

# **Aiwaz in the Abyss**

**by**

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**February 6, 2003 (revised September 2007 & May 2008)**

**Published in: *The Ogdoadic Journal of the Western Mysteries* Vol. 1 No. 3**

**2009**

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## **Introduction**

There are two great spiritual landmarks encountered on the Path of Return in the Western Esoteric Tradition. In modern nomenclature they are usually referred to as: (1) the Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel and (2) the Ordeal and Crossing of the Abyss. The history, emergence and authenticity of these particular terms would be a fascinating study unto itself. This particular paper has a more humble goal. In the academic study of mysticism, two different approaches of mysticism have been distinguished: the *apophatic* and the *cataphatic*. These two approaches are even distinguished by the type of meditation utilized by the mystic. It is my contention that these two different and seemingly opposite mystical approaches may be correlated with the two great spiritual landmarks of the Western Esoteric Tradition. It is not a direct correlation to be sure but a possible solution to the appropriate (and necessary) approach at different stages in the spiritual journey. In this preliminary exploration of this theory I will draw upon the work of a few mystical writers including: Dionysius and

St. John of the Cross as well as the work of Western theurgists including Paul Foster Case, Aleister Crowley and the writings of Melita Denning & Osborne Phillips.

The writings of Dionysius (aka the Pseudo-Dionysius) and his 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century work on the mystical theology had a profound effect on Western mysticism. I am especially interested in that spiritual experience spoken of as the *mystical theology* of Dionysius compared with the Western esoteric ideas of “crossing the abyss.” I have always hoped to see more comparisons regarding these two spiritual ordeals but to my knowledge nothing has ever come forth. The *mystical theology* of Dionysius is a very important aspect of the spiritual path particularly to Christian mysticism but the ordeal of “crossing the Abyss” is one rarely dealt with (in any great detail) in the Western esoteric traditions -- leaving us mere mortals with Nothing and in Silence.

Being a very important stage on the spiritual journey, it is too important just to turn back from because a great gulf looms before all of us eventually on the Path of Return. What method or methods we may use to approach that spiritual crisis is not as important as that which we use to reach beyond it. It is referred to as something completely unknown and unknowable. It is the ultimate. It is the most intimate. It is complete. About it some prefer to maintain silence, some resort to poetic or symbolic expression and some have actually tried to present the Teachings in some sort of rational way – even though they know they are presenting the irrational or rather non-rational.

It is a crucial subject to the large majority of occultists yet it is rarely mentioned (except when one wishes to act spooky!). It is crucial because it addresses the ultimate spiritual horizon in almost every Western esoteric tradition including for example: the classical lineages (*Aurum Solis* and *Ordo Astrum Sophia*), the Rosicrucian lineages (G.D., B.O.T.A., F.L.O.) and the Thelemic lineages (O.T.O., AA). As it turns out, these magical traditions are not in conflict with the Judeo-Christian-Islamic mystics of more traditional spirituality in this regard.

It seems best to proceed than not I suppose and because of the gravity of the subject will do so in three parts. In Part One we shall consider two seemingly opposite types of mysticism. We need to tread the invisible path of dealing with a style of mysticism technically referred to as *apophatic* or negative mysticism. The term Negative is not to be taken, umm.....negatively but actually – positively! You see, we are already in trouble. We also need to consider its opposite, the *cataphatic* approach. These are methods, approaches and ways of speaking (or unspeaking) about the spiritual life. In Part Two, some explanation is needed to place the mystic at the particular point on the Tree, the Path of Return. Then, in Part Three we shall don our camel hair robes and head out to the great desert itself and deal with the concept of the Abyss.

## **Part I**

There are two broad categories of mystical approach. The mysticism of Dionysius is representative of a long tradition of what has been called *apophatic mysticism* which is negative and basically passive. This is in contrast with *cataphatic mysticism* which is positive, deductive and affirming. These terms, *apophatic* and *cataphatic*, are ones of convenience and only tools for considering mystical approaches. In reality, there are very few mystical traditions that can be classified as exclusively one or the other. The criteria of classifying one type of mysticism *apophatic* or *cataphatic* is probably decided by which approach is emphasized in their teachings.

On one hand, Tweedledee says:

The *apophatic* mystic speaks of the passive approach to spirituality in order to open oneself to the state of “infused contemplation”. Here the emphasis is upon cultivating an acceptance of God alone doing the revealing, giving the gift of Himself. The state of consciousness cultivated is that of acceptance, expansion and opening. But it is not a product of human desire or action. So then, personal activity and spiritual programs are not emphasized. Grace is.

And on the other hand, Tweedledum says:

The *cataphatic* mystic speaks of long apprenticeships and necessary disciplines to attain to what is usually referred to as “acquired contemplation”. These are the normal spiritual disciplines of prayer, concentration, meditation, ritual, asceticism and so on to produce illuminative states of consciousness.

The kicker is that the *apophatic* mystic usually agrees on the importance of the *cataphatic* methods of attainment – but only as preparatory spiritual work. In their view the *cataphatic* approach is imperfect. The spiritual path requires the preliminary discipline of mysticism but there comes a point where human effort is vain. Like the unfinished pyramid, it must wait until the Capstone is laid by Another.

A contrast of very early Christian approaches serves as an example: “For Origen the three stages of the soul’s ascent ...was a movement of increasing illumination; the soul moves from darkness to light to still greater light. Gregory of Nyssa takes over Origen’s three stages, but for him they are a movement from light to darkness. ...For Gregory of Nyssa the doctrine of God’s unknowability means that the soul’s ascent to God is an ascent into the divine darkness.” (*The Study of Spirituality*, ed.,; Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright and Edward Yarnold, p.166.)

The *apophatic* tradition spans from the Neoplatonists, to Philo, Gregory of Nyssa, and Dionysius up through the centuries to the unknown author of the *Cloud of Unknowing*, Meister Eckhart of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, to St. John of the Cross in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and even up to our time to the Cistercian abbot Thomas Keating.

It is natural for Dionysius’s work to cause speculation of possible connection between his type of mystical theology and that of Aleister Crowley’s. There is no doubt that Aleister Crowley advocated the same two tiered approach: the discipline and practices are necessary up to a very advanced point but then there is the *apophatic*

shift at the threshold of the Ultimate. In particular, Crowley's articulation of the concept of an abyss that separates earlier mystical states from the final stages of attainment has strong similarities with the ultimate states described by earlier *apophatic* mystics.

Unfortunately some of the similarities seemed to have caused a bit of confusion among the occult community. Many of the ideas have become garbled and clear distinctions lost. One reason, I believe, is that Crowley never put forth simple detailed explanations - bless his little soul. Yet because of Crowley's lucid descriptions of those ultimate processes and states of being, it is, in my opinion, possible, with the help of more traditional descriptions, to bring the magician to a better understanding.

One of the confusions I have noticed is that mystics tend to correspond their spiritual status with the particular mystical states that they have experienced along the Way. It is an easy thing to mix as the mystical states are intrinsically linked with the quality of the soul. One has to realize that there are several types of trances and mystical experiences - some very profound - but one also has to be very careful about assigning great importance to them, especially assigning great importance to yourself for experiencing them. Here is the distinction then: mystical states are signposts along the Way and they are normally purifications (and healings) of the soul but they are not the ultimate goal of the mystic. We can hear these sentiments right from the mouth of one towering magician:

"Hindus may maintain that *Atmadarshana*, or at any rate *Shivadarshana*, is the equivalent of crossing the Abyss. Beware of any such conclusions! The Trances are simply isolated experiences, sharply cut off from normal thought-life. To cross the Abyss is a permanent and fundamental revolution in the whole of one's being." (Crowley, *Magick Without Tears*, p. 112.)

As we limp upon the Path of Return we move symbolically in a vertical as well as horizontal fashion. While we may wish to take highway 37 directly to the summit, there may be by roads and back roads. Still all roads converge at the top.

The concept of the mystic's spiritual advancement coming to an ultimate crisis after a series of illuminations and profound insights followed by the resolution of that crisis that comes only after much suffering in what has been called "the dark night of the soul" wherein there is agony, despair, and the ultimate humbling which results in the highest spiritual attainment places Aleister Crowley squarely in the *apophatic* mystical lineage.

And this brings us to the second part of this paper, encountering the Abyss. Just what are we talking about? – it does sound like some kind of cosmic grand canyon. This is another confusion I find rampant in the occult community especially, but not exclusively, with Thelemites. One reason no doubt is that it is not mentioned much outside of Thelemic circles. I do not know why that is, as I mentioned before it is most definitely a part of almost every spiritual and magical system. But for some reason, I cannot count how many times I have heard the statement: "I have taken the Oath of the Abyss" from some wild-eyed magician expecting me to drop my jaw, shriek, run and jump on the first camel to Abydos. Hopefully, in the second part we can calm the sand storms and dust devils and keep our herd of 73 camels from running amok.

## **Part II**

Lover's leap was always a foolish notion to me. Maybe it is because I never really understood it. As kids we would make our way to cliffs and call it "lover's leap". What the hell does that mean? Is falling in love like falling off a cliff? Or the other way around? And here at the cliff, looking over, is it a visual representation of that irrational impulse? Is it that there is something akin to falling in love and falling into the unknown? Is there some story behind it? It does have an archetypal or primordial feel.

We are all familiar with the magical philosophy behind the Tarot key "The Fool", shown recently in a few decks as a young person about to walk off a cliff – an innocent spirit about to take the plunge. Occultists have designated the card numerically as zero, or nothing. In older decks this card portrayed a dancing fool or a beggar. I don't

think they were numbered but it would have made sense. A beggar has nothing, and in a social sense, is nothing. He has no where to go but up. He can always be more than what he was. I think this spirit or impulse is accurately portrayed in both images. The “metaphysical” point of descent from the Supernals and ascent back to them is the furthestmost planet Saturn, right before the eighth sphere -- the Fixed Sphere.

Whenever I think of “The Fool” I am reminded of that great bard Ian Anderson and his lyrics:

“And each step that he takes is one half of a life-time: No word he would say could you understand. So he bundles his regrets into a gesture of sorrow, bringing you love, cap in hand.” (Jethro Tull, *Songs From the Wood*, “Pibroch”)

The magical philosophy has adopted the Neoplatonic view that the forces of life emanate from a central but omnipresent unified source reaching deeply into the world, at some point reaching its limit and then turns around to make its way back. This nadir is the point of true initiation. One has reached the western limit of the lodge and is now reoriented to the East. One has been in darkness because his back has been turned. Now he turns around and faces the rising sun. This is the conscious beginning of the Path of Return. And to me the Masonic question to the candidate has always summed it up the best: “Where were you first made a mason?” The answer: “In my heart.”

The ordeal of the Abyss is the second of the two major spiritual stages on the Path of Return. It is said that the true obligation of every occult order is to guide the candidate to the first one. From that point on, your spiritual work is directed by a higher influence. Thus, some mystical Orders do not work rites for any Sphere above the one representing that central spiritual experience.

“It should never be forgotten for a single moment that the central and essential work of the Magician is the attainment of the Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel. Once he has achieved this he must of course be left entirely in the hands of that Angel, who

can be invariably and inevitably relied upon to lead him to the further great step – crossing of the abyss and the attainment of the grade of Master of the Temple.” (Crowley, *Magick Without Tears*, p. 502.)

The thing I have always liked about the A.'.A.'. magical system is that each level is specifically determined by results. Whether or not one receives ceremonial support and benefit, one knows, if honest with oneself, exactly where one is on the Tree and what needs to be done next and done successfully to advance authentically. If you have had the spiritual experience of knowing your Higher Genius and conversing with the Voice of the Light then you are an Adept and within the Second Order – the Order of the R.C. Obviously, this is the fact whether or not you are the member of any magical group or a member of all of them.

The first and most important task is to make this personal link. All rites and practices are only there to assist your personal quest. Once that inner link is forged in your soul, the Holy Genius is your sole guide from that point on. It always was the case, but now it is consciously so. The temple of your soul has been built incarnation by incarnation as you “sailed over the sky of Nu in the car called Millions-of-Years” and now all of that experience, knowledge, and wisdom is becoming accessible to you consciously. The ongoing relationship and fusion accelerates the adept’s rate of ascent and prepares him or her to the second major spiritual crossroad.

“His Angel shall lead him anon to the summit of the Order of the R.C. and make him ready to face the unspeakable terror of the Abyss which lies between Manhood and Godhead; teach him to Know that agony, to Dare that destiny, to Will that catastrophe, and to Keep Silence forever as he accomplishes the act of annihilation. (*Liber ABA*, p. 496)

We must not forget where the Adept is, technically, on the Tree of Life when we say the above. The summit of the Order of the R.C. is the metaphysical grade of Exempt Adept relating to Sphere Four - Chesed. He or she has climbed the Tree step by step up the paths to each sphere. Now for the first time, there is no direct path to the next

sphere as there was before. The diagram of the Tree of Life depicts this phenomenon as there is no path between sphere 4 and 3:

“One of the remarkable features in the development of Western religions and philosophies, has been the gradual realization of the existence, at an advanced point in individual evolution, of a gap or chasm across which the advancing consciousness cannot pass unaided: a point at which its hitherto repetitive methods of overcoming obstacles will not suffice.” (Denning & Phillips, *The Magical Philosophy*, vol 2, p. 362)

Yes, the Adept stands at the brink of the Abyss but we might just as correctly call it “the Wall”. What is also interesting is that one of the meanings of the Hebrew name of the fourth path is the “arresting intelligence”. (I am aware that there are other more common interpretations of this adjective.) Now that the Adept is “within this sphere” it is important to consider its attributes. In modern Qabalistic and Tarot correspondences, the sphere of Jupiter is blue as is the High Priestess. One of the powers of the soul she represents is the personal memory; and the Jupiter Sphere represents the cosmic aspect of memory. The Platonic view that Truth is actually remembered can be applied here along with the view that the path of the High Priestess is the link between Tiphareth and the indivisible One. As the wayward spirit returns he remembers his homeland.

The Adept stands at a very unique situation on the Path of Return. He or she stands upon a peak but can go no higher. He also realizes that this is not the ultimate of spiritual life. How does one break through this impasse? One of the chief tasks then of the Exempt Adept is to fortify his position by understanding his past. He can only do as much as he can to prepare.

“Until he has thoroughly mastered the reason for every incident in his past, and found a purpose for every item of his present equipment, he cannot truly answer even those Three Questions that were first put to him, even the Three Questions of the Ritual of the Pyramid; he is not

ready to swear the Oath of the Abyss.” (*Liber vel Thisharb sub Figura CMXIII:37*)

I am confident that the Three Questions can be extracted from the statements: “I know not who I am; I know not whence I came; I know not whither I go.” See *Liber DCLXXI vel Pyramidos* or Crowley’s comments on it in “John St. John”, *The Equinox*, Volume 1, Number 1. An Exempt Adept is given several aids in order to prepare for this last great ordeal depending upon the magical system. One of the practices is *Liber Thisharb, vel Viae Memoriae* which concentrates upon the faculty of memory and its stimulation by several advanced methods. Another task is to compose a thesis containing, as completely as possible, your knowledge of the universe. This is explained: “For in the Abyss no effort is anywise possible. The Abyss is passed by virtue of the mass of the Adept and his karma. Two forces impel him: (1) the attraction of Binah, (2) the impulse of his karma ...” (Crowley, *Liber Thisharb*) Obviously there is nothing you can do about number one above so the Adept is to align oneself as much as possible with the second.

Knowing and understanding every facet of your past is to become ever closer to that underlying “true will” and allows you to break free from the excess baggage you may still harbor. In Paul Case’s words defining this grade: “... they cannot enter into the consciousness of a Master of the Temple until they have become truly exempt from the delusions of personal volition and personal action.” (Case, “The Master Pattern”, 8:1)

Or in the words of Aleister Crowley: “It is the purity of the Exempt Adept which destroys for him the illusion or drunkenness of existence, and therefore enables him to take the great leap into the Abyss.” (Crowley, 777, pp. 102-103)

The adept does not ascend from this point, one only receives the influences from Above. The adept only needs to get out of the way – permanently. Here you do not just transcend your individual life, but all the millions of lives you lived. It all has to be offered up. “Stir the cup that’s ever filling with the blood of all that’s born.” (*Jethro Tull*, “Cup of Wonder”)

In the next and final part, an attempt will be made to produce an inkling of the Ordeal of the Abyss, the sphere of Da'ath, and the Dark Night of the Soul.

### **Part III**

“Myself flung down the precipice of being  
Even to the abyss, annihilation.  
An end of loneliness, as to all.”

*(Liber Liberi vel Lapidis Lazuli sub figura VII, Prologue)*

#### The Abyss:

In the last section we were preparing for the big night out on the town. We were about to gird up our loins and head out into the wilderness for a good 40 years or more. Or actually, it might be more accurate to say that they got us all healthy and strong so we could be moved to death row!

“It is done quickly; yea, the seal is set upon the vault.  
There is one that shall avail to open it.  
Nor by memory, nor by imagination, nor by prayer, nor by fasting, nor  
by scourging, nor by drugs, nor by ritual, nor by meditation;  
only by passive love shall he avail.  
He shall await the sword of the Beloved and bare his throat for the  
stroke. Then shall his blood leap out and write me runes in the sky;  
yea, write me runes in the sky.” *(Liber Liberi vel Lapidis Lazuli, V: 44-48)*

All action is now void. One's forward progress has turned into spinning wheels in the sand. “Then there was silence. Speech had done with us awhile.” (Liber LXV: 1:12) The adept's karma has propelled him to this crossroad. And like all crossroads, the goddess Hecate rules here for She is the ruling spirit of boundaries and thresholds, of life and death. It may have been several lifetimes since the adept had the epiphany of the Angel, but now he must face the crisis of the abyss. And, like death, he or she must face it alone.

This phenomenon is actually a natural outcome of the contact with the Angel. As one had established the “entheist conviction, the realization of the inmost light of divinity illumining the psyche” as Denning and Phillips have written, it is clear that the adept must be brutally honest with himself. You may tell others all kinds of wonderful things about yourself and claim great titles, but one cannot hide from oneself. Therein lies the danger that is read about in regards to this particular spiritual crisis:

“To search for the God Within before that deity is ready to be found is to unsettle one’s external focus and to find nothing within which is worthy of worship. It is also to incur the possible horror to which some temperaments are liable, of finding within an unintelligible and inhuman Chaos of gibbering and amorphous solitude, of turbulent and life-swallowing obscurity: the Abyss.” (Denning & Phillips, *The Magical Philosophy*, vol 2, p. 432.)

The authors above also inform us that the word Abyss comes from the word “Abzu” from Sumerian myth meaning the Water-Deep. The fear caused from the great expanses of water, of great floods, and river inundation with their occasional propensity to wreak havoc and chaos in the affairs of men and destroy everything that man has labored to build is a very real primordial response. This is an apt description of the greatest ordeal of the spiritual path.

There is not only a psychological reality to the abyss; there is a philosophical notion that mirrors it as well.

“The Abyss is empty of being; it is filled with all possible forms, each equally inane, each therefore evil in the only true sense of the word – that is, meaningless but malignant, insofar as it craves to become real. These forms swirl senselessly into haphazard heaps like dust devils, and each such chance aggregation asserts itself to be an individual, and shrieks, “I am I!” though aware all the time that its elements have no true bond; so that the slightest disturbance dissipates the delusion just as a horseman, meeting a dust devil, brings it in showers of sand to the earth.” (Crowley, *The Vision & the Voice with Commentary*, p. 24.)

Now that we have painted such a lovely picture of our task and ordeal, I am sure everyone will want to pack up and go home. Those who choose to face this grand demon do so through the “gate of Da’ath”. This is the last of the four great gates between the Qabalistic worlds. Da’ath is the gate between Briah and Atziluth – the world of divinity.

### The Hidden Gate of Da’ath:

Da’ath means “knowledge” but it is usually used in the special sense that I heard so many times growing up in Tennessee: “He knew her, you know son, in the biblical sense.” It is considered by some as the invisible sphere on the Tree of Life. It is found on the Tree if you draw a line between Sphere 4 and Sphere 3 where it crosses the path of Gimel – the path from the solar sphere to the Crown. Recall that the “abyss” lies between the Supernal Triad (the first 3 spheres of the Tree of Life) and the lower seven. Keeping this in mind, one can see the hidden sphere as the sphere right at this crossroad.

“Da’ath is the Gate by which the triune light of the Neshamah shines out, and Daath is situated in the Abyss: but as yet the Adept does not see the Gate itself, nor shall he see it until to him it is a Gate indeed and his matured consciousness may enter thereby.” (D&P, *TMP*, vol 2, p. 353)

Remember that the Neshamah is sometimes thought of as the entire Supernal Triad. How does one enter? Looking at the Tree with this new line drawn between Sphere 4 and Sphere 3 one can get an inkling. The invisible path between sphere 4 and the gate of Da’ath mirrors that visible path between Netzach and Tiphareth – that of Nun or Death. To take this path is to take the path of total renunciation. It is the higher arc of the Mystical Death encountered in Tiphareth.

There are two paths one can go from that hidden gate:

“He may ascend directly by the Thirteenth Path to Kether, to merge gloriously into Divinity, as Ipsissimus. Such a choice does not result in a loss of individuality, but rather a fulfillment of it, as the word Ipsissimus signifies: for who could be more truly himself than he who completely and deliberately plunges all that he is into the Yechidah, that pure Idea of himself, which through all the vicissitudes of his existence has awaited him, a living and perfect flame of unutterable brilliance in the Divine Mind of which it is a part? (D&P, vol 2, p. 366)

Or, and more common (if common can be used here) is to pass on to Sphere Three – Binah. And by reference to the Tree of Life one can see that this path is the higher arc of Lamed. Recall that the sign of Libra is attributed to Lamed, the sign in which Saturn is exalted. “Furthermore, the highest manifestation of the restrictive, concrete, definitive power of Saturn is brought about through the operation of the law symbolized by Key 11 (Justice).” (Paul Case, *The Tarot*, p. 126) And being the higher arc of such we can only imagine the restrictive power brought to bear upon the adept. As Libra is associated with the kidneys and the elimination of waste, one can get a good idea of what kind of process is now happening. This brings us to the true ordeal of this path: the dark night of the soul.

### The Dark Night of the Soul:

The Dark Night of the Soul is a state, a purgative state that the soul suffers at this point on the Path of Return. It does not occur below the abyss. Let me repeat that: it does not occur below the abyss. It is true, there are reflections of Saturn down through the Tree but only one’s ego believes they are going through such an exalted state. “...the Sphere of Binah has many reflections and minor manifestations which one may from time to time encounter upon the Way of Return, and not the least of these darkens the thirty-second Path. The despondency and inertia which can sometimes assail even the beginner are therefore not groundless.” (D&P, *TMP* vol 2, p. 228) This is common after initiation. As soon as the honeymoon is over, the reality of work sets in and one balks. One of the most distressing phenomenon is to witness the neophyte experiencing this Saturnine

reflection after the initiation, quit the group, and seek out another. A temporary alleviation occurs and he or she then feels justified in their decision. After their next initiation in the next group, the same pattern is repeated.

Another trap below the abyss is the suffering encountered from disillusionment. Many times is this thought of as the dark night. It is not. Sometimes this disillusionment is caused from putting too much faith in a particular religion, organization or person; the breaking up of an idealized image can be traumatic. In the same fashion, a death of a loved one is one of the hardest and darkest of times. It can cause one to question everything upon which they based their whole life. Thus, one can withdraw from the outer elements, confusion reigns, towers fall, and so on that may drive the sufferer within to an abyss of emptiness and meaninglessness. Many have lost their faith completely. Although still, this is not the dark night of the soul.

“Foreshadowing’s there are, but the veritable Dark Night does not come in its fullness below the Abyss. ... One sees, therefore, the pitiful absurdity of those who know about these things without understanding them, and who openly refer their every moment of gloom to the Dark Night of the Soul. ... it is clear, therefore, that the origin of the Dark Night is not to be found in the material world.”  
(Denning & Phillips, *The Magical Philosophy*, pp. 228-229)

No, this is the darkness, anguish and agony of personal and conscious death of everything one considered about oneself. It is also caused by the withdrawal of the person’s faculties from the attachments and engagements in the material world – the sensory world and the derived abstractions that are the foundation of one’s knowledge of the universe.

“The preliminary darkness refers to an experience wherein your personal identity utterly disappears. All you have believed yourself to be becomes non-existent! this is a necessary preliminary to union with the One Existence, for there is nothing connected with individuality related to it. There is no sense of being a person at all. ... To enter that that Holy Place you must cross the abyss of total

renunciation, wherein the image of selfhood you have for long ages identified with, is exposed as nothing at all.” (Ann Davies, BOTA lessons)

Speaking of these refined aspects of spirituality, it is reported, becomes increasingly difficult. Not many have been successful in conveying or transmitting a clear notion of everything that is involved. One of the first and best articulations came from the pen of the Spanish Carmelite monk St. John of the Cross. He explores several nuances and phases of the Dark Night in great detail. Speaking of St. John, Denning & Phillips write:

“...they were all ... treating of some of the highest discernable levels of human consciousness, wherein a writer may still use the vocabulary of this or that school of thought, but the ideas expressed will transcend all boundaries. The Carmelite made in particular a detailed study of the experience of utter desolation which overwhelms the soul on entering those heights, and he called it the Dark Night. ... for the Dark Night has its ecstatic as well as its sorrowful aspect and in coming to utterance the ecstatic veils the other. Nevertheless, it contains the desolation of utter loneliness and the vast bitterness of the ocean, for it is the experience of Binah. (Denning & Phillips, *The Magical Philosophy*, vol 2, p. 227)

It is good to let the Master's speak. Following is a series of quotes from St. John's work "The Dark Night" which represents the words of a Catholic mystical genius. But as the authors of *The Magical Philosophy* write above, it transcends all boundaries:

“Since not only the understanding is deprived of its light ... and the will of its attachments, but likewise the memory is deprived of its cogitation and its contents, the soul might as well have ceased to exist as regards those faculties.” (St. John of the Cross, *The Dark Night*, E. Allison Peers trans.; Book II, Ch. 8.2)

“This is precisely what the divine ray of contemplation does. In striking the soul with its divine light, it surpasses the natural light and thereby darkens and deprives a soul of all the natural affections and

apprehensions it perceived by means of its natural light. It leaves a person's spiritual and natural faculties not only in darkness, but in emptiness too. Leaving the soul thus empty and dark, the ray purges and illumines it with divine spiritual light, while the soul thinks that it has no light and is in darkness, ..." (*The Dark Night*, K. Kavanaugh trans.; Book II, Chap. 8.4.)

"It is fitting that this darkness last as long as is necessary for the expulsion and annihilation of the intellect's habitual way of understanding, which was a long time in use, and that divine light and illumination take its place. Since that strength of understanding was natural to the intellect, the darkness it here suffers is profound, frightful, and extremely painful. This darkness seems to be substantial darkness, since it is felt in the deep substance of the spirit." (*The Dark Night*, Book II, Ch. 9.3.)

"The soul is purged and prepared for union with the divine light just as the wood is prepared for transformation into the fire. Fire, when applied to wood, first dehumidifies it, dispelling all moisture and making it give off any water it contains. then it gradually turns the wood black, makes it dark and ugly, and even causes it to emit a bad odor. By drying out the wood, the fire brings to light and expels all those ugly and dark accidents that are contrary to fire. Finally, by heating and enkindling it from without, the fire transforms the wood into itself and makes it as beautiful as it is itself. Once transformed, the wood no longer has any activity or passivity of its own, ..." (St. John, *The Dark Night*, Bk II, ch. 10.1)

And in the words of a modern mystic, this process is like spilling every last drop of your lifeblood into the cup of the goddess:

"In this Cup, therefore, though all things are placed, by virtue of this dew all lose their identity. And therefore this Cup is in the hand of Babalon the Lady of the City of the Pyramids, wherein none can be distinguished from any other, wherein no one may sit until he has lost his name." (Crowley, *Liber ABA*, p. 79)

“O ye who dwell in the city of the Pyramids beneath the Night of PAN, remember that ye shall see no more light but That of the great fire that shall consume your dust to ashes!” (Crowley, *Book of Lies*, ch. 67.)

### **Concluding remarks:**

I doubt it sane to continue beyond this point. But I feel I have left you with little, and maybe nothing, here at the end. Yet it seems that something more needs to be communicated, at least from one point of view. The question is, I suppose, what has become of this adept who has been destroyed, consumed and transformed. He or she is still sitting there across the room; even looks remarkably the same. Paradoxically, this adept crossed the abyss but yet is in some sense still present, isn't he? Obviously, he or she now belongs to a whole other order of being:

“The Order of the S.S. is composed of those who have crossed the Abyss; ... Every active Member of the order has destroyed all that He is and all that He has on crossing the Abyss; but a star is cast forth in the Heavens to enlighten the Earth, so that He may possess a vehicle wherein He may communicate with mankind. The quality and position of this star, and its functions, are determined by the nature of the incarnations transcended by Him.” (Crowley, *Liber ABA*, p. 79)

So in conclusion then: “From the Abyss comes No Man forth, but a Star startles the Earth, and our Order rejoices above the Abyss ... ” (Crowley, *Liber ABA*, p. 496)

“Thus, that dust which is all that remains of the Exempt Adept after he has crossed the Abyss, is gradually surrounded by sphere after sphere of shining splendour, so that he becomes a fitting ornament for the bosom of the Great Mother.” (Crowley, 777, p. 102)