

## Note from the Author

The inspiration for writing *Mysticism and Modern Life* comes from my interest in holism. As far back as I can remember, I wanted to reach beyond the boundaries of common life and grasp what was on the other side. I did not have a fascination with the supernatural or the occult, but I did carry a healthy skepticism about my formal education. No matter how I rationalized it, I could not reconcile my life experience with what I was learning in school. The discrepancy between my experience and education intensified when I was sixteen years old and had my first psychic dream.

On June 5, 1968, I fell asleep while waiting for Bobby Kennedy to make his victory speech in the California primary. I dreamed I was walking with my girlfriend through a cemetery looking at all the headstones, but could not make out any of the names. I awoke just as Kennedy was leaving the podium and watched in horror as Sirhan Sirhan assassinated him. I kept that dream to myself for quite a while as it frightened me. It marked the beginning of my investigation into the polarities of the mystical and the mundane, an inquiry lasting for the next ten years.

The first outlet I found for my nontraditional beliefs occurred while reading *A Yaqui Way of Knowledge* by Carlos Castaneda in 1970. Castaneda, a reclusive UCLA anthropology student who went on to write twelve books about his apprenticeship with the Mexican shaman don Juan Matus, encouraged a generation of readers to see the life force in all things. The controversy over the veracity of Castaneda's accounts of his training with don Juan still exists today. Was he reporting from his field notes or was he writing fiction? Even during my college days, the legitimacy of his claims was irrelevant to me. I was more taken with his alternative model of reality than with its factual basis. Since I already believed reality extended beyond the range of our physical senses, I found Castaneda's world of sorcery powerful, provocative, and irresistible. The sharp contrast between the formulaic pretensions of my conventional education and Castaneda's magical world was another glimpse into the raw strength and creative power of polarities.

My metaphysical speculation became even stronger in graduate school after reading Carl Jung's (1961) memoirs. I was particularly

struck by his chapter entitled “Visions,” in which he describes his 1944 near-death experience following his heart attack.

Caught in the space between life and death in the moments after his heart attack, Jung experienced the joy of being released from the containment of his physical body, while back on earth he was given oxygen and camphor injections to help stabilize him. In his euphoria he floated high above the planet in full contentment. Having shed all of his prior regrets and feeling free of pain and restriction, he encountered the ethereal form of his doctor who told him about a protest on earth “against his death.” At that point, Jung’s vision stopped, his pulse stabilized, and he regained consciousness.

Three weeks of depression follow his revival, as Jung came to terms with what he called the *box system* of physical life. He had to convince himself that the restriction of living in a human box was important. Jung, who spent his entire life charting a systematic course to help people expand the confines of humanity, found that no matter how hard he tried, he could not escape the containment of the physical body.

This particular recollection of Jung’s life and Castaneda’s paranormal experiences in the Sonoran desert were so consistent with my interest in life’s larger contexts, it spurred me into gestalt therapy, energy transference, and philosophy.

My early professional work culminated in 1977 when my dear friend and early mentor, Barbra Dillenger, introduced me to Gregge Tiffen. Gregge, a Tibetan-trained mystic, became to me what don Juan was to Castaneda. Under his tutelage, I learned the mechanics of metaphysics. Integral to his teaching was the relationship between the polarities of the macrocosm and the microcosm.

Simply put, the microcosm is born out of the macrocosm, giving both the same patterning and structure. The microcosm, therefore, becomes the representative of the larger whole of the macrocosm. This basic understanding of the relationship between the macrocosm and the microcosm helped me to reconcile the polar split I was experiencing between the mystical world of my Kennedy dream and the mundane world around me.

I began to see the sensitivity some people have to nonphysical forces—experiences such as clairvoyance, prescience, and the paranormal—as one way of connecting to a larger context beyond the range of our physical senses. I came to understand Jung’s “full

contentment” experience could only happen after he shed the physical constraints of his body and could connect to a larger context. Within this larger context, Jung gained spiritual insight into the box system of human life and caught a glimpse of the interaction between the macrocosm and the microcosm he wrote about so prolifically.

With Barbra and Gregge’s help, I developed a metaphysical framework, adding an extra dimension to my life without discounting life’s ordinary qualities. In the ensuing years, I have not disregarded my normal life for a spiritual quest or ignored everything I learned in school. Instead I have combined the qualities of the mystical and the mundane into one coherent system in, *Mysticism and Modern Life*.

In the book, I present a framework for viewing life within the larger contexts I have struggled to define since childhood. In presenting the part to whole philosophy of mysticism, I draw from case examples, as well as from literary works of Musil, Canetti, Borges, Tan, and Mann; the philosophy of Kierkegaard, Wilber, Emerson, Heraclitus, and Plato; the Jewish mysticism of Steinsaltz and Heschel; the psychology of Freud, Jung, Winnicott, Becker, and a host of post Freudians; the poetry of Frost, Blake, and Neruda, and; the social science of Bateson, von Bertalanffy, and Levi-Strauss. I include many knowledgeable voices in the text since the concepts are universal. In other words, they are found in different historical eras, domains of life, and modes of expression such as poetry, literature, philosophy, and psychology.

By distilling the concept of mysticism down to six principles I show readers how human life and universal principles correspond to each other and how our lives are actually part of a larger organizing scheme.

I focus on a predominant universal principle—the law of polarity. I particularly rely upon the Greek philosopher Heraclitus, who was one of the first philosophers to show that polarities were the by-products of unity. By seeing human beings as a meeting place for various levels of reality, he created a multidimensional philosophy of human existence demonstrating the connection between the unity of the cosmos and diversity of its people.

Due to the verbal tradition of ancient sages handing down information to their students, we have only sixty fragments scholars can attribute to Heraclitus (Geldard, 2000). By referring to the ancient teachings of Heraclitus within the flow of the book and in the epigraphs,

I try to create a sense of continuity and clarify the correspondence between mystical principles and human development.

Finally, I hope this book will reveal to readers, if only incrementally, how a small individual expression, unique and complete within itself, can have a positive influence on the world.

Larry Laveman  
Solana Beach, California  
June 2006