have the voice of William Shatner blasting in my head again. The mere thought of the volume that I was subjected to caused my ears to ring slightly, a soft tinkling bell far off in the distance. Grabbing my backpack I got out of my seat and entered the subway station.

Immediately I was struck by the funky smell that seems to universally haunt subway platforms everywhere. It must be a combination of the recycled air and ever present dampness that is a feature of underground tunnels everywhere. The platform was not very busy, I had arrived in the brief respite between lunchtime and rush hour. I walked to the end of the platform glancing around as discreetly as I could, trying to see if there were any CTA cops hanging around. There were no uniformed guys, and the only person who appeared to be paying any attention to those around them was me, so I didn't think there were any plain-clothes guys either. They might be wearing jeans, but cops look like cops.

I turned and walked, as discreetly as I could past the large yellow end of platform area. After taking a long look down the tunnel, I hopped down the four feet or so to the tracks. My feet slapped down in the never-dry gunk that lined every inch of every subway in the world. As quickly as I could I hopped over the rails, exaggerating the distance needed to clear the third rail that hummed low and audible, like crickets in the summertime. About ten feet down the tunnel there was a ladder that led to a walkway that ran the distance of the tunnel. If a train breaks down, or a Hollywood style crackup takes place the walkway served as an evacuation route. It was also used for maintenance crews, after all, someone had to change the lightbulbs down there.

The tunnel was very dark, the only light coming from emergency lamps placed every ten feet or so. My footsteps echoed in the tunnel, coming back to me and making me paranoid. I was already worried that the overly loud voice of Captain Kirk would send me tumbling off the walkway and onto the tracks, frying myself on the electric rail or conveniently falling in front of an oncoming train. It was hard to get along because I wasn't sure exactly where the graffiti had been placed; there was about three-quarters of a mile between stops here. I walked along, my eyes scanned the wall in nervous sweeps.

When I found the Tree the second time there was no voice. It was just a red diagram, one that appeared to be very old. It looked, as impossible as this is, to be older than the tunnel that it was painted in. The more I looked the more I began to think that this was no paint at all, but instead; a primitive vegetable dye. It didn't leave the bunched pattern of paint that spray cans deliver, instead, the Tree was painted with some kind of course brush, the bristles were evident at the end of each stroke of red.

Reaching into my backpack I removed my camera and began to snap pictures. I took almost a complete roll, clicking over and over, to make sure that I got the shot, so that I wouldn't ever have to come into this tunnel again. I realized that my days of snapping shots of subway graffiti were probably over, this trip would be my last. In fact, it was highly possible I would eschew the subways altogether from then on. (A promise to myself I kept for less than a week. When the film advance lever on my camera pulled to a stop I returned the camera to my backpack and jogged back the way that I had come. Before I could get all the way out of sight of the tree I glanced back at it one last time. When I did, I heard the voice again, William Shatner, reverberating like God, "Thee... Who is sick.... Must... .. Be healed." Thankfully this sentiment was intoned at a normal conversational volume. The voice continued, "Only by the name of God... Can thee be healed...? What's wrong with this picture?"

The last bit seemed to be separate, an almost rhetorical question, but I couldn't be sure. Nothing else was said, even though I asked the voice to clarify itself. Apparently this mysterious voice that came from nowhere wanted to be enigmatic. I grinned and shook my head.

Climbing the stairs from the depths of the city I walked into the brightness of the afternoon. The sun was reflecting off of the snow that covered everything, it blazed against my cornea causing little lights to dance. I stopped for a minute, giving my eyes the chance to adjust. In the meantime I stared at a crack in the sidewalk, pondering my next move. What I had just gone through was too weird, too hard to sort out, my mind was dealing in situations for which it had no categories and was attempting a revolt. I needed perspective. I had to separate myself from the weirdness, if only for long enough to get some kind of direction. I glanced furtively up, doing what could best be called a Glare Check. The returning image was clear, free from the annoying feedback it had been giving off for the past several seconds. I looked around at where I was.

A storefront McDonalds, sans drive-through was on my left and rocketing into the stratosphere, only a block and a half away was the Hancock building, the second biggest Lingam in Chicago. I decided to go to the top, if there was anywhere better to get perspective than the top of a skyscraper, it wasn't only a block and a half away. I stuck my hands down as deep into the pockets as they could go, brushing aside the small remnants of tissue that lived there, fugitives from the fates of snot.

I weaved through the heavy foot traffic on Michigan Avenue. Every third storefront had a Salvation Army person ringing the bell and wishing everyone a Merry Christmas even though it was only the middle of November. I doled out my change, a little at a time as I made my way down the street. I usually gave whatever change I had anyway, but when voices yell prayers into your head with the volume of the Armageddon, you make sure that you have the tithe thing covered at the very least. God is obviously a capitalist, just ask the Vatican.

Before I walked down the stairs to where you pick up the elevator to the observation deck I looked straight up, feeling the reverse vertigo. The building was so high that your eyes had to distort its shape badly to make any sense of the thing at all. Normally, only nature had the power to do that to the senses. Here the sheer magnitude of what man was capable of gave the same effect. It was one of the chief attractions, I think, to building such magnificent edifices in the first place.

It felt appropriate, somehow, to go into one of man's most audacious structures, to get perspective, to gain a little of the advantage I imagine God has over us. The difference is God gets the 3-D director's cut with several billion simultaneous audio tracks and more camera angles than Oliver Stone throwing a fit in the editing room.

The elevator shot through the center of the building like a piece of food exiting the windpipe of a person receiving the Heimlich. The doors opened to a cash register where I shelled out my bucks to pay for the heat in this gigantic thing. Passing through the turnstile I made my way directly to the floor-to-ceiling windows that wrapped completely around the building except for where the massive steel support beams were laid into the overall framework of the building. I ignored the crappy telescopes which cost a quarter and were never in focus on the rare occasion that they worked at all. I leaned forward and placed the top of

my head against the glass. Even though it was enormously thick, the glass was still very cold, and a small shiver went through me. I looked down, not focusing my eyes at all, only looking at the shapes and the movement, the way that you have to look at those "Magic Pictures." The ones that don't look like anything at first, but suddenly become 3D sailboats or race cars if you look at them just right. I had even seen a pornographic "Magic picture" in a store window in New Orleans.

As I looked now, the Tree was everywhere. In the small dots of people that passed like tiny living dots in a marvelous pointillist painting, the tree was there. Severity, mildness, and mercy were in every direction. Opposites and their balance, their equilibrium. The grand and holy movement without which there would be no existence at all. Without the movement there would be a stillness so total it cannot be fathomed but only reached at with a Zen-like sideways glance of consciousness. In that moment I knew with a total clarity that the diagram was the key to something. It was potentially the answer to the question that burns in the hearts of every human. For even the holiest monk has at one time or another felt that God might just be in his head. That we are, in fact, alone. The product of random chance and coincidence.

In that moment though, I was seeing the pulsing source that ran through everything. Seeing the larger pattern that spun into the lives of people, patterns made ordered by their sheer lack of pattern. A contradiction that was nevertheless true. Like the inseparability of the chicken from the egg, so too are we connected with the tree.

The last words that I heard whispered before I left the graffiti, "What's wrong with this picture?" suddenly flashed through my mind with a terrible force, it drowned out my thoughts and visions of the tree and its patterns.

The world once again became full of cars, buildings and people; the wholeness of the movement was lost in the particulars of regular perception. Again the phrase, "What's wrong with this picture?" came rocketing across my mindscape like an enormous locomotive. I brought up the picture again in my head. It was suddenly clear to me what this last bit had meant. All of the labels had been right on the diagram, but the order was wrong.

I had seen a one-hour photo development place just before the Hancock center. I immediately headed back to the elevators. As I waited for the elevator to rocket up to the observation deck I rewound the film in the camera and popped the roll into my hand.

An hour and a half later I had my developed roll of pictures, a hot cup of coffee and Dion Fortune's The Mystical Kabbalah on a table in front of me. The coffee shop I had ducked into was crowded with downtown shoppers. I took a seat in one of the many new chic overstuffed chairs that were scattered carefully about the shop in a manner that wouldn't disrupt the room's Feng-Shui. I pulled the pictures out of the envelope quietly crossing my fingers that they wouldn't show a tree shaped blank spot on an otherwise paint saturated wall. They didn't. The tree was there, the ghastly color of red well captured by the film. The moment that my gaze touched the graffiti I could hear the Lord's Prayer being recited again. It wasn't in the blaring TJ Hooker voice that I heard on the train, instead the voice was a woman's and the volume was a tad beneath normal speech.

"Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed be thy NAME." The last word, "name" was said with a special emphasis. I looked around startled and more than a little frightened despite the volume loss.

Sitting on a chair just behind my own was a very old nun, reciting the Lord's prayer and absentmindedly fingering a rosary between her old leathery fingers. She had a kind face when she looked up at me, and she smiled in spite of the fact that I was probably looking at her with a very peculiar expression on my face. I stretched my face into a return smile and went back to the pictures. I took the copy of Fortune's book and flipped to the last page where she had rendered several different drawings of the tree. I immediately noticed what was wrong when I compared my pictures to the pictures in the book. Chokmah, Binah, and Malkut, the second, third, and tenth points, respectively, were mixed up. Malkuth was in the third position where Binah was supposed to be. Binah was where Chokmah was supposed to be and Chokmah was in the position of Malkut, at the very bottom of the tree. I took a pen and drew a triangle from the second, third and tenth points. I shook my head.

I knew that there were supposed to be three triangles already inherent in the tree, the supernal, ethical, and Astral triangles, they were in fact illustrated on the page previous to the one I had been looking at. This new triangle, formed by mixing up the normal order, had to mean something. The new triangle connected the base of the top triangle, to the lowest point on the tree, basically creating a triangle that spanned the entire thing.

I flipped through the book skimming over the sections on the relevant points on the tree. No obvious story popped out at me. Then I had an idea. At home I had a computer program where you could type in Hebrew letters and their mathematical equivalents would surface, maybe if I entered the three sephiroth and set the program running it would find something interesting. As it was, the more I sat there, my eyes darting from one point to the next, the more vexed I became. My mind made up associations and rejected them at random and I didn't think I would ever be able to come up with the solution on my own. If the computer failed I would deal with it when the time came.

I went back to my small apartment in a daze. My animals greeted me at the door, falling all over themselves. I liked the attention, the normalcy and predictability of it. I stroked them each in turn, enjoying the soft slickness of their coats. I was lucky enough to live in a dog-friendly apartment building and my neighbor and I had erected a fence around the backyard, allowing my dog Misha to go out in the cold to do her business while I stayed warm inside. There was still the winter ordeal of the walk, the only time of the year that the daily march wasn't pleasant. The only time I liked taking the dog for walk in the winter was when it was snowing. Walking among the falling flakes has a kind of hypnotic quality, especially in the evening when the artificial light caused the snow to light up like little miniature comets, swooping lazily on the heels of the wind.

I turned on my Compaq while I waited by the back door for Misha, if she wasn't let in the moment she was finished, she would scratch on the door and bark until the entire neighborhood knew that she had taken her poop. A few minutes later, Misha was sitting on my feet while I worked on the computer and tried to set up the Hebrew/number translation program. On a whim, I decided to send all the results to a cryptography decoder that I had downloaded on a whim and had never actually used. To be honest, I wasn't sure why I did it at the time, it was just a hunch.

I set the program running and wandered into the kitchen to make something to eat. Opening the refrigerator revealed milk, a loaf of bread, and a wide assortment of condiments. Briefly hoping for peanut butter my eyes scanned the jars. I had pickles, a food I don't even like, but no peanut butter. In the end I settled on cereal, as I too often do. It didn't make for the

greatest dinner, but it was better than nothing.

Two days later the program was still running. I tried not to think about the problem directly, figuring that my subconscious mind would do a better job with such a problem than my conscious one ever could. Nevertheless, it seemed like every ten minutes I was standing in front of the computer wishing and willing it to go faster. Every once and a while the computer would beep and some nonsense would pop up like "Earmuff Jumbo Rat Xylophone" or "Pork Channel," weird random combinations which, I was pretty sure meant nothing. Although I thought that Pork Channel would be a good name for a band. I dutifully wrote them down though, on a yellow legal pad that sat next to the computer. Once the message was a name, Hunter S. Thompson." I smiled and wrote it down. After doing the necessary bookwork I would clear the file and the computer would get back to its business.

Finally in the middle of the third night the computer beeped twice loudly, indicating that the program had finished running. The noise woke me because I was asleep in a LaZy-Boy Chair right next to the computer. I had been dreaming of the Tree, the same still image that had come in my dreams night after night. Only this time, the dream was even more real than it had ever been before. Prior to then, I would have said that it was impossible for the dream to be more vivid, more detailed than it had been, but it was.

The computer was flashing, the cryptography program read: *Match comparisons run*: a bar graph indicated 100%. Then a line beneath: *Match Probability*: another bar graph indicated 100%. Beneath this was the message it had discovered. It appeared to be an address: 777 State Street. Chicago, Illinois.

The words sat on the screen in a most unremarkable fashion, as if I had asked the program for the address of a pizza joint, not to find a alphanumeric code hidden in a piece of graffiti from a subway. Slowly, as if through a thick gauze a thought entered my head, State Street was the road that ran along the train route I had been on.

It wasn't possible, it would simply be too weird. I called up MapQuest on the computer and put in the address 777 State Street. I typed in the state and city and hit enter. I waited, a nasty knot forming in my stomach as I waited for the results to make their way from the computer database that was MapQuest. I figured that I would probably get an error message telling me that the address that I had entered was in fact, not an address at all. But then the screen booted and I found myself looking at a blinking red dot that sat, as far as I could tell, directly where I had seen the graffiti in the subway. It was an actual address. I felt a sizable lump rise from my stomach to the back of my throat.

In the back of my head I could hear the Lord's prayer being recited, quietly, but urgently.

Was it possible, I wondered, to be possessed by God in much the same way some folks say you can be possessed by the devil?

After saving the results of my search I tried to go back to bed, abandoning the LazyBoy in favor of the real thing. I was comfortable physically but I was in far too many emotional/psychological knots for sleep to come easily. Instead, I sank into that strange, half-way point between sleep and wakefulness. My thoughts took on the gummy quality of dreams, but there was still ego, awareness, floating inches beneath the surface of the fog. The Tree appeared, yet again, in my sleep vision. Only now the fourth triangle, the one that had been formed by the misaligned sephiroth, shone brightly, standing in stark contrast to an abnormally dulled view of the Tree. The three points suddenly blared brighter still, the Hebrew letters that made up their names suddenly projecting out of them. These letters then floated up and rearranged themselves into a new word, formed from all of the letters of the three sephiroth. Then they began to transfigure themselves, from one language to another. The Hebrew letters gave way to other languages, Aramaic, Babylonian, Ionian, Greek, Latin, French, Spanish, Jive, and finally English. This new word suddenly glowed with the intensity of the sun, making all previous appearances look shadowed in comparison. The word remained there for a few seconds and then faded into darkness again.

I went with the darkness and slept soundly until the morning. I awoke to a clear sky, the winter sun blaring bright, but ineffective through the window. The first thing that I did was reach over to the nightstand and grab the pen and pad that I keep there for random sleep inspired ideas. The only thing that was in my memory was letters, and I knew, even as I wrote them down that I was missing some. I could not remember the context of the letters. I knew they were important, but I had no recollection of why.

The memory stood just outside my mind's grasp, taunting. With total certainty I knew that I had seen whatever it was before, that it was common and had something to do with the "Tree of Life Mystery." This was the term I had begun calling it in my mind. It reminded me of a Hardy Boys title or something. I wonder what they would have said about what I had gotten myself into. I strained at the memory, searching for more clues, but everything remained hidden in a fog. I wandered over to my bookshelves trying to find a book on Hebrew, I could look in it and see if anything rang a bell.

My only weakness, in terms of material junk, is books. I love and collect them like some people do baseball cards or ex-wives. This led to a curse and a blessing. If I wanted information on a subject, chances were that somewhere in my personal library I had something that would help. The curse was in trying to find it. The curse was also that while I had lots of books, I rarely had sufficient socks, the sock fund often ended up in the numerous makeshift bookcases that were pretty much everywhere. I scanned across the shelves, finally spying the binder where I had crammed my extra information about Kabbalah and Hebrew Gematria, subjects connected intimately together, and now pried apart by the numerous changes and mutations undertaken by Kabbalah over the centuries.

I flipped through the information that I had, but nothing was ringing a clear bell and after a time I gave up. It was just a dream, it probably meant nothing. Besides, I had other things to do today, I had to go downtown to a certain address and see what there was to see. As I put on my coat, going through the bundling ritual which is first nature to anyone who lives north of the Mason/Dixon line, I almost changed my mind. For a second I was able to convince myself that even if there was something going on at that address, it wasn't a something that I really wanted to know about. For a moment I faced how truly bizarre what had been happening to me was. It seemed as if some supernatural force had just decided to implant itself in my life one day, like it

pulled my name out of a hat or something.

As soon as I accepted that what was going on had a supernatural origin, I opened myself up to the question, are you sure that you are not crazy? After all, I had, up until a couple of weeks ago, thought that people that heard God talking to them were probably just a wee bit bonkers. I thought of the Leprechaun on Ralph Wiggum's shoulder in the Simpsons episode, the one that tells him to start fires.

If I concluded that I wasn't crazy then that opened the door to the idea that somehow God, the guy from the Bible, was actually somehow trying to directly interact with my life. The childish deity who flooded the entire Earth because people acted in a way that his omniscience should have seen coming a mile away. The guy who let Satan torture Job three ways from Sunday (When Job asked why, he could only reply, "Why there is no God nearly as awesome as I! See Job 3:4 for more details.) was showing up in my dreams. Oh yeah, and he sounds like he should be telling Scotty to beam him up.

When I put it that way, I was suddenly a great deal less sure that I shouldn't immediately go to the psychiatric ward and ask for a rubber room, preferably one with a view of the lakeshore.

In spite of my blustering I knew in the end I was too curious to not go to the address the computer had spat out. I had to know what was there. Chances are, I would be looking at a pawn shop or a McDonalds. I could then sigh a big sigh of relief and go have my head examined. In a way I was hoping that I was crazy because somewhere deep down in my guts, where the odd truths lie, I was certain I wasn't. If it was God that I was going to have to deal with, I wasn't so sure that I should be looking forward to the meeting. I walked out of my apartment, locked the door and headed for the train station.

I got off the subway at the stop that preceded the graffiti, positive that I didn't want to see it again. I took the escalator up and emerged onto state street. I looked around to get my bearings, then turned North. My eyes immediately caught an address, 552; two blocks. I people-watched as I made my way; the crowded and busy sidewalks provided ample people to watch. The most obvious thing these people had in common was their cellphones. There were actual packs of these people, walking together like gaggles of geese. People didn't talk to one another, they talked to their cellphones. The thought crossed my mind that they were talking to each other on the cellphones, but I rejected the idea, not wanting to believe it- even if it was true.

I noticed that the buildings were all built together. They went on for blocks, one butted into another, stopping only for the occasional roads that cut narrow gaps between the buildings. In spite of the highly centralized location, many of the building facades carried only a door, a buzzer, and an address. Some even lacked the address or the buzzer. Just doors, doors that could lead anywhere. I marveled at the way a parking garage was indistinguishable from a bank. Everything was so squished together it was as if whole blocks were actually just one building with cinderblock walls separating one space from another.

This was true until I came to 777 State Street. It was set off to itself on both sides. Narrow alleyways, almost pitch black even in the daytime, ran like pits between it and the surrounding landscape. The building rose three stories straight into the air, deceptively traditional in its architecture; rectangular with a slightly gabled roof. The gutter was clearly in disrepair. The old red brick facade was battered and held within itself the essence of normality. It was the red brick of apple pie and snowball fights. "The Beev was home in time for supper." said the bricks.

The air smelled dank here, the foul odors floated out from the depths of the deep alleys. Stone steps led up to the front door which was flanked on both sides by enormous marble pillars. They looked overtly odd against the red brick of the rest of the building. The front door was made of olivewood, the deep grain beautiful and ornate. A brass doorknob in the shape of a yawning lion's head was centered at eye level.

I pulled back the knocker and let it bang against the door, the sound it made was much too loud in proportion to the force I used. It was as if it had a power to resonate within itself. You could hear the sound of it reverberating through the inside of the building. I waited a moment and then knocked again. The second time I knocked the sound was normal, a low thud. I wondered if I imagined the first effect, but instead felt a weird certainty that it *did* happen that first time, and I was being fucked with. There was no immediate answer so I examined the door a little closer.

Across the top of the olive wood door there was an inscription in fancy, highly specialized script, "Unless the LORD builds the house, those who labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchmen stays awake in vain." Then in a smaller script, the source of the quote, Psalm 127. The doorposts and the lintel formed a pentagon. From somewhere that seemed very far away I heard a voice yell, "Come in."

I tried the door and it was unlocked. Taking a deep breath I pulled it open and went into the building, closing the door behind me.

Across the street, a woman named Racine Dry was smoking a cigarette. Her building had a no smoking policy and an office boss that was unsympathetic to the plights of smokers, even in the wintertime. "Go outside if you want to kill yourself. You're not gonna take me with ya." She would say while chewing two donuts at the same time, her jowls bouncing with moral superiority.

So Racine stood, as she did twice a day, not counting lunchtimes, rain or shine, and smoked. She really enjoyed these breaks, even when it was cold. She would lean against the wall in the breezeway and watch the people as they went by. She always hoped, just a little, that the guy of her dreams would come up to her one-day to ask her for a light. She would give him one and then it would be nothing but blissful love, cigarettes, and happiness for the rest of her days.

While she didn't meet her soul mate, she did see something that caused her to never go outside for a smoke break again. She decided to hang out in the emergency stairwell instead, very few weird things happen in office building stairwells. Racine stood smoking her cigarette and watched a young guy in his mid twenties disappear into what was clearly a blank brick wall. He walked up to the wall, his nose stopping inches from it. He then pantomimed opening a door and like some kind of magical Marcel Marsou, walked into the blank wall.

Racine dropped her half smoked cigarette onto the ground; she stomped it out with the heel of her boot, exhaling the last drag deeply into the smoggy air of the city. She turned on her heel and went back to work. She considered talking to her friends about it, but decided it would be better if she kept this particular vision to herself. Unlike Klinger on Mash,

Racine wasn't looking for a psychological discharge.

I stepped into the building and my nostrils were immediately overtaken by the strong smell of cedar. The floor, walls and ceiling were lined with long slats of the wood. Carved, with amazing detail, on every inch were gourds filled with flowers that were clearly in full bloom. The carvings looked very old. I walked into the foyer and ran my hand over the wall, it had taken on the unique smoothness that can only be achieved by really old, well used wood. You knew, for example that you could run your hand anywhere you wanted and you wouldn't get a splinter. Any burrs that were in the wood had been buffed out by passing feet and bodies long before me. It reminded me of the hallway floor of my grandmother's house, the same one she had lived in her entire life.

The foyer was separated from the rest of the building by a second set of doors, also made of soft white olivewood. The carvings in the wood provided more than enough for my eyes to focus on and I wasn't surprised that there wasn't much in terms of decoration beyond them. The exception was a plaque of the Lord's prayer on the far wall of the alcove. Although I didn't stick my fingernail in it to be sure, the plaque seemed to be made of solid gold. When I first recognized the prayer that was engraved in it I involuntarily flinched, expecting the prayer to be recited at volumes only bearable by angst ridden teenagers of every stripe. This prayer, one of the most common in all of Christianity holds meanings that remain almost completely opaque to the average Christian. These alternative meanings had been mulling through my head since the day before, beneath the surface of my conscious mind. Now seeing the prayer, it came bubbling to the surface. I went through line by line wondering what any of these things had to do with me.

*Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.*

-The holy name of God, YHVH, Jehovah, when properly stated is said to be the ultimate secret kept in the Temple of Salomon. It is said that the head Rabbi in Israel would be the only one who carried the knowledge of this true name of God. Once a year the Rabbi would go into the inner temple, the "Holiest of Holies" where the Ark of the Covenant was said to be kept. The Rabbi would recite the name, have a long rap session with God, and find out what kinds of stuff was going to happen during the next year. If God liked the behavior of the Jews the proceeding year, then everything would be fine. If not, bad things would happen to them, like 40 years of wandering in the desert and other such nastiness. In a way Jehovah was like a divine Santa Claus, he knows when you are bad or good, So be good for goodness sake!

Somewhere way back in history, it's said that the true name of God was lost. Some group is always claiming that they know the divine name but they are all pretty much full of shit. The search to rediscover the name is ongoing and the idea that it's hidden in the Bible somewhere is improbable, but not necessarily impossible.

Kabbalists try to decipher the Torah looking to decode this divine name of God. The people who do this work believe that every part of the Torah is connected together. The hard part is figuring out which set of connections are the ones that will return the knowledge of the name to mankind. In this way searching for the name of God is like the idea of the Six degrees of separation between any two people on earth, the trick is finding the right people. Today, even the greatest adepts make no claim to really knowing what this name is, at least not publicly. If someone knew it, they would be in control of the force and form of the universe. The very powers used by Jehovah in the creation of the world. The Torah may just be a vehicle for its concealment, in much the same way that the Lord's prayer hides a deeper understanding of God than regular folks are want to discover.

In calling God by name the power of the supernal triangle is invoked, revealing the mindset for the more commonly understood notion that is found in the next line. Heaven, the totality of God and his being are the 3 impenetrable veils of Ain Soph.

*Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*

-On earth as it is in heaven is just another way of saying "As above, So Below." This notion is one of the most basic in mysticism. It is a premise that indicates that the earth is made in the spirit of heaven. To the laymen, this means that earth was made by the same God who made heaven. For the illuminated however, it means that the earth itself is heaven, or at least it should be. As above, so below, is also a popular notion in physics, where the quantum world, the world of the very small, begins to merge into the large macroscopic world of planets and stars.

*Give us this day our daily bread,*

A reference to both the basic sustenance of daily life and a fertility reference, dating back to the Pagan Gods, snuck into the most patriarchal religion of all time.

*And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.*

Forgiveness and empathy, two of the basic ideals of illuminism, the first religion, the one that brought mankind from the trees. The fall referred to in the Bible in the Genesis story is a thickly metaphorical reference to this lost utopia. The most poignant surviving phrase of Jesus is also a reference to this idea. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Significantly more than a century later Emanuel Kant proved, using logic, what had come to be known "The Golden Rule." It may, or may not be a coincidence that around the same time Kant was publishing the Critique of Practical Reason, Illuminism was flourishing all around Europe and the Mideast.

*Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, Amen.*

*For the Kingdom, the Glory, and the honor are yours, Forever and ever.*

Malkuth, the Kingdom, Hod, the power, Netzach, the Glory, form the basal triangle of the tree of life, with Yesod, the foundation, as the central point. This is the lower of the three triangles that I have mentioned; it deals with humanity and its necessary

connection to the divine. A connection that is unfortunately lost to many of the believers who intone this prayer every Sunday, unaware that there is more to religion than has been dreamt of in the churches.

After meditating briefly on the prayer I once more looked around the room. I had been waiting for at least five minutes so I decided to peek my head through the second door and give a yell. The door knob felt very cold in my hand, and I shivered slightly as I pulled open the door to the inner chamber.

The inner chamber was an enormous room, rectangular with high ceilings and balconies stretching all the way around. There was what appeared to be a stage on the left, a heavy red velvet curtain hanging down, providing the only color change in a room that was otherwise two toned. The main color was the light brown of cedar wood that lined the floors, walls and ceiling, just as it had in the foyer. Again this wood was carved with gourds and flowers in full bloom.

The most obvious feature of the room, the one that literally dragged your eyes to it was a huge square box, 20 feet on a side. Like the plaque in the foyer, it too was made of solid gold. I immediately recognized it for what it was, and in doing so I knew where I was, although I couldn't really believe it.

That square room was the "Holiest of Holies" and I was standing in what had to be the Third Temple of Salomon. An involuntary gasp escaped my chest. Suddenly, without warning the curtain that blocked off the stage opened with an eerie fluidness that was reminiscent of fog rolling off of a lake.

There were five of them, sitting in large upholstered chairs. Four were wearing identical cloaks, elaborately bordered. These cloaks were dark and elaborately embroidered, the designs seemed to pulse with life, and for all I know, alive they were. The fifth man, he looked to be the oldest, wore a stunningly white cloak, that seemed to glow from within itself. Naturally, he was sitting in the middle with two men on either side of him.

The man in the middle spoke. He was the only one of the five who was wearing the doily thing on his head that indicated traditional Hasidism. I tried to remember the name of the doily thing and found that I couldn't.

"I am Josiah, These people are," He indicated each with his finger as he introduced them, "Manasseh, Hezekiah, Ahaz, and Johiakim. We are the guardians of the Temple, positions we have held for many centuries." He said this with such frankness that there could be no doubt that he was speaking the truth. When he said centuries, he meant centuries. One of the dark robed men began to cough thickly, the kind of cough that comes from the toes, reverberating up the body. It was the cough of a man that was about to die. Josiah, the leader had called the coughing man Ahaz. Ahaz had dark hair with creases in his face deep enough to hide a quarter. His eyes were bloodshot and had streaks of yellow in them, his skin was pasty sickly looking.

"We saw you looking at the Lord's Prayer in the Foyer, do you *understand* the prayer." You could actually picture him winking at you on the word understand. His eye didn't move, he conveyed the wink with the tone of his voice. He continued, "Because the prayer holds the key to why you are here."

"I must admit, that was going to be my next question. I'm not even Jewish."

"You have studied the ways of mysticism though haven't you? You know that in all things there are levels, and that these levels are all connected together. Connected in ways that most people don't even consider."

"I know about them sure," I replied, explaining, "but I didn't actually believe any of that either. I think that God is just everything, he's not an old guy with a beard that sits around judging us all day. The Kabbalah has always seemed, at least to me, to be both versions of God simultaneously. The "oneness" on the one hand, Jehovah and the whole gematria thing on the other." Yamakah, I thought suddenly, the doily thing he was wearing was called a Yamakah.

"Be that as it may, there is a holy name that will summon the very Jehovah whom you claim to doubt. The ceremony, as I think you have already realized, takes place in there." He pointed with his finger to the beautiful gold cube in the center of the room. "In exactly one hour you will enter the Holiest of Holies and speak sacred name of God as it was given to you in your vision..."

I immediately cut him off. "What vision?" I asked, "If you are talking about my dream I didn't get the whole name down. I missed some of the letters."

All five of the men's faces seemed to fall at the same time. Apparently they had expected me to write down the whole name. I was starting to get angry. How was I supposed to know that the name was so important? I didn't even know what it was when I wrote it down. Kinda vague, screaming the Lord's Prayer at me in subway tunnels and then hiding the address in a mislabeled Tree of Life diagram. What kind of a way was that to run a universe? No wonder there was cancer.

"Well," Josiah said at last, "You had better think of the letters that are missing because the fate of existence is being slunked right onto your shoulders. Your refusal will only guarantee the annihilation of the entire physical plane of existence. Oh yeah, you will also go to Hell."

"So I have no real choice here."

"That's pretty much true yeah. As you have probably noticed Ahaz is very ill and we need someone to pierce the veil for us. Only then can Ahaz be healed. Without the five of us as guardians, the world will descend into utter chaos. Hezekiah got a really nasty bug that kept him ill from 1937-1948 and there was a world war and 2 atomic weapons were dropped. We keep getting older and sicker as society advances technologically and not ethically. It makes the lack of empathy in the species only that much more evident, and damning. Every once in a while old Jehovah likes to force humanity into proving that they are worth putting up with for another thousand years. Well, this time you are our guy.

If you don't come through the Big Guy is going to pull the plug on this whole existence thing and return to the absolute silence that is Nirvana. Believe me, nice place to visit but you wouldn't want to live there. Just stillness, forever, talking about fucking boring. It makes infomercials look like a triple overtime SuperBowl."

"But I don't have the whole name." I repeated, thinking that this was simply too important a point to gloss over.

"It'll come to you. Have faith, I know it's hard for you, I read that about you in your file. What is important is that you agree to do the ceremony." He said this last in a very harsh tone, like a several thousand year old guy admonishing a very small

child. Which I guess to him I was. He was staring at me with a great intensity, I could feel the weight of it on me like a lead shirt.

“OK.” I said suddenly, not realizing I was going to say it before it was out there, almost visible in the air. Somewhere inside I could hear the discussion that was going on in my head. One voice was assuring me that this whole thing was either a dream or insanity, either way I should just go along for the ride and it didn't matter. The other voice also wanted to go on, but for different reasons. This other voice, the one that I think I most identified with, was telling me that I had to go along with this on the outside chance that it was real. I had to admit to myself that I wasn't particularly interested in total stillness either.

The moment that I told Josiah that I would go into the Holiest of Holies his entire demeanor changed. He had been a very intimidating before, centuries old or not. Now Josiah took on the air of a very nice person, one who was glad that the tough stuff was over, allowing for his real personality to come out.

“Now that you have agreed to fulfill your duty I will now give you an opportunity to ask me a few of the questions that are no doubt cascading through your brain right now.” He looked at me expectantly, an open friendly smile on his face.

“Why me?” It was the first thing that came to my mind.

“Why you? Why Moses? He was a drunk. Why Jesus? He was just a latchkey kid from a single parent home. You know God works in mysterious ways. Maybe this whole show is actually running without a script. Like Seinfeld, it's about nothing, but everything is connected together and so it makes sense. I think that is why that show was so popular. It resonates with the universe it exists in. People respond to that kind of stuff. It's really the same thing going on with the Lord's Prayer.”

“That wasn't an answer.” I said in the most self assured tone I could muster. I had to admit I was impressed that an eons old man would watch Seinfeld.

“No it wasn't.” Josiah smiled. “We picked your name out of a hat ok? We pulled a bunch of pages out of the phone book and circled random names. Then we crumpled up the pages put them in a basket and pulled one out at random. Your name was circled on the page we pulled out. Satisfied?”

I realized that he was serious, they had picked my name out of a basket at random. I opened my mouth to say something, realized I didn't have any idea what I was going to say, and shut it again. I probably looked like a goldfish, stupidly gulping air. Josiah's tone was steadily lightening.

“I remember the day that the first temple was destroyed, The 9th day of AV, 586 BC. I'm pretty sure that it was a Thursday. Never could get the hang of Thursdays.” The old man grinned a crooked grin and looked away. I couldn't be sure, but I thought I was being joshed by a several thousand year old guardian of the physical universe. Josiah was apparently the Johnny Carson of the centuries-old set.

Apparently we were now friends, so I decided to be direct. “I believe that you believe what you are saying. I don't know if I believe you or not. Either way, it seems safer to go along with this than to walk out of here. But you need to understand something, at the beginning of this week I thought I was going to a job interview. Now a few days later I am standing in some kind of recreation of Salomon's Temple in the middle of one of the world's busiest business districts. Forgive me if I appear confused and incredulous. You managed to invade my dreams, so I am taking you as seriously as I can. But the very idea that Jehovah, the deity who, if he exists, I would just as soon kick in the shins as worship has *chosen* me is hard to deal with.

I am supposed to say his sacred name so that he...” I motioned to Ahaz, “...can get over whatever his sickness is. And the reason that I am the one that has to say the name is that you picked my name out of a hat? Can you see why I am having trouble with this?” I asked.

I wasn't being sarcastic, although it probably sounded that way. I really wanted them to understand what they were asking me to believe, wanted them to know that this wasn't a nice thing to drop on a person out of the blue. Besides, picking a name out of a hat is a terrible way to decide the fate of the universe. What if they had pulled the name of some guy who was in the Klan and hated Jewish people? The idea flittered through my mind that God wouldn't let that happen. The absurdity of everything caused me to chuff involuntarily. My sinuses created that disgusting grunting sound that happens when you try to hold in a laugh unsuccessfully.

Josiah just looked at me smiling. “You know that above the diagram of the Tree of Life there are three veils.”

I did know this, they were call Ain, Ain Soph, and Ain Soph Aur. Some say that they collectively make up the trinity; Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Others say that the veils represent things much more mysterious. The one thing that everyone manages to agree about is that the veils cannot be accessed by a living soul.

All I said was, “Yes.”

“Good.” Josiah said. “For it is your job to pierce these veils with the name of God. This is the purpose of the name. The magic syllables, spoken in the confines of the Holiest of Holies, are the only ones that allow direct access to God, the true father of the universe, they are the only sounds that can pierce the veils of Ain, Ain Soph, and Ain Soph Aur. In a sense, the name is the only direct line to God. It is his Batsignal. If someone doesn't go in by their own free will, Ahaz will not be healed and the universe will be cursed with eternal nothingness.”

I gulped, “Um, Josiah... Isn't it true that you have to die in order to pierce the veil?”

“Yes. You are being asked to,” he paused, “take one for the team.” He smiled satisfied that he had found the phrase he was looking for. “Solve the riddle of God's name and you will pierce the veil, for a moment the pure light of the parent will be allowed to shine through, healing Brother Ahaz and restoring balance to the tree. Unfortunately for your ego, but quite happily for your soul, the accomplishment of piercing the veil will be your own absorption into fana.”

“Fana?” I interrupted him, my stomach clenching. “Fana is a Sufi idea, it is annihilation in Allah. Complete union with God.”

“What do you know about Sufism?” Josiah asked.

“If Islam is the beach, Sufism is the sea.” I said with a broad smile.

“Yeah great, I'm glad that you read your homework assignments.” Josiah replied, looking at me with a sarcastic smile on

his ancient lips and a curious expression in his deep set eyes. He seemed to be shocked at my reaction to his continued explanation, like hearing that you were going to die was a normal thing.

Needing clarification, badly; hoping that I had somehow misunderstood, I asked again, "You mean that my reward for success is death?"

"It's all illusion anyway." Josiah smiled.

Buddhism now.

I was having a very strange day.

Looking around, I noticed that there was nowhere to sit down. I had a problem. My legs seemed less than anxious to continue holding me up. In fact they seemed to be considering taking a quick trip to Disneyland. If I didn't find somewhere to sit down, gravity would help me and I would sit on the floor. Feeling nauseous I stumbled close to the stage and leaned on it for support.

It was no good. The next thing I knew I was on the floor, my breath was coming too quickly, I was getting insufficient oxygen. The little dots, my old pals, began to dance in the front of my vision; I watched their movements, random and vibrant patterns dancing. I thought about the back of my eyelids, and wondered if I would get to know them in eternity.

I stayed there slumped for what seemed like a long time, watching the dots and not thinking how insane everything had suddenly become. Judging from the lack of assistance I was receiving I assumed that the five guardians were just sitting in their chairs, offering neither sympathy, concern, nor annoyance. As suspected, when I opened my eyes, they looked just as they had before I had my episode. I dragged myself slowly to my feet, my knees still feeling like jelly. The room was swaying slightly, like we were on a boat.

When I was standing again Josiah began talking again. He made no indication that I had just spent a couple of minutes on the ground. "You will need to change clothes. There are special vestments that must be worn in the Holiest of Holies. We will show you to a room where you can change."

Josiah motioned to one of the dark robed fellows, the one he called Hezekiah. Immediately Hezekiah rose from his chair and walked to the end of the stage. He crouched, and hopped down to the ground. Without saying a word he motioned to me with his finger and walked to the corner of the room. He put his hand up to a panel that had been nitched into the cedar. He gave the panel a soft smack.

The panel must have been some kind of latch because a door suddenly popped open. It led to a regular room with tan painted cinderblock walls. It was a stark contrast to the ornately carved wood and golden opulence of the temple itself. There was one door in evidence here and on the far side of the room was a short hallway that opened into five additional doorways. Looking at Hezekiah, I asked, "Is it OK if I look around a little bit? I have never seen anything like this place."

Hezekiah smiled slightly and nodded permission. He confirmed his reaction by sweeping his hand around as if to say, "Mi casa, su casa, amigo."

I took a few steps into the hall and saw that the doorways led to the monk's sleeping quarters. Each monk's cell was separate but identical in size. They all contained the same items, a wash basin, a cross, a Bible, and a bed. The bed was just slats of wood with a thin futon mattress covering it. There were no blankets or pillows in evidence, but they may have been at the cleaners I supposed. Everything else was certainly clean, the concrete was swept, and the lone mattresses were still fairly white. Much whiter than my own, which I knew had more things spilled on it over the years than I cared to think about. There was no bathroom I noticed, perhaps you graduate from the annoying practice of shitting when you hit your one-thousandth birthday. Hezekiah went to a closet cut into the wall of the main anteroom and pulled out a robe that appeared to have been fashioned of golden wires, meshed together to form a robe so gaudy Liberace would have blushed. I immediately dreaded having to wear it and was glad that the chances these guys would want a picture was pretty slim. Then he took out shoes. They were also made of gold and looked as uncomfortable as any piece of footwear ever devised.

Hezekiah smiled and draped the clothes over a lone cane back chair. Misinterpreting my hesitation, he indicated the clothes to me with his now familiar sweeping motion. I smiled at him and nodded. "Thanks," I said, "I'm supposed to put these on, I understand."

Obviously pleased that the message had been conveyed Hezekiah turned and left the room, never having said a word. The door closed behind him with a thud. I stood staring at the door, hesitating; then I grabbed the robe. I changed slowly. The robe, made out of metal, was cumbersome. As I squished my feet into the unweilding golden foot torturers I realized that I was really starting to believe that what was happening was real. I was going to die in order that universe survive. I wanted to feel noble for that, proud of myself. But I didn't, not at all.

I wasn't really ready to go, if anyone ever really is. Mainly, when I thought about the reality of what I was doing, I felt a distinct uneasy annoyance. This was, I thought, a really shit way to run a universe. When I got to God, I intended to ask him some very harsh questions. He probably won't answer, he seems to really like playing this whole "mysterious" thing to the hilt.

Before opening the door, I reached into the pocket of my jeans and pulled out the paper that had the partial name of God written on it. There were at least three letters missing. ?-?-B-S-M-I-?-H read the paper uncooperatively. If I didn't figure out what the missing letters were, I wouldn't exist anymore to worry about it. I admit to being a little dismayed that I wouldn't exist anymore even if I did remember the letters.

Folding the paper and holding it my copiously sweating hand I pulled on the small latch that opened the door from the inside and entered back into the temple proper. The guardians were waiting for me by the heavily jeweled entrance to the Holiest of Holies. I had not examined this side of the cube before and was momentarily stunned by its beauty. On the doorway itself was the now familiar visage of the Tree of Life, each point on the tree was decorated with a precious jewel, the color corresponding to the Masonic designation. Josiah touched each jewel in turn, making a lightning zig-zag pattern down the door. Once he reached the yellow jewel at the bottom of the tree the door to the Holiest of Holies snapped open with a distinct click.

As Josiah pulled open the door he began praying softly, more under his breath than out loud. He stood there doing this, blocking the way and the view into the golden cube. I just stood there, my hands behind my back, the heavy smell of cedar again becoming conscious. Finally he finished and stepped aside, revealing what appeared to be a set piece from Indiana Jones.

It was, I supposed, the Ark of the Covenant. Under normal circumstances the sight of such a historical and mythic item would have been life-changing. But it looked exactly like the golden coffin in Raiders of the Lost Ark and so it looked campy and a little dumb. I kept waiting for guys with Nazi uniforms to show up. Or maybe the Asian guy with the wide face and thick rimmed dark glasses, the one whose face melted. Or maybe a bullwhip should have come with the robe.

Specialized angel figures paralleled each other on either side of the Ark. Long poles, also inlaid in gold, stuck out, providing handholds for removing the lid of the thing. The guardians filed together into the Holiest of Holies, each darkly clad guardian going to a handhold and then waiting.

Josiah walked to a small altar built into the backside of the room. There was a large incense burner, the kind that you swing from the end of a long chain. Josiah lit the incense with a Bic lighter that he had hidden in his robes and then solemnly walked around the altar ten times, swinging the burner and chanting under his breath. By the time he had finished the room was thick with smoke, everywhere was the heavy scent of sage. Once Josiah finished his revolutions he began to light candles all around the room. He lit each from the flame of the previous. This process continued for at least fifteen minutes. I just stood and watched. My emotions swayed wildly. One minute I was struck by the feeling that entire situation I found myself in was completely unreal, the next I was desperately trying to remember the letters that were missing from the name that had appeared in my dream. At times the memory was so close that I could almost feel the letters. They would come close enough to the surface of my memory to tease, but then they scattered away again, giggling like girls playing jump rope.

The room's temperature was beginning to rise. It was no wonder; Josiah had lit enough candles that it was actually too bright in the room, the light glaring off the highly polished gold. Josiah had made his way to the "front" of the Ark. He indicated with his hand that I should take the place at the opposite end, the silent guardians were still at their places by the poles.

I walked slowly toward the Ark. As I came closer I began to feel a low vibration in the pit of my stomach. At each step the vibration increased. By the time I took my place next to the ark, the vibration was audible, causing a steady whoomp...whoomp... in my ears. Josiah was again chanting in a language that I didn't recognize, it was not Hebrew, it did not even really seem to be human. His voice weaved itself into the rhythmic vibration that thrummed through every cell of my body. My vision too, was beginning to be affected by the shaking, the room and its contents were becoming fuzzy, unclear shapes.

I felt separated from myself. A ghost in the machine of my body. It was as if my very soul was being shaken out of my body. Without explanation I thought of the Name. I saw the memory of my dream as a big holographic ball. It spun slowly around, revealing my dream to me. As I looked I could see the tree, the ten points were metaphors, an attempt to understand how the universe came to be. From the first point of light, represented in the story of Genesis by the words. "Let there be light." The light that is the Lord. The word that is a name. The name that is God's.

The ball of my dream spun. Before me was the name. I knew it now, the memory of it clear and unmistakable. At the same time that the memory returned, Josiah had finished his chanting. He looked at me and winked. The vibration stopped at the same time Josiah did.

Josiah met the eyes of each of the four guardians, one at a time. Ahaz looked at me and smiled wearily, thanking me with his eyes. Josiah lifted his arms up and the four men lifted the lid in unison. Immediately, light poured out of the Ark. Only it was light in a plasma state. It roiled out of the box and seemed to slowly expand, filling the room like molasses. Once the light was diffused throughout the room everything changed. The walls, floor, and ceiling faded out of existence, as if by dimmer switch. The ark and I were the only things left. Even Josiah and his buddies had been left back. The ark appeared still, I peered into it and was only aware of a vague sense of movement, a slight spinning that may have just been my imagination. I looked around me, as far as I could tell I was actually inside some kind of three dimensional star map. The ark and I were off to the left, not really even close to the middle of the action. I could see a place, far off in the distance that was positively buzzing with activity.

The Ark regained my attention. While I was looking around, it had managed to create a fairly large whirlpool of light that had a distinctly golden tone. I stared at the apparition, held rapt by the beautiful swirling light. From the center of the Ark rose three dark rings. They rose out from the swirling golden light and obscured my view of it. The rings were obviously barriers. The barriers that would be broken by only one thing. The one true and unspeakable name of God. Only I was going to have to speak it, no matter how much the idea scared me. Once the veils had deployed from the Ark the entire picture changed perspective.

I was now looking at the everything from above. Between me and the vortex was the earth, spinning innocent and blue underneath. Below spun the golden light of God, threatening to suck the earth back into itself, a failed experiment.

"BOBSMITH" I yelled into the screaming vortex that rose out of the Ark of the Covenant. The first of the three dark clouds that surrounded the vortex disappeared suddenly, the veil parting. As it did, I felt something inside myself opening up. If Racine would have been watching see would have seen my body fall to the floor, that part of me suddenly as dead as the golden floor that it slumped upon. Where my body fell marked the exact point where the first veil had stood, my body made for a pretty

direct symbol of what the first veil entailed. What Racine would miss was the nonphysical part of me continuing on to the second barrier.

Again I yelled the name, "BOBSMITH!" and the second barrier fell. As I advanced forward to the third barrier I felt the individuality of myself begin to peel away like layers from an onion. My own memories became obscured. This is not to say that they weren't replaced. I wasn't left an empty vessel. Instead, new kinds of memories began to fill me as I felt my own consciousness expand from the individual to the world soul.

By the time I reached the third barrier I had become a We. We spoke out the name, billions of voices, each different, and each me, and each not me; all at the same time. The most amazing part was that the WE wanted the same thing that the I did. There was never a moment when the WE considered not piercing the third veil. We had always planned to say it, and so we did.

"BOBSMITH!" we said, in the voice that I would have recognized from the subway. It was the voice that had recited the Lord's Prayer, the voice of an entire universe of being. The third veil dropped.

It was thus that the WE once again became an I. I realized now that the I that I now had become was a combination of an infinite number of We's. I was all that there was and all that there wasn't at the same time. And then there was light, and it was good.

In the temple, Josiah walked slowly back and forth in front of the holiest of Holies. If things had gone well the special chamber would open and a burst of light would come forth and heal all of their illnesses. Ahaz was by far the worst of the five, but Josiah had to admit to himself that he hadn't been feeling quite himself either lately, his normal energy level was a great deal lower than it usually was. Being the Speaker for the Group meant that Josiah was in need of extra strength, strength that had been lacking badly for the past several months.

Suddenly the Holiest of Holies began to vibrate intensely, it was as if a very powerful poltergeist was trying desperately to escape. Finally it split open, all four walls falling aside with a dramatic crash. The Ark was revealed, floating two or three feet above the floor. A light more intense than the sun suddenly burst forth in the room basking the five guardians in the intense glare. As Josiah breathed in, deeply, he felt the sicknesses that were dragging on his physical body suddenly soften considerably, about thirty seconds later he felt like a new man. He looked it too, Josiah's ancient face was restored now, he had regained the appearance of a man in his early fifties. An absolutely astonishing improvement. When I had met Josiah he had looked every one of his thousands of years, little more than a bag of bones. Now he was a vital person, ready to once again hold the strings of the fabric of existence together again.

For a while...