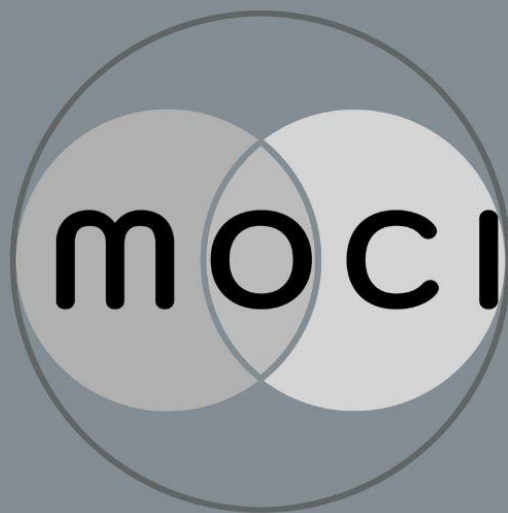


In the Desert



By James Mahu | E1 : S2

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E1 : S2

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In the Desert

E1 : S2

It was a still day. Not a single breath of wind. The sun was harsh, but not unkind. The desert was one of the woman's favorite destinations as a young child. It was a short, but perilous walk from the cliffs that overhung the beach. Hardly anyone knew of the place, and those that did, avoided it because of the presumed danger that they would become lost. There were too many stories of unsuspecting tourists, losing their way once they traveled into the sand dunes, and then were never to be seen again.

The desert's contrast, after walking along the shores of the sea, were stark and breathtaking. She knew of an oasis that was surrounded by sand dunes that were the size of hills. Navigating the distance was no easy task, and that kept out everyone but the very adventurous.

As the woman shuffled down a steep sand dune she could hear voices that she presumed were coming from the oasis. There seemed to be a friendly argument afoot. It was all the woman could ascertain. As she came down from the hill, she swiped off the sand from her cloak, and walked the remaining distance to the strangers, her hosts, and bowed. "Please, I'm sorry to interrupt, but could I trouble you for some water?"

There was a man and two women. They were dark skinned, like people who come from places where the sun is no stranger. She surmised they were from the deep desert, places that no one in her world ever ventured, unless they were anthropologists. They were young — at least to her — perhaps in their early thirties. She was quite terrible at guessing ages once the person survived their teenage years.

One of the women stepped forward with a flask of goatskin, about the size of an adult hand uncoiled, bearing the width of a fist. The visitor took the flask and drank. Her thirst was quenched quickly, and she handed it back.

"You can have more, there's plenty of water here. No one ventures out to these remote places." The woman pressed the flask back into the visitor's hands, who accepted it. "You must be in good condition," the woman observed, scanning the length of her body.

"Did you come from the cliffs or the sea?" the man asked, entering the conversation with perfect timing.

"I came from the sea," the visitor replied. She had taken about the same amount of water as before, and handed it back. "I'm good, thank you. Perhaps later I'll have some more."

"If you came from the sea, then you are indeed in fine condition. You would probably be able to keep up with us." He smiled and winked.

"Where are you from?" the visitor asked.

"We are from everywhere in there," he pointed to the region behind them in the opposite direction of the sea. "We are what you might call nomads or part of the ne'er-do-well denizens who roam the desert floor, dissatisfied with permanence and surety."

The visitor squinted her eyes slightly. "Where did you learn to speak so well?"

"Ah," one of the women said, "we were educated by our parents who had a distant relative who once went to your universities. This relative happened to be our finest logician. An anthropologist from your university visited us, and over time, offered our relative an education. She went with great encouragement from our people, and she learned everything she felt was important. And then returned to our people and taught us."

"You have books?" the visitor asked with a degree of wonder.

"No, everything we know is in the oral tradition," the woman answered.

"In other words," the man said, "we like to talk a lot."

The sound of laughter followed his comment. "Come, join us, we have grapes, bread and goat's milk, and if you feel like it, we even have red wine."

The visitor sat down on the soft sand floor, surrounded by palm trees that provided much needed shade. An occasional lizard flitted across the sand. Its movement, such a rapid rhythm, was surprisingly loud when measured against the absolute silence of the desert.

"Where are you from and why are you here?" the man asked. "If I'm not being too bold."

"I am not offended by directness," she replied quietly. "I am from a place you have never heard of. It is a town so remote, so small, that it is not even on the map. As for why I am here, I listened to my desire and followed it."

"Have you been here before?"

"Yes," she nodded. "Twice."

"How long ago?" the woman asked.

The visitor looked carefully at her guests. "Before you were born."

"Huh..." the man said, bobbing his head slightly. "Then your memory is as impressive as your fitness. You keep this up, and by the time we're done talking, I will hold you in the highest esteem." He smiled and sat back against one of the palm trees.

"If it had been that long a time since you were here last, how did you find it?"

"I know exactly how many steps it is from the bottom step of the stairs that mount those cliffs. I counted them when I was a child. Not only do I remember the number of

steps, but I remember the direction. If I had been wrong when I reached the number, I would have turned back. There's no wind today, so I reasoned that I could follow my tracks back to safety, if needed."

"But no water, you took a risk."

"I know. But at some point I could hear your voices, and I stopped counting because I knew I had gone in the right direction."

"Well, we're glad you could join us for some conversation." The three of them all nodded. The visitor smiled and nodded in return.

"We were discussing the validity of spacetime when you arrived. Do you have any opinions?" the man asked.

The visitor nodded. "Opinions I have an infinite supply. Knowledge, not so much."

"So, tell us your opinion. Does spacetime actually exist?"

"It seems that you have come to the conclusion that it either exists or it doesn't, when indeed, I believe it is both."

One of the women shrugged. "How can something exist and not exist at the same time?"

"It can do that because we live and operate in all spacetimes. Spacetime is not a binary expression of Nature. By its very nature, Nature is all dimensions of spacetime. It exists in every level, every particle, in all. Nature is all. We are a part of it." She picked up some sand and let it pass through her fingers. "Not just this desert, or the palm trees or even this planet. Nature is everything, everywhere, everytime." she paused and looked up at their three faces, all staring at her. "And who would that include?"

One of the women pointed to her chest. "Us...humans..."

"We are infinite beings that weave our way across spacetime in a succession of bodies and temporal identities. Spacetime is the one constant of our journey and the learning therein. If it didn't exist then the illusion of its existence is perfect, and anything that is perfect, must exist, therefore, it is not an illusion."

"Well, your mind will certainly perk up our conversation," the man remarked.

"Yet, spacetime is not foundational," the visitor continued. "There is an encompassing, formative, primitive, preternatural reality and this is the blackhole behind all blackholes. It is the source of spacetime, in the same way as we are the source of duality. It is a world in which opposites are created from separation."

"How did humans come to possess this perspective, different from all other parts of Nature?" the woman asked. "How did we become the creators of separation?"

"Only a certain brain and nervous system can accommodate this ability to separate from the whole within spacetime, and truly contemplate it. There awaits an infinite understanding of the complexity of being separate from the whole, and yet the whole itself."

Other parts of Nature are aware of this separation, but lack the biological tools to contemplate the fullness of this separation.”

“And for what purpose does this uniqueness serve?” the man asked.

She turned to him and then pointed to the sky. “We are the only eyes of Nature, upon this planet, that can explore *that*, and out of that exploration we bridge worlds. We are the part of Nature that connects itself to its wholeness. Where there is life in spacetime, there is the probability that a part of that life will evolve to a sufficiently complex entity that it will become an explorer of new worlds, and in that process, become a bridge to a greater part of Nature.”

“That’s all?” one of the women asked with a tone of perplexity. “We’re just here to interconnect with other lifeforms from other planets?”

The visitor shook her head slowly. “No, I am just telling you my opinion on the purpose for all of us. But for us, as a Sovereign identity, we have a completely unique and different purpose. And this is the purpose, for example, that you are human, living in the desert as nomads, flitting between an oasis and harshness. You have a purpose and I would imagine it has nothing to do with intergalactic comradeship.”

“Well, I can’t speak for my wonderful companions, but I will tell you this, I don’t think I have had a single thought in my entire life where I considered my purpose to be an ambassador for other life on other planets in spacetime.”

“And why not?” the visitor asked.

“I suppose because it’s not possible. We don’t have spaceships laying around in the desert,” he said with a chuckle. “Or anywhere else for that matter.” He tilted his head in the direction of the visitor. “Are you suggesting we wait for them?”

“I’m suggesting that we understand. We are a part of a wholeness that is Nature. It is simply Nature externalized, but there is an internal Nature as well, and it is from this Nature that the external is expressed. And this relationship is fractal, absolutely infinite, and is only soluble in a love that understands the one, many and all consciousness. That is what I am suggesting.”

There was a long pause. The silence that filled their space was fertile with ideas.

One of the women shifted her position. “Our scientists have said that the quantum world is strange. A wave is also a particle. A cat is both dead and alive. If we simply measure something, it will change in some way.” She sighed. “Does any of this make sense? I don’t think it is simply that we invented separation, and by association, duality. We invented confusion.” She seemed to try to smile, but her attempt was awkward.

“Nature is always expanding,” the visitor said. “Even our universe is expanding so fast that we will never see it all, no matter how powerful our telescopes. Nature is the intelligence we cannot fathom. It lives in the unknowable state where all things arrive and

depart. It is not simply a forest or an animal or fish, it is all of life. That is nature. We are the part of Nature that initiates interconnectedness across spacetime. We are its threads to weave itself together planet to planet, species to species, galaxy to galaxy, universe to universe."

"Such a grand plan," the man intoned. "Yet here we are, sitting on sand in the desert like lizards. How are we going to explore anything up there?"

"Oh, we will," the visitor said with absolute conviction. "But first, we will be visited by those who are ahead of us in their explorations. They will come to understand us, evaluate us, and determine when we would be ready to become partners, instead of adversaries."

"All of what you say makes a degree of sense, but we are here for such a short time, how is it relevant to any of us? All you can be suggesting is that some future version of us will shake hands with our galactic neighbors...right?"

The visitor licked her dry lips, and took a deep breath. "This is the grand plan of Nature. Spacetime is the only real variable. Which generation of our species will shake hands in an explicit, and mostly collective partnership is the only question, and that answer is always contained in a very specific *and* non-specific spacetime. There is a probability scattered in that generation like Easter eggs stashed away in stealth."

"And how do we become trusting of a race so alien from our own, and by inference, more advanced?"

"It is a long process," the visitor replied. "Nature enables this over timescapes we would consider planetary in scale. But once a sufficient biological system is in place, Nature will enable this. It knows how. The *when* is curled within spacetime and this is the magic that is unknown to all, until it is but a short time away, no one will know."

"Are you implying it cannot be foretold?" the man asked.

The visitor nodded, remaining silent, her eyes closed.

One of the women leaned forward. "We have a woman in our tribe who sees the future. Perhaps she could — "

The visitor raised her hand. "As I explained, it cannot be seen. This is a time when Nature does not reveal itself."

"...Huh..." the three said in near-perfect unison.

In the distance a snorting sound erupted. "Just our camels," the man said, waving his hand. "They're resting in the shade. Amber is probably dreaming again. She always snorts when she dreams."

The two women chuckled, and the one who had talked about their seer, suddenly turned serious. "Who are you?"

"I told you. I am from a tiny place of no concern, utterly without credentials, if that's what you seek."

"Let me turn the table, where did you learn to talk like that?"

"Like what?"

"You seem to know the deeper realities. How did you come to this understanding? Where did you learn it?"

The visitor paused, considering the questions. "I decided a long time ago that I would be my own teacher. So, I didn't learn it from anywhere, but here." The visitor pointed to herself. "And for this reason, as I told you from the outset, I have an infinite supply of opinions, and they are always morphing and contorting into new shapes that I can barely hold onto."

"But what you say...makes...it makes sense."

"Perhaps, but they're just principles, and once the principles are understood, then life — Nature — can reveal itself a little more, and a little more and a little more. That's how it works, at least for me."

"But where did you learn these principles?"

"From everyone else."

"Like who?"

"Literally everyone who has ever walked across my path. Every single one taught me these principles. I cannot even say that one was more influential than another, because they collectively taught me, and I don't know where one stopped and another began."

"Huh..." the trio replied, once again, in near-perfect unison.

"Yet, if what you said earlier is true, then it was Nature itself that taught you," the woman observed. "Is that not true?"

"It is. Thank you for saying that."

The woman suddenly looked perplexed, but smiled anyway.

The man, suddenly restless, stood up as if he didn't know where to go. He grabbed a new flask that was about twice as large as the one that the visitor had drunk from. He took a swig and then held it out. "Anyone else want some wine? It's quite good."

All three women shook their heads.

He took another swig, longer than the first, and returned to his spot in the shade of a palm tree. "This notion of Nature being everything, everywhere, everytime, it's...um....well, it's most unusual. I was never taught that an ant or whale were part of nature, let alone us. Nature was the *stage*. It was the grass, the trees, the sand, the water, the land, everything that provided a way for life to live, but you're suggesting that Nature is...is all."

He rocked his body slightly, deep in thought. The women just watched. He finally raised his hand, index finger pointing to the sky. "I guess what I'm saying is that if we all fold into Nature, then we all fold out of Nature, too. Nature is the substrate of all, and it is also the stage. That's what you're saying, correct?"

The visitor nodded. "I am saying that."

"And the only way you know that is because you have some *principles* that you've learned from everyone in your life — that Nature taught you. You either have a very forgiving nature or one that cannot discern teachers from ignorant bastards — if you want my opinion..."

The visitor smiled. "I am aware that there are many who cross my path who are *ignorant bastards*, as you call them, but this is just a name. If you dissolve the name, if you really look behind them, they are teachers. Sometimes teachers push the brake, and sometimes they push the accelerator. Sometimes they push us into anger, frustration and fear. Sometimes they pull us into love, kindness and compassion. Regardless, they are teachers."

"So, then Nature is not only the stage and the substrate, but it is also the teacher?" the man asked.

Again, the visitor nodded.

The man shook his head in contrast. "Then tell me, friend, what is Nature not?"

The visitor began to speak, and then paused. She motioned for some water, which was handed to her, and she took a quick sip, holding onto the flask. "Nature is all of those things, and we are just one thing, and Nature is not that."

"And...?" the man chortled.

"We are Sovereign."

"What does that even mean?"

"It means we have an identity that is the amalgamation of everything we have experienced in every moment of every lifetime that we, and only we, as a Sovereign, possess. And the keeper of that experience is only us. Even Nature does not possess it. It is ours alone. And that aspect of us, at our very core, the Sovereign, understands these experiences because we observed them, experienced them, learned from them, and expressed them."

"No one else in spacetime has done that?" one of the women asked. "Not even Nature?"

"No, not even Nature. If it had, there would be no reason for us to exist. We would simply be swallowed into Nature," she said, turning to the man. "Folded in, as you put it."

"And we're not one with this Nature?" the man asked.

"Always in your way of thinking it is one or the other, when it is both. We are both Sovereign of, and Integral with, Nature. We are a part of the one, many and all consciousness of which Nature is, in all of its manifestations. In the realms of spacetime, we are given our Sovereignty so Nature can expand, and in this expansion retain interconnectedness within spacetime."

"Only within spacetime? What about outside or beyond spacetime?"

"The closest we will come to that domain is through the lens of imagination, logic, mathematics, the feelings of intuition, and art. Through those doors you can find the door to the unknowable, but you cannot cross the threshold as a Sovereign."

"Why?"

"Because the room of the unknowable is always behind the unknown. No matter how far we journey. We are always within spacetime if we are Sovereign. And Nature, as the most primitive substrate, is always in the Integral of the unknowable."

"Then how exactly does one become a Sovereign Integral if the Integral is always unknowable to us, the Sovereign?" The man asked, frustration rising in his tone.

The visitor smiled at the question. "Now you have found it."

"Found what?" he replied reflexively.

"There must be a way to move between these individual states," the visitor explained, "to feel both, and become so good at it that we can learn to live in both simultaneously."

"How does one do that?"

"I might know for myself, I don't know for you."

"Everyone is different, then?" the man asked.

"Everyone is different." She nodded her head.

One of the women cleared her throat. "Each Sovereign finds this point themselves...eventually?"

The visitor handed the woman the flask of water. "Spacetime is infinite, it is the stage of Nature. The Sovereign that experiences this stage, is also infinite. We come from infinity and we leave to infinity. This is who we are. Each one of us, no matter what we are or who we are. *We are that!* And that is presently unknown. So, we can either lean into that direction, or we can resist and lean into separation, duality and confusion."

"You didn't answer my question..."

"Oh, I thought I did," the visitor lamented. "Let me try it this way, we don't know how little or how much we know. We are ignorant of our knowledge. Would you agree with this?"

"The more we talk, the more I am convinced of this," the woman half-laughed as she spoke.

"If we are ignorant, what is our best course?" the visitor asked.

The woman shook her head and shrugged.

"We observe life through the best framework," the visitor said. "If one is lost in the desert, what do you do?"

The woman shrugged. "We use our heads, we just know. Everything around us, the sand dunes, the wind, the sun, the stars, the vegetation, everything points the way to where we want to go. We cannot be lost, unless there is a bad storm that reforms the desert."

"And if that were to happen," the visitor asked, "ideally, what would you need to find your way?"

The woman thought about it for a short time, while everyone looked expectantly. "I guess I would, again, ideally, I guess I would want to be taken up high in the air and look down on the desert. From that perspective I could recognize something that would give me my bearings."

"High in the air," the visitor repeated in a distant voice. "That part of us is our Sovereign — high in the air. Indeed our highest point is the Sovereign. That is how we find our bearings. To remember that we are a Sovereign through our imagination, intuition and logic. To use these three lenses within ourselves, because they are our infinite partners.

"You introduced spacetime when you asked the question: does the Sovereign *eventually* achieve this realization? Well, the use of the term "eventually," in an infinite spacetime, is inevitable. And this is one of our problems in understanding the Sovereign. We think of spacetime as earth and a single life, because it is highly relevant. And even if we were to consider the universe and spacetime of a hundred thousand years, we would still only capture an infinitesimal portion of our Sovereign experience, and the Integral is infinitely larger." She flashed a smile like a virtual particle.

The visitor then paused to observe her hosts, gauging their interest in her line of reasoning. "We are an agent of Nature that possesses multiple consciousnesses and lifetimes within spacetime. The number of the multiple is unknowable, and the form each of those lifetimes takes, is also unknowable. Thus, we have no method to understand what we are. Yet, Nature made us this way because *eventually* we will realize what we are. And if not for spacetime, we would know this very instant."

One of the women motioned with her hand, for the man to hand her the wine flask, which he gladly did. She took a long sip and then let out a long breath. "So, we're forced to live lifetimes in an infinite succession to simply understand that we are both Sovereign as an agent of Nature, and Integral to Nature itself? How is that not like the myth of the man doomed by the gods to roll a rock up a mountain only to have it fall to the bottom after he reaches the very top? Over and over again.

"At least with religions, provided you lived a moral life, you would leave suffering, humiliation, fear, anger, pain, you would leave all of those terrible feelings behind you on earth, while you enjoyed the fruits of heaven. You would live in everlasting beauty and joy.

If we are Sovereign, infinite in scope, but always in spacetime, lifetime after lifetime, then we are doomed to the repetition of life.”

“Ah,” the visitor nodded, “but you are assuming that you are a human being on earth over and over again. And that is a false assumption.”

“Why?”

“Because you are infinite, you embody an infinite number of lifetimes. And all of them are in a different embodiment, a different spacetime, a different species, and so on. It is anything but repetitive. For example, our physical body that we live in consists of 10^{27} atoms, and there is one of those atoms that is the Sovereign, and all of the other atoms represent a lifetime you are experiencing in one of your 8.5 billion moments of time that comprise a single lifetime. Eventually, we learn to let that one atom — the Sovereign — shine and illuminate the other atoms.

“The number of moments that a Sovereign experiences is unknowable by any instrument or mathematical process. These moments, collectively, enable the Sovereign Integral experience. We live to learn the moment when learning culminates in our realization that we are an agent of Nature and a part of it simultaneously...and so is everyone else.”

The man cleared his throat and motioned for the wine flask. “If science, mathematics, philosophy, and religion cannot peek behind the curtain and see Nature for what it is, then why are we given these tiny instances when we see something or feel something or imagine something that is beyond us? That almost calls to us? I have literally heard this voice when I’m alone in the desert.”

“The term Sovereign,” the visitor said, “is not simply another name for soul or consciousness. It is not a name at all. Nor is it an assemblage of numbers or code. It remains behind and outside of those human-created concepts. Everything we have created through humanness is unlike the one, many and all consciousness and the Sovereign Integral experience. Your life, as it is right now, is like a small circle that overlaps — by a single atom — an infinite sphere. Yet, this overlap provides glimpses into the Sovereign’s world.

“It pulls you towards itself through the writings, the beliefs, the art, the science and the mathematics of our spacetime. These human-created constructs do not reveal the Sovereign. They reveal the soul or consciousness or the mind or the heart or the body, all of these are revealed. The Sovereign waits for you to bring an “atom” to the area of overlap. Once a single atom is brought to the place where the Sovereign waits, it will begin to reveal itself without the human constructs and the well-meaning descriptions of who we are or might be.”

“So, it is the Sovereign that we hear and feel and pray to and seek? Is that what you’re saying, my good friend?” the man said, his face squinting as if a ray of the sun had suddenly found him.

“You decide. It is not an absolute. There is no puppet master looming above us who orchestrates it. It is a journey of free will for all life that is uncaged and solitary. For every other life, free will is a concept modified by the Many. Groups modify free will, and ensure it is the thing that attracts humans to socialize, and diffuse knowledge and understanding.

“This is how a planetary consciousness, that is the local expression of a concentration of Nature, evolves itself to explore the universe and reunite with other planets and the species there upon, helping each other to solve problems, build societal cultures of partnership, and expand exploration.

“Yet, to realize this we need to have the possibility...the probability that the human species can collectively see this future state; to feel it in their bones.” The visitor took a deep breath and held it for a few seconds while closing her eyes, and then expelled it slowly, almost silently, but in the deep silence of the desert, sometimes, even the heartbeat can be heard.

“It is the Sovereign that knows the one, many and all consciousness, and through its far-flung lifetimes, this knowledge is shared, but only from the Sovereign, not paper or screens of one size or another. Not by my lips or yours. It is shared by the Sovereign to its embodiments, and from there it is uncaged, a wild living thing in the pure solitude of a breath and heartbeat and solitary movement. It becomes a probability of our future, but first, we must go through it ourselves.

“It is not a thing of the will or a plan or purpose. It is simply free from a Sovereign to a life form through which that Sovereign overlaps with.”

“And are there good and evil Sovereigns?” One of the women asked.

“They are not of duality,” the visitor said.

“Then who created them? Were they good or evil?”

The visitor shook her head, but a smile came over her slowly like a shadow from a tall object. “There is no duality my friends but what we have created. How can the unknowable, or even the unknown, be measured in terms of good and evil?” The visitor stood up slowly. “I will go meet your camels. It’s been a long time since I have seen one, and I remember their curiosity for strangers.”

“They’re back there,” the man pointed. “Amber, Dusty, and Shadow. I suspect you’ll have no problem telling which is which.” He smiled, yet his mind seemed to be roosting on a far-distant planet.

The visitor stopped momentarily, bowing slightly to her three hosts. “Thank you for your hospitality. It has been an honor to know you.”

"You should come with us," one of the women said. We're headed to an oasis that is famous among our people who believe it to hold magical powers."

"I don't believe in magical powers," she replied. "It's Nature I believe in."

"This whole time I believed you held the panpsychist view, and now you've confirmed it."

"Well, don't put your faith there," the visitor said. "I'm not a panpsychist. They believe that nature is the body of God, and God is the mind of Nature. I believe that the Collective Mind is not Nature, it is just another aspect of Nature. In the same way that I don't consider you to be your nose, I don't consider the collective mind to be Nature. Nature is the one, many and all consciousness that embodies spacetime. Panphsysim believes in the One, as if Nature is only a collective mind.

"It is much more than that; however, it cannot be defined."

"I understand, but it certainly is related."

"The teachings of my Sovereign, when I am alone with it, are for me. They are related only to me, and how they are related to other beliefs, theorems, hypotheses or imaginative forays of the arts, that also is left to me."

The women stood up. "But someone who is of the opinion that all is Nature, even God is contained in that. Do you believe that Nature is God? Is it simply semantics?"

"I believe in the intelligence that could conceive of Nature, and then, possess the patience to allow Nature to unfold, evolve, survive and project its intelligence within spacetime, gathering itself like an explosion in reverse in ultra-slow-motion. It is the reality of all realities, so vast...to be a container of Nature, I don't have a name for it. Yet, that is what I believe in. It is not semantics. There is no name for that binding, energetic intelligence...perhaps the closest is love."

"Why does your belief go to an unknown thing?" the woman asked. "A thing that until just now, I never once contemplated? I mean...it is so abstract that it is unrelatable. How can I be expected to put my belief into that?"

"Who is expecting you to do that?" the visitor replied.

"God...that intelligence behind Nature. It expects me to believe in it, when it is invisible, hidden behind my reality in some abstraction that my mind cannot fathom. So how can it expect me to believe in it?"

The woman was quite distressed in her tone, and the visitor paused to recognize it, nodding her head in empathy. "You assume there is an expectation. Perhaps there isn't. Perhaps your life is better lived without believing in it. Some want this and some do not."

"But what changes if you believe in that intelligence? Does it change your life?"

"If you believe in that intelligence that encircles all expressions of life, you understand that the Integral is a part of you and you it. And that applies to all life. If you already believe this, then it will not change your life. If you do not believe this, then it will."

"But something so...integral to all life, that is always separate from us, as if it lived in a parallel reality. How do I even reach for it, speak with it, learn from it? *How?*" The woman moved a step closer to the visitor, her head craned forward, as if to emphasize her interest in what the visitor had to say.

"As abstract as the ultimate reality is, it does not mean we cannot probe it with our imagination and logic. Our unique portion of reality can overlap with this ultimate reality. We are a part of it, even if that overlap is but one atom. And even when the overlap is fleeting and exquisitely rare, we can still believe in it. Even if we continue to deny it to the outside world, there remains a place in our heart and mind where we believe in it. Where we always believe in it."

The visitor turned her voice to mere whisper. "And that *is* the Integral in our world — the *belief* in the Integral by the Sovereign expressed, in our case, through humanness."

"So, you're saying that the Integral can only be believed, it cannot be proven in our world. Why can't we have more than belief?"

The visitor chuckled. "Everyone wants to pull down the covers of reality and reveal it is just a bunch of numbers, a matrix, a simulation. Something unreal. A shimmering illusion behind which is the Great Wizard of evolutionary processes so vast as to be called by a thousand names." She paused and took a long breath. "Yet it is the world of the Integral that we are trying to reveal. The intelligence that created Nature and then set it loose within all of spacetime. And we puny humans want to pull back the curtain and see it with our human senses and know it with our brain, all because we desire to have something more than belief."

"We all want proof...something solid we can trust."

"Ah, but you trust this reality, do you not?"

"...Mostly..."

"And the only reason you trust it is because you have had experience with it since you were a baby. It is familiar to you. The Sovereign and the Integral, you are not familiar with, certainly not in *their* true environment. Where they live and have their being, you cannot go. For you, they might as well be in the middle of the sea. So, you think that if they will only come here — to this world — and show themselves, then you can trust them."

"Yes, I would trust them, if I could see them with my own eyes."

"What if a scientist showed you proof of the Sovereign and the Integral that was based on mathematics. Would you trust them?"

The woman shook her head. "No, I don't understand mathematics all that well."

"Then what about a book that explained what the Sovereign and Integral were?"

"They're just words. No, I would not trust it, I might believe in it a little, but I would not trust it."

"What if you had a dream, and met the Sovereign and experienced the Integral?"

"No, I would not trust a dream. They're too fleeting and I know that I created them."

"A vision?"

"No!" The woman shook her head vehemently. "It needs to be them! You don't understand, because you have obviously experienced them."

The visitor sighed. "So, the only solution for your proof is your eye-brain system. Is that correct?"

"Yes."

"Then seek it, and be patient," the visitor offered. "Be very patient."

"That's all?" the woman asked. "No process, method, technique; no code, ritual or ceremony? Everyone has their own way, and one way doesn't work for all...or any multiplicity?"

The visitor held up two fingers. "Even two," she said with a slight grin. "What process is there except the stage that Nature creates and evolves? We land upon this stage at birth, and journey across it through spacetime. We decide what we believe inside the heart and mind of us. It is that exact path and process for everyone embodied in any species. However, as you have pointed out, there is a greater nuance to the stage, spacetime, and a single lifetime when viewed with an open mind."

"And if we want to understand that nuance...?" The woman asked. "And there is no real path other than our own...*how* do we find...or...or *where* do we find this nuanced understanding. You found it, can't you explain how I can, too?"

"Ah...I see your problem."

"What?"

"You take my words as an indication that I know things that you do not. What I am saying is that I know opinions that you may not know. Nothing I say is fact, because I do not know what is fact, fiction, illusion, truth or lie. Nor, in my opinion, does anyone else. The Unknowable is aptly named. The unknown is as well. However, I do have logic, imagination and intuitive sensibility, and I can use these to chart my course across the stage that Nature has prepared for me. So can you, and anyone else."

She smiled at the woman and bowed again to her hosts. "I will greet your camels and be on my way. Thank you." She placed her hand to her heart and then swept it in the direction of her hosts. They returned her farewell, but their words were followed almost immediately with protestations that she should go with them. They had plenty of food and

water. There would be other people in their tribe who would want to converse with her. And they would personally see that she found her way home safely.

"I will ask the camels," was all she said, as the visitor walked away.

The two women sat down next to the man. One of them watched the visitor as she walked over to the camels. "She's almost there," the woman whispered. "We need to convince her. She must meet Sitara."

The man turned just in time to watch the visitor disappear over a small sand dune. "Ask the camels?" he said with a smile. "She's one of us, but we're obviously not going to carry her off, so how do you propose we convince her?"

"I will go to her right now, and explain that Sitara is our teacher, and we want to introduce them. We believe that she would find the ensuing conversation very interesting..."

"And...? The man said.

"Well, I mean, I...I could offer her some gold."

"Keep it in your back pocket and do not exceed a reasonable sum," the other woman said. "You should go now, she may not come back, and you clearly have a connection with her." As she got up to go, the woman grabbed her arm. "Tell her we're all in support, it's not just you. Okay?"

"I will." With that the woman hurried away, half-running to the camels with a quickening pace. When she got to the crest of the sand dune, she could see the visitor talking with the camels, as if they were old friends. The visitor noticed her, and patted the sand next to her.

The woman slowed her pace, and casually sat down next to the visitor. They both stared into three pairs of large black eyes atop light brown heads. The camels maneuvered their necks like cats do their tails, yet their eyes would remain fixed on an object.

The woman took a quick glance at the visitor trying to read her mood. "Will you come with us? We are all of one mind. We want you to journey with us."

"Where?"

"We would like to take you to meet our teacher. She was the one who went from our tribe to your world, to understand what we were missing, and then to bring this new information back to our tribe."

"And what is her name?"

"Sitara."

"Ah, of the stars..."

"What?"

"Her name, it means of the stars. She is not from this neighborhood," the visitor smiled, but it looked like a wince in the brightness of the day.

The woman turned to the visitor. "Her one request to us was that when we are adventuring, if we come across someone with more wisdom than her, we should do everything in our persuasive powers to bring them to her, or to bring her to them. It is our one agreement. Sitara is someone who has separated from our tribe, not physically, but she understands something that none of us do. So, she has no one to talk with. To learn from."

"She can learn. It's not the learning. It's the presence. She senses things in these terms, and when there is a presence of the one, many and all consciousness, it comes through in words, images, feelings, tone, behavior, and so on. She wants to see that she is not alone. That her presence is in others, just as developed, just as strong, just as committed. That's what she wants."

The visitor sighed, and then slowly turned to the woman. "So do we all. I will go with you."

She turned to the camels, and pointed to Shadow. "He offered to take two of us."

The woman chuckled. "Well, he is the strongest, and likes to show off to his two friends."

The visitor stood up spritely, offering a hand to the woman. They marched off, back to the encampment to settle on the timing of their journey to Sitara.



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