

MYSTICAL LIGHT

energies in the stupid drifting of the world, which amounts to a wholesale destruction of constructive and creative forces through the cult of selfish success or the limitations of ^{competitive} business thinking.

By then I had completely forgotten my own predicament and wondered with great intensity about other miracles of the mental world. I thought of all the many experiences, where obviously my own subconscious or unconscious mind had taken over and had revealed in pictures what my conscious observation never could have reached. I must have switched at that point from conscious logical thinking into another level of consciousness. There were no longer thoughts to be examined. I was, after all, only three strenuous days after those two weeks of incredibly sustained concentration and my mind gradually swung into a certain dark emptiness out of which appeared all sorts of symbols, ^{a nonif} a triangle, ^{a pentagram} a square, a circle, a circle with centerpoint, concentric circles, a spiral vortex, and other primordial symbols of more complicated design. It was like a whole prelude to a world of symbols which I seemed to understand and recognize.

By then the rhythmic saddle movements became disturbing so I stopped Pipsi, descended, and sat down on a rock. I think there were clouds by then and no moon. It was rather dark and quiet and we were behind large rocks.

As I sat there peacefully, I had a strange sensation of watching a light growing until it was a globe of light of considerable size. It was the most difficult experience to

describe. In fact, any attempt to picture it verbally leads to impossible contradictions. Please remember our Tower of Babel discussion.

There was that round field of light without flames or a luminous center or object, from which it radiated. I don't even know whether light is the right word because light as we know it seems not quite the same. Here it was, this luminous radiation, as if in front of me, and yet, I was in it and a part of it which strangely made any feeling of being a part of anything disappear until nothing was left but a consciousness of totality. An absolute completeness inside of me and outside, permeated me--again I should mention that this contrast of inside and outside also disappeared. I think this is as far as I dare to go in my description. If somebody came from a big opera with magnificent voices, a huge choir and a big orchestra, an enormous stage with space, light and color effects, and he would try to describe it with a few tones on an ocarina or a little 3 tone whistle, he could not be more embarrassed about the limitations of his crude instrument than I am in using words at this occasion.

I don't know how long I sat there. It could have been hours or a split second. There was no sensation of time. If there was such a light, was it visible to any one else? We used to be so careful not to light a match outdoors at night. Why didn't the Russians start shooting at such a light? Pipsi stood there quietly as if nothing had happened. Are animals capable of sharing such sensations? What did happen? I only

can reconstruct a theoretical path from 2 wires plus 2 wires are 4 wires, but two currents plus two currents are, under circumstances, sixteen and the sixteen being of a different world could become millions and the millions in a different world would multiply into the All, the timeless, unlimited completeness which one can conceive outside by "being" it inside. It was like a breakthrough from a limited three or four dimensional prison cell into a semiconscious glimpse of omnidimensionality. And then it disappeared, that is, I must have switched back into the cage, somehow, not knowing, was it a dream? was it a vision? It did not seem any of it. There were no monsters or battles of demons like in my previous visions at the London fireplace. There was no voice of Jehova or figure of Moses or Buddha or Christ in this ethereal halo. I had read of visions of Christian mystics who experienced direct illumination from Christ or Hindu saints to whom their divinity appeared and gave them supernatural powers, and of course of Moses and Abraham who heard the voice of God. All I can remember is, it was like an indescribable universal halo in which any individual physiognomy or unidirectional concept would have been unbearable because it would have destroyed that real indivisible unity of that all-embracedness. This light came to me about forty-five years ago (1917). Ten thousands of other things have come and gone and were forgotten. But this experience has stayed with me like a pivot around which everything else rotated. Little events became important inasmuch as they moved toward it and other big deals

became insignificant if they led away from this mysterious center. For long periods of time I had to live in an environment of total materialism and even people of religious and spiritual tendencies in their fanatical exclusiveness of sectism, churchism or religious, scientific, or political orthodoxy made it impossible to mention this experience to any one. Even now, when I came to this point in my story, I had to fight hard, inside of me, because there was a powerful fear that just mentioning it, even in an unpublished book, somehow is like exposing something ultra sensitive to the brutality of insulting thoughts from minds with a limited dimensionality. I thought a lot about some of the Japanese temples, where certain paintings by great masters were not shown to anyone unless a person came who was found to be of such high spiritual development, that the masterpiece was not in any danger of being offended or soiled by thoughts of a minor level. Thus certain paintings attributed to Kobo Daishi or Chisho Daishi, had not been shown to anyone for generations or a century (i.e., some of the Fudo Myo-O figures). Kobo Daishi was the founder and the first leader of Shingon Buddhism and Chisho Daishi was his successor. Both were artists of great power. It was Kobo Daishi who said: "There are many paths leading to Buddhahood. Art is the noblest." Can one expose such a spirit to people to whom art is fun or a thing to be judged for its commercial values? I realized how arrogant and limited our usual attitude is, to assume that, if we look at something, that something--a book, a per-

son--a picture, any masterpiece, etc.--is on trial, to be liked by us, or to be condemned. Can't we learn that it is a matter of simple intelligence to know that we are facing a test too, and it is we who may flunk? And if one is able to see something of a higher essence, does one not have the obligation to protect it from those who can't understand it and are unwilling to try? All we usually do is to project everything on ^{to} our own vacuum and then judge what we don't find. We were trained to be customers who have to be pleased while some of those works of masters were never for sale, and if they were paid for, they were not created to please, to entertain or to be judged. Yet a museum curator, an art dealer or a jury have to judge, and judge all day, and an artist competing for success or ^{for} a job has to do the same. It is through judgment that we "belong" and "belonging" in turn decides our judgment.

In more recent years there has been a tremendous change in this country and probably in Europe too. Art has become much more recognized as a part of life. The number of books published and sold is staggering. Two weeks ago 88 new art exhibitions were opening in New York. The week before, it was "only" 56 new exhibitions. The public library is as busy and crowded as any department store. On one Sunday 75,000 visitors came to see the 2,300,000 dollar Rembrandt at the Metropolitan Museum, and the Chagall windows for Israel at the Museum of Modern Art were besieged by such crowds that few people could really see them. Irving Stone's biography of Michelangelo,

under the title "Agony and Ecstasy," has been on the top list of bestsellers for months, although Michelangelo's genius had practically no influence on modern art for the last two generations or more. Floods of books on Art, on Religions and philosophies, are appearing, including a remarkable number of books on Zen Buddhism. Everywhere, in newspapers and magazines, articles appear about Yoga, Samadhi and Illumination.

This is, of course, only a report about quantitative statistics as symptoms of a change. I personally stayed home and hardly saw anyone in weeks. I went out only a few times. I heard a lecture by Edgar Cayce's son on his father's "Headings on Dreams" in which he unexpectedly mentioned and described something like a circle of light and he added that this was the ultimate goal of life. Alan Watts in a lecture at the New School of Social Research talked also about that "Samadhi" condition, and called it an identification or union with one's environment in his clever way. I also met Mrs. Sasaki, the head of a Temple in Japan at a lecture at the First Zen Institute of America. She also mentioned the Shin (I had known her many years ago in Chicago as a society lady just when she had made her first trips to Japan). It seemed that the few times I went out to hear someone speak, this phenomenon was mentioned as a matter of course just during this period when I wrestled with that idea: "Should I or shouldn't I mention this experience?" Perhaps hearing it mentioned several times publicly, influenced me somewhat. Even my friend Dr. William Wolf, whom I visited recently, brought up suddenly the

"Samadhi" in our conversation. He knew I was writing a book but I had not mentioned a word in this direction. Another friend sent me by mail the last volume of poems by Robert Frost (In the Clearing) and when I opened it I found some ideas which I just had concentrated on in connection with this subject, although he does not mention illumination itself. My decision to include this experience came when I realized that my whole story of the quest would be very incomplete without it.

Now back to 1917 in Rumania. At that time there were no books within reach, which could have conditioned me for mystic experiences. I had neither worked for, nor toward, it consciously, and my colleagues or superiors in the regiment, with their army vocabulary, were certainly of no stimulation in this direction. At the start of my ride that night, I may have had a strong wish to escape from the pressure of my immediate problems and their utter hopelessness. I am, however, quite sure that the light did not come in answer to an effort, demand or wish. It had come to me, but not like Nothing, the sword to be found "in hoechster Noth" ("in highest need") as a saving weapon (from the "Walkure"). It was a sudden surprise of a peaceful kind, but of an explosive effect afterwards. I remember now Aldous Huxley's book on "The Doors of Perception" in which he describes his experience under the influence of Mescaline. My experience was definitely of an entirely different nature. I did not see everything in highly intensified colors a la Van Gogh, nor were my other senses or

my self-consciousness in any state of extreme stimulation with a freedom of expressive distortions. The rocks and the landscape were quiet and dark as before, and I was hardly conscious of anything but the globe of light,--least of all of myself. The most outstanding characteristic of this experience was, as I indicated before, the feeling of completeness.

It makes me now think of a conversation I had with Dr. Fritz Zwicky, the famous astrophysicist at Cal. Tech. in Pasadena, California. Dr. Robert Milikan and he were very kind to me by telling me and showing me many new things which were going on in different fields of scientific research. That was in the 'thirties. We came to discuss the fact that there are really so very few things we actually know, especially in basic sciences. "Most of the time we can just find out whether a theory works or not. Even then we might find two contradicting theories working equally well," said Dr. Zwicky. I asked him: "How do you choose when there are more than one theories?" He answered, "All I can do is select the more beautiful one." I have heard similar answers from other scientists since, and I gave it a lot of thought. There is, of course, that difficulty again with the language. The word "beautiful" has been used so carelessly and in so many ways that it has become meaningless today, and a word to avoid. If he meant: "the one I like best," then it would be a personal choice, as one chooses a picture one likes, or a flower. Could he have meant that one theory seems fragmentary, sharp in one part and soft or empty in others, while the other one,

being well balanced and more complete, is more beautiful? Anyhow, this would be a contrast like the one, which upset me considerably, on the way home. I did not know what to do with this new experience. Cosmically and philosophically speaking, there was a new clarity within me. But I was so used to look up to Goethe, Kant and Schopenhauer as the divine super-thinkers among men, and now, when my mind raced from one to the other, I finally felt terribly let down. Their thinking seemed so incomplete, so humanly limited, with occasional glimpses of something more, but somehow for the first time they all seemed "German thinkers," slices of thought, or collections of slices. Imagine the love affair of Dr. Faust and Gretchen with all the hocuspocus of Mephistopheles; it is all marvelously brilliant in presentation, but so indigenous, so typical for certain places and certain times. I was not sitting arrogantly in judgment. I now came looking for something which I could not find. It hurt--those had been my gods. Who am I, after all, to know something bigger than they? But all those symbols and ideas which preceded the light--wasn't it my duty to share it, to give it to the world? But I was not a writer like Goethe or a thinker like Kant. Besides, it would take more than a lifetime to teach just a fraction of it, and furthermore, how could I teach? I was a painter, not a teacher!--A painter?? Oh my merciful heavens--now it came back to me: I was a telephone officer of the Regiment and I didn't know a thing about the telephone! I had felt so utterly different inside, after that glimpse or union with "every-

thing," it was as if I actually had crashed through an invisible barrier and all my own problems belonged to this side of the wall. Therefore, I still knew nothing about such a tiny little slice of knowledge like a telephone or about what to do in my crazy situation any more than if I would have suddenly tried to win a championship in tennis. Thus, I was torn between this helpless humility in my predicament and the violently overflowing urge to give to the world this new vision, this new approach, which was slowly but irresistibly finding new formulations in my mind. Again I realized that one lifetime did not seem enough to put it all down in words or to get sufficient information on the different specialized terminologies in use in the different fields of knowledge. It again was not the personal wish to accomplish all this for my own satisfaction. It simply was like having been sentenced to this responsibility which I was unable to fulfill and unable to shake off.

I arrived at the Headquarters pretty exhausted. I attended to Pipsi, wiped her dry in her stall, ^{put} plus a blanket on her back. She was the only living creature present during my experience. Strange, that it was a horse and not a person. Finally I went to bed.

In the morning I woke up early and while I was shaving, it suddenly struck me with full force: For Heaven's sake, three days had already passed and I should have reported my new job to the Brigade Telephone Officer (who was my immediate superior)---within 24 hours! --in person!" What am I

going to do? How am I going to explain such an inexcusable neglect of discipline and regulations when everything depended on the extreme good will of my superiors. They were interested in efficient service, not in symbols and visions. In fact, there was nobody I knew in the world to whom I would have dared to confide my overwhelming experience.

I felt like an accordion again. First expanding, to be filled up to the last corners of my capacity, and now compressed, to the most miserable minimum of self-confidence. I saddled Pipsi and off we went on the dry dusty road south, to the quarters of the Brigade Command. We went slowly and stopped at every possible excuse. I could visualize a stuffy captain or major receiving me with a tidal wave of curses and insulting epithets, hollering me into the ground, because of my "Schlamperei" (carelessness) and my "Gottverfluchte Sauwirtschaft" (goddamned sowishness), finishing his speech with the usual "Vollkommen verblodete Hurengesellschaft" (totally idiotic ^{bunch} company of whores). After that he would perhaps give me a chance to make my "obedient report." What could I report? And how could I face him, who now was responsible for me and my efficient service? Or--he could refuse to take the responsibility in view of such a "unerhoerte Unregelmässigkeit" (unheard of irregularity).

After more than an hour I arrived in the little village or town where the Brigade command was located. I found a nice clean plaza, surrounded by houses with different roofs, some shingled, some thatched, but all of them were neat looking.

In one corner of the plaza was a well with a pump. A woman had just filled her big jug with water. I asked where the telephone office was. She shrugged her shoulder and walked proudly away. She was one of the examples which still showed definitely the Roman or Latin origin in spite of the many invasions of slavie and other types. I was rather grateful for any delay. Finally I found a young boy who pointed at the house across the plaza and that was it. I tied the reins to a fence, gave Pipsi a little pat on the neck and walked to the door. I knocked, I heard a loud and clear "Herein" (come in), so, I had to walk in. It was a clean and neatly kept office and there was a ^{Pr} Captain Rochaska at the desk. His type struck me as rather familiar.

It is amazing, how certain burned-in habits or rituals of unshakeable conventionality can help one over the hopelessness of a frightful predicament. So, I stretched every muscle to the breaking point. I put my chest out, athletically, and my stomach in, ascetically, and went through the saluting and heellicking ceremony with submicroscopic precision. Then I lifted my voice to the most soldierly pitch and I said: "Herr Hauptmann (Captain, sir), Corporal Katz obediently reports-- obediently reports--as--Regiments telephone officer of 'Reitende Eins.'" The Brigade telephone officer looked at me with a certain humour and said: "Is that a joke, perhaps?" I said: "It's the sad truth," and he thought again that was funny. Then he said: "At ease, sit down. Now what is all this about?" I explained: "The telephone officer was leaving on an overdue

furlough--no substitute, so, I, Corporal Katz, graduate of the officer school, received orders to take over." "What did you say?--Katz? I heard about you. In fact I heard a lot about you. You are the painter, aren't you? Sure, they talked about you at Brigade Headquarters, Ernjähriger Katz pushing around Fieldmarshal Brandtner, in Krakow? How cute! Oh, yes, somebody must have watched you. Say, where are you from?" I answered: "Prossnitz, Herr Hauptmann," and at once he said: "I am from Plumenov." So I replied: "Plumenov right outside of Prossnitz, with that Liechtenstein castle reflecting in the lake and three floors, the lowest with Doric columns, the next Ionic and the third with Corinthian columns. Of course, Plumenov, of course." Then we started to investigate whether we knew some of the same people in Prossnitz and he unloaded some personal gossip about some of the prominent Czechs in Prossnitz, and soon we talked like next door neighbors. He offered me cigarettes. I refused with thanks, but when he offered me some Slivovic (a liquor^u made from prunes), I accepted a little, for courage, to face the storm ahead.

But the storm never came. The Captain, obviously lonely and homesick, was genuinely pleased to talk to me about home and the Hanna. Soon he behaved as if I were an old friend. He seemed an honest kind of a soul and in spite of previous experiences with Czechs, I remembered that "induction" was also a name for a certain kind of thinking, a scientific term for "generalization" (that is, to judge whole groups of people and

phenomena according to individual cases and their behavior, or in reverse, to judge individuals by the behavior of the groups, nations or races they belong to, which was the cause of much misery in the world and many sorry mistakes in science. Therefore I tried to see him without "induction" and accepted his friendliness.

And then without further ado I said: "Herr Hauptmann, I have a terrible confession to make if I can count on your word to keep it confidential. It is not just my own problem but there are others involved and I need your help." He promised not to breathe a word about it. Then, I simply told him: "You heard about my Brandtner portrait. I was ordered to do it, but it had to be done at the time of my telephone lessons. Everybody here expects me to be a wizard in telephone. That's why they put me in charge. If I tell that I had no lessons at all, there will be a scandal of a magnitude, etc., etc. What shall I do?" The Captain was visibly shocked; for a moment he looked positively outraged and inhaled nervously from his cigarette. His jovial neighborly expression changed into a military grimness but in the end he softened and said: "Jesus-Maria-Josef---what a situation! There is only one thing to do. At nine in the morning, tomorrow and every day, you report here. I can give you one or two hours--a day--and in a week you can learn more than in a whole semester of a routine class. We won't bother about all the junk you don't really need."

And so I started every morning before eight for the Brigade. That made a great impression on the Regiment staff.