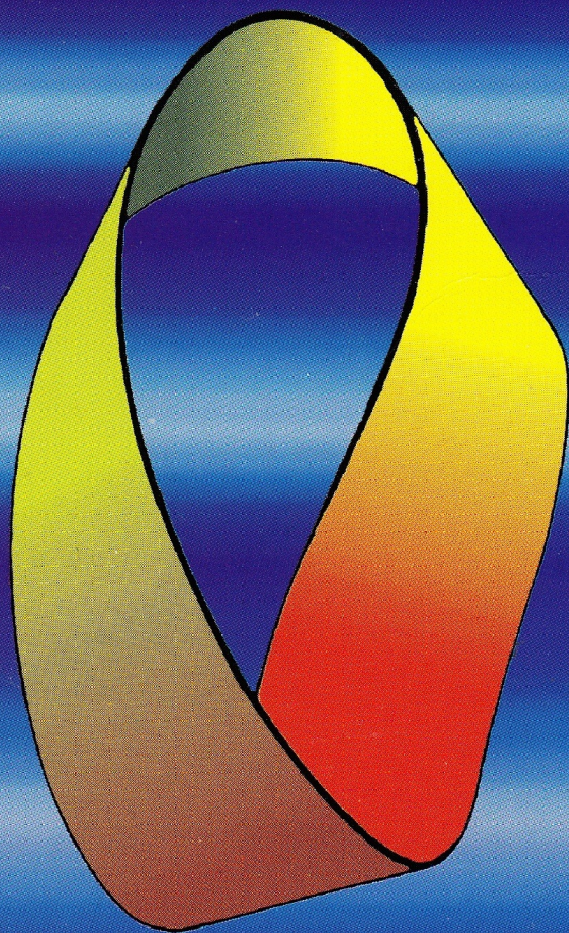


POSITIVELY
WYRD

harnessing the chaos in your life

Tom Graves



Positively Wyrd

Harnessing the chaos in your life

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Also By Tom Graves

Needles of Stone

Inventing Reality

Disciplines of Dowsing

Elements of Pendulum Dowsing

The Dowser's Workbook

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Sampler edition of 'Positively Wyrd'

by Tom Graves

This sampler-edition ebook of *Positively Wyrd* is based on the first edition of the book, as published by Gothic Image in 1995. Chapters highlighted in **bold** are included in this sampler-edition.

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Positively Wyrd

Harnessing the chaos in your life

by Tom Graves

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Preface

Acknowledgements

Although there's only one author named on the cover, this book, like so many others, is a joint venture by an unknown number of people, many of whom will never know that they were involved.

Most of this book is based on personal and original research; but like every author, I've 'lovingly lifted' from many different writers, teachers, colleagues and friends a wide variety of ideas and comments – though often placed into contexts that their originators did not plan for, or may in some cases even disagree with. Lists of names are always invidious, because there's always someone left out: but they include Richard Bach, Kenneth Batcheldor, Gregory Bateson, Richard Nelson Bolles, John Bradshaw, Bryan Branston, Cassandra Carter, Ram Dass, Werner Erhard, Maja Evans, Alan Garner, James Gleick, Felicitas Goodman, Douglas Hofstadter, Frances Howard-Gordon, Robert Johnson, Dess Kammason, Jessica Macbeth, Pat Medland, Cindy Pavlinac, Vera Peiffer, Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, Idries Shah, Starhawk, Charles Tart, John Venables, Gerald Weinberg, Paul Whyte and Kim Williams. My thanks go to them, and to the many others whose names I've forgotten, but whose wise words I have not.

Introduction

Life is weird. It has a habit of presenting us with weird tasks, trials and tribulations – no matter how much we’d rather not face them. So for many of us, we try to resolve the issues through ‘personal growth’, as something we undertake in the hope that things will get better, that we’ll regain some kind of control over our lives. And things do get better: though rarely in a simple, linear sequence of improvements, and sometimes not even in a way that we *would* at first understand as ‘better’ – the process is far more weird than that. There is indeed a deep joy and a deep sense of meaning to be found this way; but it would be unrealistic to say this without also saying that the path, always a personal one, can at times be intensely lonely and intensely disturbing. It’s that confusion that makes the process hard: but it *is* part of a process that does lead us to enjoyment, to the full, of *every* aspect of our lives – a joyous involvement in life as it is.

The reality is that the path we each take *is* weird, and often doesn’t seem to make sense: we get launched into new experiences, or seemingly trapped in loops time after time. And the whole process can not only be tortuous, but at times torturous, a sense of being tested again and again almost – yet never quite – beyond what we can bear. As to why it should be so, we can only answer ‘Yes’. In some cases there probably *is* no ‘why’: it *is* – and that’s all. If we’re to work with what Reality Department cares to hand us, we first have to accept it for what it is: the ‘why’, if any, can come later.

We do always come out stronger, more able to enjoy life, and more able to face our personal issues after each of these apparent tests, as long as we face them and what they show us of ourselves: that seems to be the reason for it all, and is certainly what makes it all worthwhile. And although this process of growth at times is hard, is

painful, is lonely, it's always based in *our* choices. We *always* have a choice; yet there's also always a twist. Those twists are where the weirdness lies: the effects of our choices ripple out into the world at large, and then echo back to us in a way that we can only describe as weird. A weaving and interweaving of life and lives: a sense of connection, a sense of choices, a sense of subtlety, of something we can never quite control. Within those weird twists of our lives are subtle, hidden choices: it's up to us to make use of them.

It's to this weirdness in the process of personal growth – accepting the weirdnesses of our lives, and working *with* them rather than trying to fight against them – that this book is addressed. It's also addressed to the realities of the process and its often uncomfortable twists and turns: as such, it develops a rather different view of the sequence of the changes in the process of personal growth. In particular, there's an emphasis on some intermediate stages that are often missed out in existing descriptions: the stage of 'everyone is to blame' that must be moved through, for example, before the well-known concept of 'no-one is to blame' can be reached. And there are also some guidelines on how to work with the bad times – and how not to get lost in some illusory 'good' ones.

You may find the writing style that I've used a little strange at first, but it's there for a reason: the way a book is written is a crucial part of its message. The impersonal third-person mode preferred by most psychology texts, typically referring to examples as 'case studies' or 'client experiences', may make intellectual understanding easier, but can actually block *experiential* understanding; while the second-person ("you should do this") mode popular in 'New Age' books often seems condescending and patronising. My choice here has thus been to use, where possible, a first-person or 'I/we' conversational mode, framing the text as if spoken by an imaginary narrator – a composite (whom I've named 'Chris Kelley') drawn directly from many people's personal and real-life experiences. So although this introduction is somewhat formal, the rest of the book is not. The stories the narrator tells are highly personal, and

illustrate clearly the intensity of *feeling* of many of these states – so if you find yourself in the same kind of emotional spaces that this imaginary ‘I’ describes, you’ll know you’re not alone in that experience. We’ve all been there too: that fact alone can be a great deal of help in some of the darker times...

But since nothing changes without ourselves choosing to be involved in the change, there’s also a strong emphasis on the practical: examples to put the concepts into practice will be found on almost every page. These typically consist of a personal experience that illustrates the point being made, followed by some suggestions, and questions about the resultant experience. (There are no set answers to these questions: in this field, the only valid answers for each person are their own.) All of the examples have been tested in practice, most of them independently by myself, friends and colleagues as well as many others, and often over long periods of time: they work. Whether they work for you in the same way is up to you to decide, and to experience: but you won’t find out unless you try!

The four sections of the book develop a sequence of observations and changes, starting with the self, and moving outward to the world at large. Be warned, though, that the sequence is not always obvious in the usual sense: the apparent repetition that occurs throughout the book, for example, is intentional, and is not simply due to poor editing! And in particular, the early part of the book may seem to dwell on the darker emotions more than you might expect: the reason is that unless these *are* faced early on, they continue to block progress indefinitely. So the first two chapters ‘set the stage’, using a typical experience as a start-point, and comparing the sense of fatalistic gloom that often accompanies it, with the subtle freedom to be found from a better understanding of the original meaning of ‘weird’.

The second section, consisting of roughly a third of the book, looks at the kind of pressures that get us to limit our choices – especially as

we grow up – and builds some analogies and suggestions as to how to break free of our habits and conditionings. We learn to watch – and use – the way in which old issues keep looping back in one form or another until they are resolved; we gain a peculiar – yet very real – kind of freedom by working *with* the twists and paradoxes of life, in a way that moves past the fears that drive our need for control. And we recognise that we always have choice, we always have responsibility – although at times it's neither easy to see nor to accept.

The next eight chapters – also roughly a third of the book – discuss ways to work with and consolidate this new freedom in our own lives. We do this by watching, listening and, especially, acknowledging what we *feel*; accepting ourselves for who we are, from moment to moment, whilst still maintaining some kind of overall aim. A delicate balance: we learn to trust and to let go, yet without letting go; we learn the subtle – weird – difference between doing nothing, doing something and doing 'no-thing'; we watch the ways in which our own choices echo back to us from the world around.

In the final section we start to move out into that wider world – and recognise that in some weird way it is also always a reflection of ourselves and our choices. The sense of being separate from the world, and at the effect of its forces, is to some extent an illusion: our choices are part of the weaving that makes up the world we experience, 'inside' or 'outside', 'self' or 'not-self'. Our relationships, our work and our interactions with the world at large all have the same weirdness in common: there's always a choice, there's always a twist. And the choice, and the responsibility for that choice, are always ours: it's up to us to build the world we need.

Using this book

In keeping with the nature of its subject, this book can be read in a number of ways, not all of them obvious at first.

It can, of course, be read in the usual way, from cover to cover: as mentioned above, it does have a developing sequence of ideas, with a beginning, a middle and an end. If you're only interested in concepts, you can skip over all the 'boxes' of practical material – the text will still work without them, especially in the earlier parts of the book, which deal more with ideas. But if you only do this you'll also miss one of the key points of the book, which is to provide *practical* tools for change.

If you plan to read it from cover to cover, doing all of the practical material in sequence, take it *slowly*: experience suggests that, after the first couple of chapters, not more than a single section a day – two or three pages – is best. Change, while valuable, can also be uncomfortable, and the practical material, if it's used properly, does trigger real changes in the way we view and work in the world: if you try to rush it, or force the pace of change, you'll either miss some key points and have to go back later, or else give yourself an unnecessarily rough time. So take it *slow*: “beyond a wholesome discipline, be *gentle* on yourself”!

Another way is to skip over the main text, and use only the practical material in the boxes. That'll make sense too, though it may not be so good in terms of understanding what's going on. You can follow the sequence of examples in the book, or just dip in at random: it still works – perhaps even better than the sequential way, given the weird nature of the subject. It's up to you.

The general consensus, though, seems to be that a combination of all these methods works best. Read the first two chapters; then skim through the whole of the remainder once, quickly, stopping only to read in detail a few passages that catch your eye. That'll give you enough background for the practical material to make practical

sense, whatever you do next. Then go back and read through a chapter at a time, slowly, carefully – though in whatever order you prefer. And also, as the whim takes you, dip in at random to find a passage or a practical piece: you'll usually find it has some apposite comment or suggestions to make on your current situation. Use this book to work *with* the weirdness of change, the weirdness of the world: that's how it works best.

Whichever way you choose, welcome to a different world! It's a world in which we *do* have choices – although, as we'll discover, there's always a weird twist in what happens...

1 Living in the dark

When first we meet Chris Kelley, it's clear that our narrator has just had another encounter with one of life's weirdnesses...

It's not an easy world to live in. Right now I'm sitting on my bed, in an empty house in a back suburb of the city. It's a warm, quiet day outside; but inside my head it's anything but quiet...

I'm confused, lonely, angry, disoriented, depressed - a welter of interweaving thoughts and emotions that just will not stop. Where *am* I? What am I doing here? I've just moved to another city to be with and work with my partner - only to be told I'm not wanted now as partner in either sense. Won't talk about it; there's nothing to say, I'm told. So everything's stopped: everything we worked on together for so long. That's months of planning out of the window - quite apart from what I *feel* about it...

Who *am* I? I don't think I know any more. Chris? That's just a label I've been given - a label for a life of chaos, it seems... I don't know. I don't think I know *anything* any more...

Why *am* I here? What am I here *for*? Why does this keep happening in my life? Why do I have to keep putting myself through all this stuff?

All right. So I'm here. So now I have to start all over again. Again. Alone. Again. I've only just moved here - I hardly know anyone. No work: the local economy is a shambles, job vacancies have dwindled almost to nothing, prices and taxes are on the way up again; and now the government, in a sad attempt to distract itself from the troubles at home, has entangled us in yet another war a few thousand miles away. And I've just come back from a walk by

the river, looking at the trees festooned with plastic shopping bags, and the signs warning people that it's too polluted to swim in...

We're 'living in the light', says a book beside me. Living in the light? Living in the dark, more like...

How on earth did I get myself into this mess? It's crazy... weird... More to the point, how on earth do I get myself out of it? Whatever I do, it just seems to get worse: one obstacle after another after another. Doesn't *anything* work any more? What's *wrong* with my life? What's wrong with *me*? What's wrong with everyone else? Round and round go the thoughts, chasing each others' tails... round and round and round...

"There's a whole in my bucket..."

Whatever we do, it seems, nothing works out the way we want: there's always *something* that's wrong, something that ruins it. Everything depends on everything else being right: and only when everything's perfect will anything work out. That's the way it goes, isn't it? If *only* I had the right partner... the right job... or more money, always more money... everything might work then. Or if *only* we had a sane government... if *only* the unions weren't so stupid... if *only* the multinationals could *see* what they're doing... Or if *only* I could lose some weight... if *only* I could do something about my hair... If only... if only...

A familiar feeling?

"There's a hole in my bucket, dear Liza, dear Liza... there's a hole in my bucket, dear Liza, a hole..."

And the only reply we get is "Well *fix* it dear Henry, dear Henry, dear Henry... Well fix it, dear Henry, dear Henry *fix it*..."

Very helpful. If I knew how to fix it, I wouldn't be asking...

What can we do about it? Where on earth do we start, with all this chaotic mess? We can try to hide from it for a while: but every time we look up, it's still there. It seems obvious that *everything* has to be fixed before *anything* can be fixed: the economy, the environment, the insane politics, the even crazier militarism – let alone our personal relationships, or lack of them... The old standard solutions – the authoritarian church, or authoritarian leaders – just don't seem to work any more: which is probably a good thing, in its way. But how *do* we get back to some kind of control? – to take back the control over our lives?

It's at this point that we start looking for someone to blame: usually someone else, like the unions, the government, or men, or women, or God, or the Devil – whatever. Or we blame ourselves: perhaps too often, sometimes perhaps not enough. It still doesn't do anything: we can blame all we like, yet the mess is still there, and still growing all the time...

But another way is to look again at the song that describes this circular trap, the one that's driving us crazy, and make a small but significant change:

“There's a whole in my bucket, dear Liza, dear Liza; there's a whole in my bucket, dear Liza, a whole...”

And as we learn to change the hole into a whole, watch the changes that echo in the world we see around us...

2 A weird kind of fate

When something else goes wrong, more often than not, I'd look around for someone or something to blame. It's only natural. It can't be just some weird kind of fate: everything has its cause, we're told, so if something goes wrong for me, *someone* must be causing it, surely? So it's the government's fault, or the unions', or just 'the system'. Or my fault: everything's my fault – I'm just inadequate, incompetent, that's what they told me at school... When life collapses into chaos again, it's all too easy to spiral down into paranoia on the one hand, self-deprecation on the other, or more usually some subtle mixture of the two.

But wait a minute... Sure the unions are devious, but are they *really* responsible for my inability to shed my excess flab? Or is it *really* my fault that the man in the car in front of me throws his empty cigarette carton on the road? How? After a while it becomes clear that no one person could co-ordinate all these attacks on me, my values, my beliefs, my world. And it's at this point that I start to look a little wider...

In the hands of fate

As soon as we do look wider for some kind of understanding about what happens to us, we'll often be hit by a weird sense of powerlessness. All these things are happening – and it's all too obvious that they're not in our control. Tradition would tell us that our fate is the force behind these chaotic twists and turns – and we have no choice, it seems, but to suffer them.

But a great deal depends on our point of view: we're not quite as powerless as we seem. Rather trying to work out who's to blame

for all those cruel-seeming tricks of fate, we can look instead at our own point of view about them, and how it affects what we experience. And even there, in the midst of what may seem to be a predetermined fate, we find that we do have choices – of a kind.

Imagine a path, winding through the leafy cathedral-like gloom of the forest glades. And across the path is a great swathe of nettles – a real obstacle for the traveller.

Along comes a monk, with a fierce, striding walk. At the edge of the wall of nettles, he stops. “The mark of the Devil, trying to prevent me doing God’s work!”, he cries. “Well, he shall not succeed!” And with his staff, he sets about destroying as many of the nettles he can reach, smashing his own wayward path through this aspect of unworthy nature that dares to defy the will of his God – cursing loudly as torn fragments of nettle still manage to sting him round the ears and hands.

Later, when the nettles have healed, along comes another monk. Deep in contemplation of the mysteries of another world, he finds that his path in this one is blocked by the wall of nettles. “Ah”, says the monk, “a symbol of the pain and suffering of this world. Like my great Teacher, then, I shall purge my soul and that of other souls by taking on that suffering myself.” And gritting his teeth, he carefully picks his way through the nettles, hoping to minimise the pain.

And later still, when the nettles have closed the path once more, yet another monk comes by. He’s drifting along, smiling, looking around at the trees and the birds scuttering between them. Rounding a turn in the path, he finds himself facing the wall of nettles. “Nettles...” says the monk. “Ooh... another *experience!*” – and dives headlong into the densest part of the wall. Yet when he emerges on the other side, he’s smiling even more broadly than before...

Which path would you choose through the forest? What would be your point of view about those nettles?

We can fight against the unfairness of our fate, and we'll find it has a sting in its tail every time. We can be resigned – 'fatalistic' – in the face of the twists and turns of fate, and 'turn the other cheek' – even though it doesn't actually ease the pain. Or we can work *with* its eccentricities, its weirdnesses – and surprise ourselves, perhaps, as we discover we come up smiling, having somehow bypassed the pain completely. It all depends on our point of view.

It sounds so easy: change your point of view, change your experience. It's not *quite* as simple as that, as we've all found out the hard way... But if this is our fate, so to speak, it would probably be a good idea to have a better understanding of what's going on. And to do that, it might be worthwhile to take the idea of 'fate' a little more seriously than usual...

Fate. Fortune. Luck. We'd usually think of them as words without much of a meaning – they describe something that's 'just coincidence', even though it might be a useful one. But in the past they meant something far more than 'mere coincidence': so much so that each was personified as a goddess. To wish someone 'luck', for example, was no trivial matter: it was a formal prayer, a wish that the gods should support their ventures. And in psychological terms, it's understood that the stories of the gods and goddesses each represent some central fact of human experience – which is not quite how we understand chance or luck or fate in the present day...

Maybe so; maybe not. Have you ever had the experience that 'Dame Fortune' or 'Lady Luck' seemed to be smiling on you? That you had no choice, at some point, but to 'trust to the hands of fate'? Or that the gods themselves frowned upon some adventure of yours? Why? What made you think so? What happened? And what did it feel like, to have your life apparently taken out of your control?

In the old legends, Luck ('geluk') was originally a Germanic goddess; Fortuna was her Roman equivalent. And Fate was not one goddess, but three: the 'three sisters of Fate', the Moirae of Greek mythology. Between them – says the story – they control every aspect, every event of our lives; between them they weave a fabric of lives, the totality of Life in all its glory. One sister – her name is Clotho (from whom we get the English word 'cloth') – spins the threads of a person's life; Lachesis, 'blind chance', weaves that life into the greater fabric; and Atropos, dispassionately, cuts the thread when its part of the weft of life is done. No choice, it seems; no hope. You can't fight the Fates...

We dream of control; yet in the background always are those three sisters. One spins; one weaves; one cuts...

But there's something not quite right with this picture: a gap in the fatalistic gloom. It's clear from our own experience that we *do* have choices in our lives – choices of a sort, at least, even if they do so often turn out to be the wrong ones! Our lives are not entirely outside of our control, lost to the whims of a cruel fate; yet at the same time it's equally clear that our lives aren't *in* our control either – and also clear that the more we try to make them so, the more definitely some random chance breaks that control back down again.

Control is a myth; and fate – a life without choice – is no better.

Somewhere between those two extremes is a way of life that *works*, one in which we *do* reclaim our choices: but it can take more than a hint of weirdness to reach it...

A subtle hint of weirdness

The theme of a ‘thread of life’ recurs in legends all around the world; the story of the ‘three sisters of fate’ exists in many versions throughout Europe and beyond. And the old Greek myth is more than a childish fairy-tale – it’s almost usable as a point of view about reality once we strip away the surface layer of metaphor.

Think about that image of the Fates for a while – of ‘blind chance’ interweaving with the ordered thread of Life. Our lives as a fabric of choice and chance; control interweaving with chaos; our infinitely rich reality. How well does that describe your everyday experience?

It’s a good metaphor: but it underplays the role of the choices that *we* so obviously have in our lives. Life’s not merely fate, but a fiction: a story in which we’re intimately *involved*. There’s always a choice; we always have choice. But there’s always a twist... that’s the part that’s weird.

Another version of the myth, an aspect of the Old Norse world-story, brings a different twist to the tale – one that is, quite literally, weird. And one that we can put to use in living *with* – not merely survive – this increasingly crazy world.

Why ‘weird’, though? We tend to use the word to describe something strange, disturbing, odd: but historically it’s a synonym for ‘fate’ – in fact the old Scottish idiom ‘to dree one’s weird’ means

‘to suffer one’s fate’. In the legends, ‘weird’ is not merely something strange, but an aspect of nature itself: like light, or electricity, or wind and wave, it simply *is*. And in Nordic myth it’s personified by the ‘three sisters of Urðr’ – pronounced ‘wyrd’, or ‘weird’; the Nornir, the ‘three maidens from Giantland’, Urðr, Verðandi, Skuld. They’re the ‘three weird sisters’ in Shakespeare’s ‘Macbeth’, who have the power to foretell the future, or affect the course of events: like the Fates, one spins, one weaves, one cuts. And their names also mean ‘past’, ‘present’, ‘future’ – so they bring the remorseless flow of *time* into the world.

“Wyrd”, says one scholar, “is the compelling power and final destiny which no man and no thing may escape”. We can’t escape time: it *is*. We can’t escape our fate, our wyrd: it *is*...

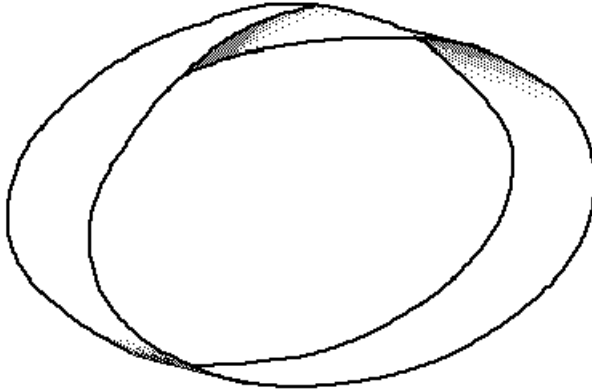
But there’s always a choice, there’s always a twist...

And that’s the difference between the story of the Fates, and the far stranger sense of Wyrd. In the Greek legend, the fabric of life is a simple sheet, a cloth-like grid: the threads of life run in parallel to each other across a framework of chance and opportunity, meted out in time. In that story, there’s little room for choice: each chance will never come again.

But the fabric – *the* wyrd – that the Norns weave is very different: the cross-warp of the web can be very warped indeed! It’s not a simple grid: it’s full of loops and twists and tangles, yet with a subtle sense and symmetry behind it, like a Celtic knotwork in infinite dimensions. Not a fabric of lives, but a fabric of *life*: a fabric on which *we* weave the story of our lives, at one time following the predictable line of the weft, at another catching a passing chance – the cross-warp of wyrd – to jump from one line, one life-choice, to another. Lives weaving, interweaving; a fabric of *choices* that we weave among the threads of wyrd.

Each thread of this fabric is not, as with the Fates, an individual's life, but an archetype – 'tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor, rich-man, poor-man, beggar-man, thief'. The Home-Maker, the Factory-Hand, the Teacher – a simple structure for a standardised life with a predictable beginning, middle and end. We always follow along a thread: but across this fabric of loops and twists and turns are an infinite number of choice-points where we can change our own story – change to another thread, another archetype – in some weird way. Wherever there's a choice, there's always a twist; so although we can feel for a path through the fabric, nothing is ever quite predictable. Is this closer to your experience than that story of the Fates?

There's always a twist; and wherever there's always a twist, there's always a choice. It's just that some of the choices are so weird, they're hard to see... At any moment there may be a choice, a junction of the threads – a decision we have to make, each one with different results, leading to different journeys. And a decision to make no decision is still a decision... There's no evenness to it, no certainty: for long periods it seems like there's no choice at all, yet at other times the choices cluster so closely together – a choice-point that cannot be evaded – that there's even a warning, that weird sense of 'impending wyrd'.



A Möbius loop – a twist of paper with only one side

A Möbius loop gives a good illustration of the weirdness that even a simple twist can create. Tear a strip about an inch wide from the long side of a piece of writing paper. Put the two ends together to form a loop: it still has two sides, as you'd expect – an inside and an outside. But now take it apart, give the ends a simple half-twist, then rejoin them into a loop, and you'll find that you now have a piece of paper with only one side: the inside becomes the outside, the outside merges with the inside. And there's no one point where they change: yet each time round the loop, you're on the opposite side. Weird...

To make this, we've bent a two-dimensional object – the piece of paper – into a third dimension, and then twisted it again. Imagine doing the same in an infinity of dimensions... if you can visualize *that*, you'll have some idea of the complexity of wyrd!

There's a further twist to this image: perhaps the most important of all. Imagine, if you can, that *every thread passes through every point in this fabric of life*. The threads are archetypes of a life – the logical outcome in time of a given point of view. At first sight, only one or two are visible at each point – the 'obvious' point of view, we'd call it – but every characteristic, every feeling, every attitude is right there at every point. Everywhere is similar: but nothing ever quite repeats.

This isn't easy to visualise. The nearest I've seen to an image is some computer-generated graphics of a mathematical structure in which every point, no matter how close we look, is a boundary between three different regions. This fabric of the *wyrd*, though, is more where every point is a boundary between an infinite number of regions: it's impossible to represent on paper.

But I have a much simpler way to imagine it, right in front of me now. Hanging from the window-frame is a Chinese streamer, a ring a few inches across, from which hang a large number of coloured threads, several feet long, drifting gently in the breeze. All the colours of the rainbow; all the colours of emotion, of belief, all the colours of the mind and heart. I can spin the ring to form the threads into a brightly coloured twist of rope. If I grasp this rope at any point, some colours will be on the surface of the bundle, while others will be below, concealed, invisible; yet all will still be there. And if I move my hand down the bundle, the same threads will tend to stay in the same relationships; but by changing my grip slightly, new colours will drift to the surface, and others will fade into the background. Whatever's at the surface, though, the whole is always there: "there's a whole in my bucket, dear Liza, dear Liza, there's a whole in my bucket, dear Liza, a whole..."

Where am I in all this? Which thread is *me*? The short answer is: all and none of them. The threads are archetypes, not people; characteristics, not characters. 'I' is not that which changes; 'I' is that which chooses. So 'I' am not the threads in this image: I'm the

hand *around* the threads, the nexus-point that I use to mark 'here' on the bundle of colours. And the next person, and the next: each a clustering of threads, a nexus on the *same* bundle of threads. The same threads pass through all of us: I'm no different from them, they're no different from me – with a suitable combination of twists and turns in time and in the cross-warp of *wyrd*, we could see that even at the surface we'd be just the same. The separateness, as the Buddhist would say, is all an illusion. And if all is illusion, what then is actual change?

Weaving a different world

So what's the point of all this? Even if life is supposedly all illusion, it most certainly doesn't *feel* like it...

True – I know that only too well... What it feels like, so often, is that I have little or no choice, that everything that happens to me is the effect of my being blown this way and that by a chaos of external causes outside of my control. But imagine – *imagine* – that there is no such thing as 'external': that all our experiences come from where we are – where we've *chosen* (if only by default) to be – on that fabric of life, that fabric of *wyrd*. Our experience is simply the combination of colours, of threads, that we perceive at that point: the sense of its being external is illusory, an illusion of separateness manufactured by the senses.

If every thread passes through every point, every life, then we can reach out in two ways to change our experience of the world. We can follow the illusion of separateness, and try to fix things in the external world – only to find, as always, that 'there's a hole in my bucket', that everything has to be fixed before everything else. Or we can reach *inside* ourselves, to the threads that *link* us with everything else, and work on the same issues there. It's simpler that way: everything's right here within us. And it works: as we look within, and recognise our choices, the outside world changes

too – not just in how *we* experience it, but also as others seem to experience it. The separateness *is* an illusion. Weird; definitely weird.

There's always a choice; there's always a twist. With all these twists and turns, we can easily find ourselves in what seem to be loops in time, yet loops that never quite repeat – whole sections of our lives returning to the same experience from different directions. The same kind of partner, the same hopes, the same illusions, the same mistakes... until, in Lewis Carroll's infamous pun, we eventually find a way to make the lessons lessen. In the meantime, though, it can hurt; so often it *hurts*... But that, it seems, is life. Or fate.

What kind of loops have happened in *your* life – 'the same kind of partner, the same hopes, the same illusions, the same mistakes...'? How did you recognise them as being the same – and in what ways were they different? What did you learn anew each time the not-quite-same event recurred? Did you find a way to 'make the lessons lessen'?

The twists seem to bring us back to the same place each time; but an understanding of the nature of these twists of *wyrd* can also bring us out of the loops – and into a place more of our own choosing. In the same way, as we watch out for the weavings of the *wyrd* in our lives, we'll find the same phrases, the same expressions, recurring – but always in slightly different contexts. Each time they come past, they'll have something new to show us – even though on the surface they're exactly the same.

And it affects more than just our own lives. All those big issues – war, the environment, the world economy – that seem too vast to change: it's easy to feel a sense of powerlessness, of fatalistic gloom as soon as we think of them. *I* can't do anything about it, it seems

– it’s the politicians, the unions, the foreigners, the... That’ll always be so – and true – if I think of them only as external. But ‘there’s a whole in my bucket’: as threads of the *wyrd*, these issues are also right here inside us, driven by *our* choices – or our avoidance of choices. “I am the *wyrd*-one”, I might say; “issues spiral through me on the threads of *wyrd* – are unchanged by how much *I* am unchanged...” Find the right thread, and face it, and even a trivial-seeming change in what we choose can have ripples right round the world. The issues are unchanged by how much *we* are unchanged: between us all, we *all* create this world of ours.

If we’re going to weave a better world, we have to start somewhere: so we may as well start here, with ourselves. We change our world by changing our choices: it’s as simple as that, and it’s worth doing. Sounds easy? To be honest, it isn’t. But then neither is life; and the usual way of living, desperately ‘fire-fighting’ from one external disaster to another, is no way to live at all...

It’s easy enough to talk about it: to put it into practice, though, is something else again. But it’s only then that the changes happen; it’s only then that the changes *can* happen. So work *with* the weirdness of the *wyrd* in your life... and let its aliveness unfold!

3 The senses taker

Most of the time, we don't even get a chance to experience the world. Habit – the senses taker – tells us what to expect, so we just switch off, and ignore what our senses tell us. So life slips by, without our even noticing. Oh! Where was I? That's another day just vanished – where did it go?

It's the same old street, I see it every day, so why bother looking at it? And I look at the thoughts in my head instead, and they go chasing round, and round, and round... driving me crazy. "Why can't I sort things out? What's wrong with me? What's wrong with everyone? Why? Why?" We've been here before... now even the thoughts are habits! We can try to break individual habits – smoking, for example – but the hardest habit to break is habit itself.

Why is habit so – if you'll pardon the expression – habit-forming? Because it *seems* to make life easier, less complicated; and it *seems* to make life a lot less work. Habits allow us to run on 'automatic pilot'. But in practice, if we're not aware of them, they tend to make life a lot less in other ways: a lot less interesting, a lot less fun, a lot less hopeful...

Habit gives us the illusion that things are predictable, that they always repeat the same way. Once they're predictable, we don't have to bother about them – they're always the same, always will be the same. And since we don't have to bother about them, they slowly cease to exist, as far as our attention's concerned. The problem is that nothing ever *is* quite the same; nothing ever quite repeats. And it's the differences – not the samenesses – which are where the interest lies. Those differences, those often tiny differences, show us where the choices are – the ones we use to move across the threads of wyrd. But first we have to notice them – and for that we have to break the habit of *not* noticing things. We

have to get our senses back from the old senses taker.

Most of our metaphors of perception are visual: “Oh yes, I see that”, “I’ll look into that”, and so on. One way to start breaking the habit of habit is to make more deliberate use of other senses. When sitting on a bus, for example, close your eyes, and *listen* to the passing streets; try to identify where you are by the sound, the smell, the taste.

If nothing else, it can make a regular journey a lot more interesting!

When I’m stuck in habit, I’m running on automatic, trying to get through each day with as little involvement as I can. Habit isn’t an absence of choice: it’s a choice I use to *avoid* making a choice. And I then wonder why I don’t seem to have any choices... why everyone out there seems to be ‘doing it to me’...

Choosing not to choose

Habit is a choice that we’ve repeated so often that it’s become automatic. The choice chooses itself: I don’t think about it – I just do it, do what the habit tells me. And if my senses tell me that the circumstances are different, that this choice might not be appropriate – well, it’s easier to ignore the senses, just stick to the rules, ‘the way I know the world works’.

But how do I *know* the world really does work that way? The short answer is: I don’t. But I *believe* it does. “That’s what always happens to me – that’s what I always get.” In other words, it happens because I expect it to happen – in many ways force it to happen that way – in order to confirm my expectation, to confirm my belief that the

world works that way. Even if I don't like what's going on, I'll still tend, with habit, to repeat the same situation over and over again. It's only if I look – use my senses – to see what's actually going on, that I get a chance to break out of the loop.

Part of this is because I *want* the world to be predictable. It makes it seem certain, makes it seem safe. But it isn't: it's never exactly the same. For a start, *I'm* different: I've changed, a little older, with different experiences, perhaps even a different point of view. So why can't I see this? Why do I keep doing the same old things in what aren't actually the same old circumstances?

What I'm really doing is avoiding some kind of pain – or rather the expectation of pain. Something I 'know' I won't like. How do I know I won't like it, though? Back comes the answer: because I didn't like it before. I remember that I don't like it. But the memory may be wrong, and the circumstances are different: I'll never know unless I let go of the memory, and work with what I have here, now.

For many years I'd refuse to eat any kind of white fish: I knew it was revolting, I wouldn't touch the stuff if I could possibly avoid it. Then one day, at a friend's house, I found myself eating some kind of fish steak, in a magnificent sauce – absolutely delicious. In my habit of avoiding fish, I'd missed out so often on what could have been a wonderful taste, a wonderful experience.

So where did the habit come from? School meals, of course: in particular, a dish we nicknamed 'porcupine pie', a semi-liquid slush of disintegrating potato and some unidentifiable white-fish consisting mostly of needle-sharp bones. Truly revolting... no wonder I felt like saying "Never again!" What I refused to recognise, though, was that the taste of fish depends greatly on how it's cooked – it depends on the circumstances. I'd fixed a choice of choosing not to accept what my senses tell me: "What's cooking?" And even when I did have to eat fish, it

always tasted revolting – because I *expected* it to be revolting. In the end, I in effect tricked myself into letting the experience be here, now, at the friend's house – finally breaking the habit of habit.

What experiences have you had like this? If the habit ended 'by itself', how and when did it do so?

In following an old habit, I'm living in the past, elsewhere, else-when: whereas what's actually happening in front of me is *here, now* – and probably completely different, if only I'd care to notice. I need to re-awaken my senses, to tell me what really *is* going on.

But part of the problem is that that's exactly what I *don't* want to do. I can still remember exactly what that stuff tasted like: I don't want to risk tasting *that* again. So I'd rather shut down my senses, and rely instead on the warning from memory. Avoid all feeling: too much risk. The result is that I shut myself into a narrower and narrower range of experience that I'll risk allowing myself – an ever smaller and more limited world.

And I then complain about how boring and limited the world seems to be...

Worse still, I shut myself out from other experiences, not because they bring up painful memories, but because I think they might bring up painful comparisons. There are whole sections of the city that I avoid, for example, not because they're dangerous, or because I don't like them, but because I used to go there with my now former partner... I'm not avoiding the memories as such – on the contrary, they were good times; it's more that I don't want to face the emotions I expect they'll bring up – the loneliness, the sense of emptiness, of absence. It hurts... I don't want to face it.

So to avoid the sense of feeling bad, I avoid the place that seems to cause the feeling – or that I think might bring up that feeling. In

the process, I give myself a still narrower world in which to operate – about which I also complain. And tend to blame others for it, of course – even though it's really nothing to do with them. It's *my* choice not to go there, after all.

Avoiding emotion

Any kind of emotion is frightening, it seems: good ones as well as bad. There's a sense of being overwhelmed, that it will never stop, or rather of being dumped in a timeless space where there is only the emotion. Good ones I tend to cling to – this happiness must last *forever!* – and bad ones, like the all-pervading wave of loneliness, I'm terrified will last forever... They all pass, of course; but it doesn't *feel* like that. Not at the time.

For a change, this seems to be more of a problem for men: women are more likely to be aware that emotions come and go in waves, while men have less of an awareness of the flow of *time*, and thus have more a sense of being 'dumped in it' at a random level of intensity. But for all of us, emotions of any flavour give us a sense of being out of control. Some people like that feeling: I don't. If I think 'I am' is the same as the 'I' that controls, loss of control means loss of me. 'I' might cease to exist. I get frightened; and when I'm afraid, I close up. No emotions, please... More walls...

In any case, whilst we may like the freedom of feeling out of control, the culture we're in doesn't like it at all. "Don't get over-excited, Chris", says my mother; "Big kids don't cry", says a school-teacher; "What the hell d'ya think you're laughing at?", snarls a passer-by; "You *mustn't* get angry", says a friend. If I'm emotional, I remind other people of *their* walls; they get frightened too, and take it out on me, as the supposed cause of their fear. Walls within walls within walls: a culture of walls. No emotion allowed: it's not considered *decent*.

If you're on your own and lonely, how do you react to seeing a couple holding hands and kissing in the street? Would you rather they stopped? Or at least went elsewhere?

How do you react to other people being angry? Or upset? What feelings does it bring up in you to see them? Does it bring up any kind of fears, or memories – especially ones you'd prefer to forget?

There's a catch: all our emotions come from the same place – from the heart, we might say. We can't just shut out loneliness, or sadness: we either accept all our emotions, or we have none. The laughter cannot be truly there without the tears; or the joy without the awareness of loneliness. 'Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness' is rather one-sided: happiness is transitory, like any other emotion, and only exists side-by-side with sorrow. If I hide from one emotion, I hide from them all: if I won't face loneliness, I actually prevent myself from ever being truly happy.

We're encouraged to be emotionless; we encourage each other to be emotionless. So being emotionless becomes a habit: but if we let the senses-taker of habit take away our feelings as well as our senses, what have we left? Not much, is the answer...

Without emotions, I all but cease to be human. I become a hollow shell – as if without a heart, a soul. And I can *feel* that emptiness – and I don't know what to do. So I find myself desperately running around, doing one thing after another to protect myself from any potential emotion in case it might be painful. The result, as one writer put it, is that I become a 'human do-ing' rather than a human being... Hence the sense of powerlessness, of being walled out from the world. But the walls are of my own making: that's what's hard to recognise, that's what's hard to accept.

The way out is to recognise that I'm afraid of those emotions – and do it anyway. Avoiding all pain means that I have no choice about how to handle it when it does come my way; choosing to *face* the pain, to understand more about myself, means that I've also reclaimed more of my sense of choice. Gently, though... gently. I take the risk: I go to one of those places we used to go to together. And yes, it does hurt. But it's not overwhelming: it *does* pass. Then it's gone: and I can find that I do enjoy being there. Even – perhaps especially – because I'm on my own: a very different feeling, which I know I'd never have experienced if my partner had been here with me. And because I *know* it's different, I get to know how *I* feel now, what *my* senses tell me now: and I'm no longer trapped in a memory of the past. The wall has gone...

The text that's in these boxes is about putting these ideas into *practice*. One of the most common habits is to avoid feeling by 'staying in my head': I avoid dealing with the world 'out there', it's too much like hard work, it might be painful, it brings up memories that I don't want to face... any excuse will do! So I'll say "I know that", yet all too often what I mean is "I have that information" rather than "I have that *experience*" – which is not the same thing at all. So take the risk: don't just read it, do it! Build a new habit of doing it, *being* it. And notice the difference in experience; notice the difference in aliveness...

It does take real courage to break habits, to break down the walls – especially if there's emotional pain attached to them. It's important to acknowledge ourselves for that.

Despite the usual all-or-nothing feeling, it's important not to try to drop every habit all at once: we won't be able to do it, and it's not a good idea in any case. It's always useful to keep some habits going:

they help to give us *some* kind of focus! But once we become more aware of the choices and non-choices we make, we can at last begin to decide which habits we want, and which ones we don't. In doing so, we reclaim our power of choice – and realise that we *do* have a choice.

Beliefs, feelings, senses

One of the ways we learn to avoid emotion is to blur the distinctions between beliefs, feelings and sensations: and a key part of reclaiming choice is to reclaim our awareness of the difference! We won't get far in understanding ourselves and our choices unless we do... But blurring the boundaries between them has, for most of us, become a habit – another habit that's surprisingly hard to break.

"I know that", I'd say: but I don't – I only *believe* that I know it. "I feel cold", I'd say – when more accurately I *sense* that it's cold. "I think I'm angry" – but how do I *know*? "I'm happy!" – but where do we *sense* this to know it? "I feel confused", you might reply, trying to make sense of all this – but *where* do you feel the confusion? What does confusion *feel* like? What and where *is* 'confusion'?

Part of the confusion comes from a blurring of past, present and future. Within our experience – as children of the Sisters of Time, we might say – these aspects of time may seem to coincide: but sensations and feelings *only* exist in the present. We don't have any choice about them – they simply *are*. A memory, however, brings back into the present a feeling – or often an edited version of one – from the past; a belief may manufacture something that *seems* like a feeling, even though there's nothing tangible behind it; and the

future never exists at all, other than as a belief or a ‘future-memory’, an imagined version of some sensation or feeling that we’d expect to experience when we get there.

The link between them all is an analogy – a common thread of connection. But it’s not a literal one: a belief about a feeling – or about what that feeling *means* – is not the same thing as the feeling itself. The only feelings we *know* are our own. For example, if I say to someone “I feel you’re being foolish”, it’s more than likely that I’m actually saying something about *myself*: “I *think* you’re being foolish, because *I* feel uncomfortable, and I want to blame you for it rather than accept it as my own” – which is *not* the same thing at all! This ‘projecting’ of our own feelings onto others is a habit we all learn very early on: and until can we see how and when we do it, and can re-‘own’ our own feelings rather than lose them to the senses-taker, we’ll find it hard to move on. But to do this sometimes asks us to look at things from a rather weird point of view...

One tool that can help break this habit of ‘projection’ is to watch our choice of language. For instance, when talking with or about other people, make a point of using ‘I-statements’ rather than ‘you-statements’ – say what *you* feel rather than what you think the other person feels. What difference does this make to your understanding of the conversation? ...of the other person? ...of yourself?

Watch, too, for the blurring of time in the way you speak: “I’d feel happy about that” is a *belief*, an ‘imagining’, not a feeling – it’s an expectation of future experience, but feelings themselves exist only in the present. This kind of precision is a bit strange at first, but it brings a lot more clarity to our understanding of ‘now’...

And another trick, as a friend showed me the other day, is that if we can replace the word ‘feel’ with ‘believe’, it’s *not* a ‘feeling-statement’ – especially when it’s said about someone

else. “I feel happy” doesn’t make sense as “I believe happy” – so it’s likely to be a real feeling. But “I feel you’re being foolish” could just as easily be “I believe you’re being foolish” – so it’s probably only a belief. You might be able to describe your *own* feelings that go with that belief: but the meaning often changes if we shift the focus from ‘you’ – someone else – to ‘I’. What happens? Changing your mode of language in this way, what do you learn about *yourself*?

Ending the confusion takes practice – a deliberate choice to re-create our awareness of ourselves. But it brings with it a new kind of clarity: a new sense of certainty in the midst of all the weird uncertainties of Reality Department.

And it brings something else that we’ll only begin to recognise over time: a strange *sharing* of feelings that’s commonly called ‘compassion’ – linking us with others on shared threads of the wyrd. A different kind of *knowing*... Weird... And that, once we find it, is a habit that *is* worth developing!

A habit of choice

In breaking the habit of habit, we reclaim our power of choice. What hurts most for me at this point, perhaps, is that I get to recognise that I always *have* had a choice: but I’ve usually given it away. I’ve chosen not to choose: so the choice has happened for me. I’ve followed the loop of wyrd that I’m on – round and round and round. So that perception of powerlessness, about which I’ve complained so much, has in effect been my own choice – or rather my own non-choice, the result of my evasion of choice. In that sense, I have actually *chosen* to be in this mess that I’m in. It’s not a comfortable feeling...

All right, so it's my choice that I'm in chaos: so now what do I do? I start to make new choices about choices; building new habits that, for a change, actually *are* useful to me – that's what I do. But before I do that, it's useful to look at how we come to make the choices that have brought us each to where we are now – and in particular how other people, and their ideas of 'right' and 'wrong', have helped to bring it about for us.

4 Everyone is to blame

We all have our habits, our mechanical avoidances of the real world. And that's one very good reason why this world of ours is in chaos: no-one's choosing, to a large extent no-one's even looking. We've all been had by the senses taker. In that sense, *everyone* – myself as well as others, others as well as myself – is to blame for this mess.

But even if everyone *is* to blame, the only person's habits we can change directly are our own. So that's the place we need to start: looking at how we interact with other people's habits, other people's choices.

“You can't get there from here”

By being stuck in habit, we choose not to choose: we give away our power of choice, and with it any real control over our lives. So if we're going to reclaim the power of choice in our life, we first have to recognise how we give it away – and how others have been all too keen to encourage us to do so. We've all done it: we've all had to, to exist in any kind of social environment.

The cultures we've grow up in – family, school, religious background, economy and so on – have all had definite ideas about habits that were, they said, good for us; and others which were definitely bad. A maze of rules, instructions, implications: “Little children should be seen and not heard.” “You ought to make way for your elders and betters.” “You mustn't contradict the teacher.” “Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and honour His commandments.” Many, many of them, over many, many years.

Some of the pronouncements are just plain daft: “You can't get there from here”, someone once told me. But they still have their effects,

especially if we were told them repeatedly in childhood.

For most of my life I've been frightened of police, or almost anyone in uniform. There's never been any obvious reason: in fact most of my interactions with police have been humorous or bizarre rather than threatening! Eventually, though, I traced it back to something my grandmother used to say to me as a toddler: "Now you must be good: because if you're a naughty child, a policeman will come and take you away and *he'll never bring you back!*" Trivial enough, innocuous enough: all Grandma wanted to was keep us kids quiet for a while. But at some level I seem to have believed it in this absolute sense – "he'll never bring you back!" – for the whole of my life. The fear has become compulsive, an unconscious habit – even though at no time has it had any true connection with reality.

Can you think of similar examples in your own life: childhood commands that you've discovered you still find yourself following compulsively, regardless of whether they're appropriate?

As children, we tend to believe that adults are all-powerful and all-knowing. Somewhere deep down, part of me still seems to believe that those childhood instructions are true – no matter what my senses and my memory may show me. So it takes us a long time to recognise just how many of those rules are not so much fact, as someone else's *opinion*: no more than their point of view. But not necessarily ours... that's what's important for us to understand. And, often, it's not been good for *us* at all, though often good for the person who wants us to accept statements like those as rules, as habits for life. There's a lot of *emotional* advantage to the teacher if I accept that I mustn't contradict: his authority is never challenged, he's always certain of his superiority. But unless I *can* challenge him, I cannot learn anything more than his point of view; and

neither, for that matter, can he. With these arbitrary ‘laws’, we all lose in the end.

To learn, we need to be able to question anything and everything, before it gets frozen into the robotic state of habit. But if we’re not clear about what we want, about what our *own* rules and understandings are, there’ll be no shortage of people to take advantage of that confusion and take the power that we give away: as Joan Armatrading put it, “You gotta be yourself – be more like I tell ya”. If ‘myself’ is defined by what other people want, I’ll end up, *by my own non-choice*, as a servant, a slave: I’ve done that often enough in my life, and it’s not a good idea...

Most of these external rules that are now habits, though, we learnt at school, or even earlier: so how were we to know then how to choose? After all, we were only children at the time. True: but I’m not a child now – despite the cultural pressures on me, or on us all, to remain children for life. I can observe; I can watch for clues. And the most important clue is in the way these disempowering ‘rules’ are phrased. Almost always they’ll contain certain ‘magic’ words: ‘must’, ‘ought’, or ‘should’. Or ‘can’t’ – “you can’t get there from here”.

“You ought to do this...” “You must do that...”, “You shouldn’t do this...” “I wouldn’t do that if I were you...” Think of some examples of these from your own life: do you recognise how they disempower you, how we give our power away when we accept them? How do you feel about that?

And think of some examples of how you’ve given these kind of ‘rules’ to others: how do you feel now about having done that? Can you see why you used these phrasings?

Phrases like this are meant to entrap, to bind, to enslave: words as

subtle chains. When I look back and see how people have done this to me again and again throughout my life, I get angry – very angry. How dare they do this to me!

Then I remember that I've done it to others, probably just as much: and I then feel foolish, a child caught in the act.

And in both cases I've chosen to do it, chosen to accept it: a habit of enslaving, a habit of enslavement. Why?

Tyrant and victim

The simple answer is fear. Lots of it. Fear drives us all, whether we recognise it or not. It's fear of uncertainty that pushes us into developing the security-blanket of habit in the first place. And it's fear of others that leads to this maze of 'musts' and 'oughts' and 'shoulds': I don't have power *over* others, but if I can ensure that those others are not powerful either, they can't threaten me. Not so much power over others, as power *under*: a systematic habit of disempowerment. So I'll tell them they *should* do this, so that it doesn't threaten me; and they'll reply that I *ought* to do that, to make sure that my existence won't threaten them. What they're actually afraid of may have nothing to do with me, in fact may well be linked to long-forgotten childhood fables – “if you don't behave, the bogeyman will *get you*!” But the fear is real, and acted on accordingly: “you mustn't come near me”, “you shouldn't do that”, and so on. You can't beat a childhood monster – but you might be able to trap it in a web of words...

The end-result is that *no-one* is powerful (or rather, only those people outside the reach of a barrage of 'shoulds' and 'shouldn'ts' retain their power – and they're often exactly those who, in the culture, we'd prefer *weren't* powerful!). We're all hopelessly confused by a maze of childhood instructions that have little or no connection with reality. So with no-one able to make a decision,

in case it threatens someone else's fears, we end up with the worst of everything: a kind of lowest-common-denominator of a world.

We seem to live in an all-pervasive atmosphere of fear – a state which, unfortunately, is actively encouraged by most political systems and most of the major religions. But that's hardly surprising: our religions and politics arise from the same fears anyway. As a result, we tend to fall into a kind of tyrant-or-victim cycle, oscillating between the roles of persecutor and persecuted: individuals, groups, cultures, whole nations – even the God is ultimate tyrant or ultimate victim.

We'd recognise this scenario most often in a physical sense: war, brutality, force, violence. Yet physical assault is, if anything, the rarest form it takes: far more often the true violence is emotional, mental, spiritual. Righteousness that rejects another's point of view as 'wrong' is just as much a form of tyranny as physical violence: "Peace on our terms" is no offer of peace, but a declaration of war; "There is no God but mine" is an assault on the soul; and a come-on followed by a callous rejection is little short of a rape of the heart. Fear leads to righteousness, which itself comes from fear – the fear of uncertainty that leads to the desperate need to control.

A common form of tyrant/victim violence is the 'Devil's Alternative', the 'no-win' – 'heads I win, tails you lose'. Here's one friend's example:

"It started off pleasantly enough: a few of us having a discussion at my home. But one woman failed to get her way, built it up into an argument, and then started yelling at me: 'Have you got what it takes to be my equal without violence?' – this being screamed repeatedly just inches from my face, even when I tried to back away from her in the room. If I answered 'Yes', she just repeated the question; if I answered 'No', she mocked me, and then repeated the question. And all the while the others just stood around in confusion, telling me

at times ‘You ought to see her point of view...’ After several minutes of this, with panic rising, I answered her question in what still seems to me an appropriate manner: I slapped her face, once, hard – something I’ve never done before or since. It stopped the verbal assault, of course, but it took me weeks to recover: I felt violated, self-humiliated, all those emotions, the equivalent response to rape – which, in an emotional sense, was exactly what it was. And the woman has usually referred to me since as ‘the man who hit her’ – a man who resorts to violent assault against women, she says. But I’m still trying to work it out: who was the victim; who the tyrant? Who really *was* the violent one?”

Think of some similar incidents in your own life. Who was the victim? Who was the tyrant? And who was responsible for the incident: who, ultimately, was to blame?

It’s much easier to accept the role of victim: we can blame the tyrant then for ‘doing it to me’, we have a reason then for our righteous indignation, our pain, our hurt, our anger. But in fact, if we’re honest, we’ve played both roles, probably equally: victim leads to tyrant leads to victim, an echoing cycle of unclaimed anger. And a victim needs a tyrant just as much as a tyrant needs a victim: in each role we’re being dishonest about our true motives – most usually, we’re looking for someone to blame.

No-one seems to *choose* to be a tyrant, to *choose* to be a victim: but somehow we all manage to become so. How? Who’s responsible?

Who’s to blame?

Finding on whom to pin the blame is an ever-popular game – a bit like ‘pin the tail on the donkey’. *Someone* must be responsible: who is it? At the first stage, it’s always someone else, especially if you’re

the victim: the tyrant did it to me, the tyrant must be to blame. After all, what they did *hurts*: I can't be responsible for that, surely? 'Round and round in the usual old game; you take the credit, and I take the blame.' Or is it 'I take the credit and *you* take the blame'...? We always prefer to feel that it's someone else: I always want to say "it isn't *my* fault". That's the usual perception, anyway: but it's never quite as simple as that.

Think for a moment about the chorus to a rather coarse old song:

"It's the same the 'ole world over:
it's the poor what gets the blame,
it's the rich what gets the pleasure –
ain't it all a bleedin' shame?"

It may be true – we could argue about that indefinitely! – but if it is, how did things get that way? Whose fault is it? And would you consider yourself as 'the rich what gets the pleasure', or 'the poor what gets the blame'?

Another 'solution' to the issue is to take the whole blame on ourselves: "it's all my fault". Sometimes this is a more mature approach, in recognising the choices we do all have in these games; but often it's a habit of the 'professional victim', or someone who's learned or been trained to be the scapegoat for the family or community. Self-scapegoating is all too common, and unfortunately is encouraged by the Christian tradition – the self-sacrificing urge to emulate 'the one who dies to take away our sins'. Once the behavior becomes ingrained, it's a very hard habit to break – and intensely self-destructive. And it's no more realistic, in terms of finding who's *really* to blame, than the more public hunt for scapegoats.

It's also a habit that others may be keen to encourage – precisely because *they* can then avoid the blame. In many tyrant/victim scenarios – as in that example earlier – it's common for the victim to be urged, by others or their own conscience, to take the whole blame on themselves, and 'see the other person's point of view'. The victim is not only beaten up – in whatever sense – by the tyrant, but by themselves as well! The tyrant's actions may very well come from *their* confused response to a maze of childhood 'shoulds' and 'can'ts' and 'oughts', and may well be stuck in depression, paranoia, loneliness or whatever: but it doesn't help if the victim is made to feel responsible for what is actually the tyrant's cruelty.

Whatever drives it, that cruelty is still a *choice*, even if it comes from habit, or from past pain. To be a victim is also a kind of choice, though at the time it's extremely hard to see how or why. It's everyone's choice, everyone's responsibility – usually through the non-choice of habit. And it does no good to anyone to allow the victim to allow their conscience to tear them apart, if the tyrant is not encouraged to make any comparable move – because today's victim will often be tomorrow's tyrant, and so the cycle goes on and on. Eventually, someone *does* take responsibility enough to face the fears that drive the cycle: and it stops. Suddenly a sense of quiet: no blame. But it's *not* easy; it does take courage...

Blaming, whether of self or others, is a peculiarly evil habit: a denial of responsibility, a false separation from reality. It's not so much that we say "Yes" to the evil, but that we so rarely say "No". As a habit, we choose by not choosing; we follow the habit of avoiding choice, then look for someone else to blame. But it is still a *choice*: in a sense, we can't blame *anyone*. If we think in terms of *wyrd*, a life-path as a series of choices, everyone and no-one is to blame. In the complexity of that fabric of interweavings, we all choose, between us, and collectively, to get what we get.

No-one is to blame

The more we look for someone to blame, the further we get from any chance of finding a solution. That's true whether we tend to blame others, or blame ourselves. The best way to understand this is to let go, let go the control, let go of the anger, the desire for revenge and all those other very real feelings attached to blame: they don't actually help in sorting things out. Let go, go wider. Be compassionate to ourselves, and to others: we're all in this mess together. Just accept, gently, that "things are the way they are because they got that way": once we can start to accept that, we can begin to move onward – and out of this torturous cycle.

Go back to an example of some tyrant/victim scenario, one where you were (nominally) the victim. Remember the sense of hopelessness, the anger turned in against yourself; *feel* those emotions again. It's not comfortable to do so: but do so anyway.

Then, within your memory of that time, think wider, of the overall situation, the choices on the threads of wyrd that have led each participant to that point. What anger is the 'tyrant' expressing, is trapped in? What are others around not facing? What are *you* not facing, to have led you there? And let go, let go...

Now turn it round: choose some incident where *you* were (nominally) the oppressor, and reconstruct that in the same way. It may be embarrassing, but do it anyway.

And, within your memory of that time, think wider, of the overall situation, the life-path on the threads of wyrd that has led each participant to that point. What anger are you, the 'tyrant', expressing, are trapped in? What was the 'victim' not facing, to have led themselves there? What are others around not facing? And let go, let go...

Consider it to have been everyone's choice to be there – often by default, by choosing not to choose; but everyone chose to be there, chose to do what they did there. Everyone is to blame; no-one, individually, is to blame. What difference does this make?

We're *all* to blame; so no *one* is to blame. That's hard to grasp, in a world in which every effect supposedly stems from a single cause. And even harder to accept! But let go, let go...

Everyone is to blame; so *no-one* is to blame.

It's important to recognise that no-one is to blame; but it's also important first to recognise that that's so only because *everyone* is to blame.

Ultimately, there *is* no blame: the world is as it is because, between us all, we chose it to be so.

The next question is obvious. If we made the world so, and we don't like it, what are we going to do about it? More to the point, it's useful to ask ourselves, "what am *I* going to do about it?" – because the only person we can each change directly is ourselves.

5 I am what I am

Instead of spending energy looking for blame, it's far more useful to use it to do something about what happens in our lives. So consider this possibility: if we each weave our lives, our fate, on the threads of *wyrd*, and every thread passes through every one of us, then in changing ourselves, we change everything and everyone else. And everyone else does the same. That's why things get so complicated: but it also means that we *always* have a choice. The world we have derives from a web of choices: yet the easiest place, almost the only place, I can start changing those choices is *here*. In *me*.

Becoming aware of my choices, I reclaim responsibility – literally, 'response-ability' – for what happens to me; I reclaim not so much power *over* my life, but power *with* it.

By breaking the patterns of habit, we reclaim the true power of choice; and by cutting free of the web of other people's 'shoulds' and 'oughts' and 'can'ts', we start to create a life that's actually worth living. It's not a quick process – have no illusions about that! – but it's well worth doing. Perhaps the *only* thing that's worth doing. But be warned: it can certainly be weird at times...

Whose life is it, anyway?

The first stage in reclaiming that power is to reclaim the energy and aliveness that's locked up within us. And a good place to start is to get angry. Very angry. We're going to get angry anyway once we realise just how much our power, our sense of self, has been stolen: so we may as well do it deliberately first...

The important trick is not to get angry *at* anyone – either others or ourselves – but just to use anger to reach the passion, the energy

that's currently locked up into fighting ourselves.

As a child I was fascinated by facts – an avid collector of not-quite-useless information. As a result, I'd find I *knew*, without needing to look up or guess, an answer in the somewhat competitive family discussions. For the others, this was almost annoying: my mother, for example, would often comment, "Oh damn the child – Chris's got it *right* again!" So which message was I supposed to believe: get the wrong answer, and be told I'd failed; or get the right answer, and be told I shouldn't? And I wasn't allowed to withdraw from the discussions, either – "you shouldn't sulk!" No wonder I'm confused and self-doubting! And recognising it now, how much these unintentional attacks have crippled me, I get angry. Very angry. "Whose life is it anyway! How dare they!"

And let go, let go... because it's equally true that I let it happen. And there was no malice: it simply was what it was. I *believed* the 'no-win'; I allowed myself to be locked up by it.

So it's time I unlocked myself from it, isn't it?

Think of some similar no-wins in your own life. As you recognise how much they've trapped you, reach into the anger... Then let go, let go... release it. Not *at* anyone – just recognise it, allow it to be; and release it.

Herein lies a problem: how to release anger – or even to get at it at all. We're all conditioned not to express emotions, especially anger or rage. And we have to find a way to release it which does not consist of dumping it on someone else, or turning it back in again on ourselves.

Don't ignore the anger: it's there, and it won't go away by itself. If we feel apathetic, a sense of "Why bother?", that's often because of this social conditioning. It locks us up: in effect, we're in a jail

of our own creation, one we've been encouraged to build by our own and other people's fears. "There's no point, it doesn't make any difference", you might say. But saying that is *why* there's no point, is *why* it doesn't make a difference: the energy is locked up into keeping us locked up.

So: if we reach inside and look at some of these no-wins, we'll either find a surge of anger, or a surge of apathy – which is actually the same thing in a different guise. Bring it out: if it comes in the form of apathy, break the habit of apathy, and *do* something with it! Jump about a bit; yell; put on some music, loud, and dance it out. Or a common technique is to prepare the scene beforehand: roll up an old newspaper into a club, place an old telephone directory on a cushion; then reach into the anger, and shred the directory with the club, blow after blow after blow. Yell, scream, shout: reach in to the anger: then let go, let go...

The 'silliness barrier'

It's usual at this point to feel that the whole idea is ridiculous. Silly. It's just stupid, childish. Surely this is a joke?

In actual fact, it's not stupid at all. It's been proven time and time again that this kind of emotional release – releasing locked-up fear, anger, guilt and the rest – is an essential part of the process of an individual's reclaiming power with their life. And it's no joke: it most certainly doesn't *feel* like a joke when we finally allow ourselves to do it...

So why does it *feel* so silly to do it – to let go at all? There's some kind of barrier there...

This 'silliness barrier' is real: and in no way is it trivial. It can be extremely hard to get past; even though, looking back, it can often seem to have been nothing much. Other people rarely see it as a barrier: "For God's sake just *jump*, child!" – a real barrier of fear,

but it's not *theirs*. It's easy to dismiss it as 'a little bit of silliness, that's all' – that's what others might say, and what we ourselves might say afterwards. But it won't seem so at the time – and not when we're *facing* it: it's important to recognise that distinction!

Not surprisingly, there are many layers to this barrier, all interacting and interweaving like the threads of wyrd. Part of it comes from social conditioning again: Good boys don't do that kind of thing, do they? It's not *ladylike* to show anger, to show aggression. "Don't be so bloody childish", you'd be told, perhaps. But we looked at this in the last chapter: "Children should be seen and not heard"; "You gotta be yourself – be more like I tell ya".

Layer after layer of no-wins, of 'musts' and 'shoulds' – or, more often, 'mustn'ts' and 'shouldn'ts' – all requiring us to deny who we are, in deferment to other people's fears and resentments, trapping us in apathy, in powerlessness. One writer defined resentment as 'a demand that the other feel guilty': we've been taught to feel guilty simply for being who we are. And guilt is an insidious weapon: it's used to get us to beat ourselves up on another person's behalf – often for no true reason at all.

But it's also important to recognise the part our *own* fears play in creating the silliness-barrier. I'm no different from anyone else: I don't like to look silly either. I'm afraid of being embarrassed; afraid of being laughed at. And I'll go to real lengths to avoid finding myself in any situation where that might happen – regardless of whether what I'm doing is actually intended to help me...

This is most obvious in learning new skills: so it's worth remembering that accepting who we are – with all our weaknesses *and* our strengths – is perhaps the most important skill we can learn. There's a specific moment in learning a skill where some new piece of information *fits*: and it's at that moment we hit a milder form of the silliness barrier. We get hit by an embarrassing sense that we knew it all along, that we could have done this part of the skill at any time, if we'd let ourselves – that kind of feeling. And we get hit

by a real fear of uncertainty, as the rules of reality change, from “I can’t” to “Oh – I can!”. So there’s a crucial choice-point here, one that’s easy to miss: one of the few times we can *see* the twists in the fabric of *wyrd*.

Some time ago, for a variety of reasons, I decided to learn how to juggle. It’s not the easiest of skills! So for weeks I couldn’t do it – I could toss two balls back and forth, but not all three. Then just when I was about to give up, it suddenly worked, for just one brief moment: “I can’t / it isn’t working” and the rest had shifted into “Oh – I can!” – and back again. I found I had a very silly grin on my face – I was embarrassed, even though no-one was there. And I could *feel* the choice: disbelieve the change, in order to prove that the old ‘rule’ of “I can’t do it” was ‘true’; or let go – knowing that it probably wouldn’t work again for a while – and *allow* the new rule to be true (or at least possible), to expand into a wider skill, wider awareness. But it was a real choice-point: on that occasion the excitement won out over the fear of uncertainty, but I know that on too many other occasions the choice has gone the other way...

Reach out to some memories of similar occasions of your own – *feel* that moment of embarrassment, of uncertainty. What were the choices that you made on those occasions – to go with the change, or revert to the status quo? If others were there, how much did that affect your choice?

Even in learning a skill, where there isn’t that much of an emotional loading, the silliness-barrier can be significant. In learning to break free of habit and the social version of the senses-taker, the silliness-barrier can be much harder to overcome. But accept it: *it is there*, it *is real*, it’s the same for everyone – you’re not just being ‘childish’ when you find yourself backing away from facing it.

What makes it harder here, in reclaiming the energy from old

locked-up anger, is the sheer volume of emotion: it can take us by surprise, and there doesn't seem to be an easy way to do it gently. For a moment – sometimes a very long moment – the intensity of feeling can be overwhelming. There's a real sense of being out of control – fearfully, terrifyingly so. And that fear is one of the main reasons why all that anger, all that guilt and the like became locked up in the first place: it was too frightening for us or, perhaps more often, for others to willingly face. But it doesn't just go away if we don't face it: it stays as energy used to fight *ourselves* – which is why we get trapped in apathy, in powerlessness. Our individual power is locked up in there: only by saying “I am who I am” – without blame, and from the far side of anger and guilt – can we reach that power and reclaim it.

But the silliness-barrier is *not* trivial: when you find yourself facing it, treat it – and yourself – with respect. We'll meet it again and again, in many different guises. At some stages, many people – and I've been one of them – do need some kind of help to open the barrier, and a safe and supportive environment in which to do so. But we don't need to worry about that: the strange part about the nature of *wyrd*, as we learn to trust it, is that when we really do need help, we'll find it *is* there – if only we can let ourselves see it!

The 'tall poppy' syndrome

The silliness barrier, or rather the fear that it triggers, is one of the driving forces behind the nasty game of 'power-under' that we saw in the previous chapter. “If I can't ride a bicycle”, the reasoning goes, “then *no-one* can: it's not possible. But if someone *did* learn to ride a bicycle, they'd have an advantage over me: so I'd better make damn sure that no-one ever does...”. This fear-driven desire to drag everyone down to the lowest common denominator is endemic throughout the culture: in Australia it's known as the 'tall poppy syndrome', the aim being to cut anyone who might be successful

down to the same uniform size – while in Britain it sometimes seems more like that the poppies never have a chance to get out of the ground in the first place! Some people make this ‘levelling’ a way of life, but we all do it from time to time: it always seems easier to cut someone down than to put in the time and effort to climb up to the same level of skill.

I’d eventually managed to get the juggling to work – only three balls, of course, but I could keep it going for two or three minutes at a stretch. At this point I was practising every day: so when I had to wait a couple of hours at the airport for a change of planes, out came the balls from my pack. A nice quiet corner. Just getting into the rhythm of it. “Huh! That’s not very good, is it?” says a sarcastic voice behind me. Middle-aged businessman; he didn’t know how to juggle, and clearly didn’t even want to try – “couldn’t be bothered”, he said, when I offered to show him how. But he was certainly going to be bothered enough to try to convince me that I couldn’t – and *shouldn’t* – be able to juggle either...

Can you recognise circumstances where others have done this to you? And where you have done this to others?

How do you feel – *feel* – about that now? And then let go those feelings, let go... things are the way they are because they got that way. What’s important is not what happened in the past, but where you take that knowledge now.

And we discover that this *always* happens at some point in the early stages of learning a new skill. It’s almost as if the uncertainty attracts it – the silliness-barrier in an *external* form. Weird...

And that’s exactly what it is: patterns passing by on the threads of wyrd. So watch these patterns as you pass through them; as we do so, we build an increasing awareness of the strange nature of the

workings of wyrd.

Strengths and weaknesses

It's important to go into the anger and the other emotions that have been locked up in fighting ourselves: but it's also important to recognise that it's only an intermediate stage. It's like the concept of blame: only by recognising that we're *all* to blame for this mess, can we move on to accepting that no *one* is to blame – and then release blame entirely. In the same way, we need to accept the anger that's in us, entirely justifiable anger at the way we've been abused by everyone in this fear-driven culture – and then let it go, by recognising that we've done exactly the same to everyone else. We *all* do it: since it's a habit everywhere, it's very hard not to.

Understand this, and we begin to understand the meaning of the word 'compassion'...

We learn compassion for ourselves, too – the many different aspects of ourselves. The anger and emotions are not *childish*, so much as *childlike*: the energy and the clarity of the 'inner child'. That child has come a long way, has been through some good times and some very rough ones: but it's still there, wide-eyed, innocent, inquisitive, aware – by nature intuitively aware of the magic of wyrd.

Much of our power and passion come from that childlike state – it's one of our *strengths*, not a weakness. But the culture and our families have usually had very different ideas about what strengths and weaknesses are – usually to their advantage rather than ours. Their definition of *our* strengths and weaknesses is their opinion only – one which often says more about them than it does about us.

Take a brief inventory of what you think your strengths and weaknesses are. Be honest!

As you make the list, listen to the voice that comes with each item – especially with the weaknesses. If you’ve written that you get tired easily, for example, *who’s telling you?* Your father? Mother? A teacher at school? Is it something that your parents always said about *themselves*? If it’s not you that’s ‘speaking’, put a query beside that item.

And look to see if others in the family have the same pattern – especially through the generations. You may feel you have the same quick temper as your mother and grandmother, for example: but it may well be something you’ve not so much inherited as learned to *copy* – nurture rather than nature. In any case, mark it with a query.

Then go through the list again. Take a closer look at each item you’ve marked with a query (hint: it’s likely to be most of them!): consider carefully whether it really *is* a true strength or weakness of your own – or merely something you’ve learned, or been told so often that you’ve learned to believe it, whether it’s true or not. It may seem to be true *now*, because it’s become a habit: but is it actually part of that clustering of threads that is your deeper choice of *you*? Make changes to each item accordingly.

Review the list again: and note that it may be very different from the one with which you started. It’s certainly likely to be a closer picture of who you truly are...

Slowly, we reclaim our *own* understanding of our strengths and weaknesses – re-own them as ours. We have certain strengths: so what? They’re there to use. We have certain weaknesses: so what? They’re there as challenges – something to *do* with our lives! Accept who you are: not someone else’s attempt to mould you to their

convenience, but who *you* are – “I am who I am”. Nothing more, perhaps, but nothing less either.

To acknowledge this, perhaps it would be worthwhile to echo the chant of the cartoon character Popeye – “I yam what I yam!” And dance with the child within for a while...

8 Control and other myths

We all crave for control – control over our lives, a control that would give us certainty over what happens to us in our lives. And we want it, and want it, often desperately.

A pity, then, that it does not, and cannot, exist.

Control is a myth. An illusion. A pleasant-seeming illusion, a highly desirable illusion – but an illusion nonetheless.

Control, if it existed, would be a state of absolute certainty, absolute predictability. But no such thing exists: there is no shortage of proof of that as a fact, from the esoteric uncertainties of quantum physics, the bizarre twists of chaos mathematics, or the mundane realities of Murphy's Law. We can often create an illusion of control – control in technology, control in politics, control in our own lives – but we can do so only by narrowing down the range of possibilities in a way that becomes further and further separated from reality. And even if we do manage to build that illusion so well that others believe it as strongly as we'd like to do, there's always some random weirdness that will break it down – more often sooner than later. The semblance of control is rarely more than a *belief* that we're in control – wishful thinking rather than reality.

Are you truly in control of your life – in the sense that you could and did predict everything that has happened and will happen to you? If not, who *is* in control?

If you'd say 'others', such as parents or politicians or abstract entities like multinational corporations, look more closely: do the people involved actually have absolute certainty about

what will happen? Do they really have control over *their* lives?

If not, who is in control of *anything*? Who or what is actually in control?

The feeling that *no-one* is in control is frightening. The desire for there to be *someone* who's in control – since clearly we aren't – often leads us to search for certainties in religion. But even this doesn't give us what we crave: we'd be told, for example, that “even the Will of God may be perverted by the machinations of the Adversary in the hearts of men” – which translates into normal language as ‘there always will be uncertainties’. According to the Norse tradition, even the gods were subject to the twists and turns of their fate, the results of their choices in the web of *wyrd*. There's no escaping Fate; there's no escaping uncertainty.

Control is either absolute, or nothing: if it's not absolute, it's not control. But reality is infinitely complex, and infinitely sensitive to its infinite conditions: absolute control would require us to control everything, everywhere and everywhen, past, present and future. So control is impossible: a myth, a joke. To seek for control is to seek for an illusion – an illusion for which most of us, unfortunately, spend most of our lives striving to achieve.

We cannot control: though with awareness we can *direct* what happens to us – the distinction is subtle, but very important! But before we can reach that way of relating to reality – one that accepts it for what it is – we first have to let go of the desperate need for control. And to do that, we first have to understand why that need is there in the first place.

Fear is a four-letter word

There's a simple, one-word reason: *fear*. Lots of it. So much fear that we'll often deny it exists at all...

Fear focusses our attention on anywhere, anywhen *other* than the here-and-now. Fear, in effect, is another form of belief: that something we *don't* want is at risk of happening. The more we don't want it, and the more uncertainty about the when, the where and the likelihood of its happening, the more afraid we're likely to get. And the more afraid we get, the more we think it's likely to happen – in fact, the more likely it *is* to happen, because of the self-confirming nature of belief.

That desirable myth of control seems to offer a way out: "I'll damn well *make sure* that it can't happen!" So we build walls, restrictions, limitations on reality. But since control *is* only an illusion, we have to build more walls to protect us from seeing that those walls are only illusory, and then walls within walls within walls – until we forget what it was we were afraid of in the first place.

When you find yourself controlling – for example, minutely planning every detail of some future event – what are you afraid is going to happen? What are the controls for?

When you get to that event – if it happened at all – did it happen the way you planned, the way you expected? What was different? How come you hadn't allowed for the difference?

Take a specific example – either your own or, if you don't want to face that, someone else's – and look at the fears that drive the need for control. How far down do you have to go to reach the fear at the root of it all?

All that we're left with is the certainty that we *have* to control – and we're usually careful never to wonder *why*, because that might mean that we'd have to face that well-defended original fear all over again.

The core fear will usually turn out to be some central self-doubt, a 'curse' that someone else has taught us to believe, as we saw earlier. And – for all our controlling – until we do face that fear, the fear is controlling *us*. If we're not aware, everything we do can be driven or distorted by a handful of long-forgotten fears... definitely weird!

In the other extreme, we can use fear as a *substitute* for control: we can use fear itself as an excuse for avoiding fears, avoiding facing up to real issues in Reality Department. Instead of trying to impose our internal point of view on the world, we hide until the issue finally comes up – is imposed on us by *external* events – and are then forced into 'panic mode' in order to deal with it. This may get the job done, but it's hardly efficient... And we might spend so much of our energy avoiding the issue – looking again and again at the washing-up we don't want to do, for example – that it can be said to be controlling our lives.

I hated doing my accounts. I'd do anything to avoid them. They'd sit and fester – a puddle of unchecked invoices – for months. Until tax-time came – then all hell broke loose! Panic! Everything stopped: it's gotta be done *now*! It would have been a whole lot simpler if I'd spent a little effort over the months keeping everything tidy, everything under control. But I didn't: I relied on the vastly magnified fear at the time instead to control *me*, since I didn't want to 'control' myself. And perhaps also because, ultimately, I was afraid of the metaphor of being 'called to account' for my life as a whole...

What issues do you find yourself dealing with only in panic-

mode? Can you identify the core fear behind the evasion in each case?

For a long while I ran my life like that, in a permanent state of panic, and using a vast intake of coffee – ‘liquid fear’ – to keep me going. Another hard habit to break! In part it can be a peculiar kind of laziness: a colleague, perhaps unkindly but accurately, once commented “You’re just a bag of flab held together by fears – the moment you drop control, you collapse in a heap on the floor...”. But the root *is* always fear: fear of failure, even fear of success. And behind those fears will be some kind of curse-belief like those we saw earlier: most of which break down to the belief that “I’m not allowed to be me”.

Control comes from the opposite direction: because we’re afraid, we want to make sure that others are not allowed to be themselves, or that reality is not allowed to be as it is. We want to disempower them, to create the illusion of being powerful ourselves. We want power over them; if we can’t have that, we’ll play the power-under game as hard as we can. There’s an old saying that “Where there is fear, there is power; where there is power, there is fear”: power and control may be what we see at the surface, but fear – a seething morass of fear – is what lies beneath it all. Until we face those fears, *no-one* can be truly powerful: none of us can reclaim the power of choice with our lives. To move on, we need to re-define our understanding of power.

I want to be powerful

When there’s so much fear that we deny it exists at all, we’ll usually call it ‘power’ instead. The drive for power – or rather, the ‘disempowerment of others’ that we *think* of as power – is

inextricably interwoven with the need for control. To be powerful in this sense, it seems, is to be ‘in control’ – we feel certain of having our needs met, whatever they might be. Power seems to give us the ability to control, to have power over events: and the more powerful we are, the more we’re in control. We’re told that power even makes people love us: “power is the ultimate aphrodisiac”. To be powerful is to be called a *success*. If I’m powerful, I can do whatever I want: and woe betide anyone who gets in my way.

And I *feel* powerful: “Nothing and no-one can stop me now!”

The opposite, to be ‘out of control’, or subject to someone else’s control, is to be powerless. I’m told I’m a *failure*: I *feel* I’m a failure; I feel shame, embarrassment, futility – all of which reinforces the feeling of failure. If I’m powerless, I’m at the uncertain mercy of someone else’s power: I have no guarantees whatever of having my needs met. And that’s frightening. I’ll do anything I can to prevent that...

It’s not surprising, then, that we all want to be powerful. We’ll fight each other – to the death, if necessary – to become powerful. Or we’ll manoeuvre, lie, cheat, cajole, manipulate, *anything*, to prevent others from having power over us. And all because we’re so afraid that we’ve forgotten we’re afraid...

For certain ‘powerful’ people, the fear that drove them is obvious: the dictator whose rivals all met with fatal ‘accidents’, for example; the politician who surrounded herself with ‘yes-men’; the tycoon who lived in morbid seclusion. Think of some other examples. Why is it obvious to us – but almost never to them – that their behaviour is driven by fear rather than true power?

Since the threads of *wyrd* pass through each of us, somewhere in you will be the same fears (though probably to a lesser degree!). Put yourself in the place of those people; reach inside

yourself to look at those fears where they pass through you. Do you recognise them as your own fears? If so, are they hard to face? What kind of behaviour, what kind of 'power', would enable you to avoid having to face those fears yourself?

It's often hard to grasp that this kind of power is an illusion – especially if you're looking at the wrong end of someone else's belief that "power comes out of the barrel of a gun". Yet in the long run, that's all it is: an illusion, based on unacknowledged fear.

The real problem, perhaps, is that this 'power' seems to be a means of dumping our fears on other people: if we're 'powerful', our fears become someone else's problem. We've seen this already as the tyrant/victim game: what happens is that the victim starts looking for someone else to be a tyrant to, on whom to dump their hurt and fear; the new victim goes looking for *their* victim, and so on. In no time at all, a climate of fear can build up: not one in which people are powerful, but in which *all* are ultimately powerless – including the original tyrant.

Since what we're afraid of is fear itself, we rationalise the fear. In the same way that love becomes confused with attention, love can become confused with fear. The 'Big Brother' syndrome: we don't fear the tyrant, instead we say "we love our great protector"... And the tyrant, in turn, is convinced that people love him *because* he is powerful: if he too believed that 'power is the ultimate aphrodisiac', he may well have started out on this road because he felt it was the only way he would find the love he craved. And yet that 'love' is an empty shell, giving nothing: he will always be trapped into wanting more, and more, and more.

Go back to the pick-up-trucks-with-hormone-trouble scenario we saw earlier, with its obsessive mode of display: can you see in there the same confusion of love with power – the notion that power alone can keep people producing ‘love on demand’?

Listen to the lyrics of a few popular ‘love songs’: look at how much they encourage this muddling of love, power and fear. Phrases like “I’m gonna make you love me”, or “You’re mine, all mine” equate love with *ownership*; and “Since you’ve been gone, I can’t go on” or “I can’t live without you” are paeans of praise to powerlessness – or an attempt to regain power by power-under, by manufacturing guilt.

How often have phrases like these been said to you, in your relationships? And how often have you said something like this yourself? Was this done as a means of control, so that wants – romance! love! schmaltz! – would be met? If so, did it *actually* satisfy the need?

Power is equated with ownership, the *right* to exploit without reference to anyone else. Employment is equated with ownership: as your employer, I’m deemed to have the *right* to have power over you. So if I employ you, it’s easy for me to believe that I *own* you – not merely the use of some of your time, but your body, your mind, your soul – and thus you must surely *want* to do my every bidding, follow my every whim. My wish is your command: you must satisfy my every need! But as the employee, of course, you might not be too happy about this point of view: so you may well either fight to gain power over me, or seek to destroy my power with every trick of the power-under game.

None of us wants the responsibility – the blame – for what goes on; but all of us want control, the semblance of power. “Round and round in the usual old game – I take the credit and you take the

blame”...

Does this sound familiar?

In the midst of that kind of mess, very little gets done: everyone's too busy playing power-games. It almost seems like the definition of power is 'the ability to avoid work' – 'winners' are those who get others to do their work for them, by force, trickery, manipulation or otherwise.

So it comes as a surprise to discover that the formal definition of 'power', from physics, is 'the ability to do work'. In all those power-games with power-over or power-under, no-one is actually being powerful in any real sense. What they *are* doing is wasting everyone's energy – and disempowering us all in the process.

In the end, that kind of power, like control, is based on illusions. If we're going to get any work done – if we're to reclaim the power of choice with our lives – we're going to need something more realistic than that. We're going to need a very *different* approach to power.

A different kind of power

In a way power-over and power-under are two sides of the same coin – traditionally the male and female forms of power, in fact. Both of them are rooted in fear; both are concerned more with disempowering others than with empowering ourselves; both make it far harder to get work done; and both are based on an absence of *trust*.

It's trust that makes the difference. With trust, power becomes empowering. The threads of *wyrd* pass through us all, and always loop back to where they started: to try to fight someone else through power-over or power-under is ultimately to fight ourselves. So instead of fighting futile battles against the *wyrd*, against the nature of reality, we let go, and *trust*. At that point, by letting go of power,

we reach a different kind of power – one in which we actually do have ‘the ability to do work’.

We let go; but we don’t let go so far as to collapse in a heap on the floor. Knowing what we want, we state the direction in which we want to go, provide the energy to get the process started, and then trust the *wyrd* to bring us to where we want to end up. We may get there by some surprising routes: but we do get there. Whereas if we try to control not only the direction but the route as well – controlling every step of the way – we somehow miss the point we’re aiming for: there’s always a choice, but there’s always a twist. And if we’re not clear about what we want... well, we could end up anywhere – which is what happens all too often, of course!

This distinction between controlling and directing, this balance of letting go without letting go, is hard to describe – yet we’ve all had experience of it. It’s like looking for a parking bay in a crowded city: if we don’t try for one, we won’t get one; if we try hard, forcing our way around, pushing others out of our way, we’ll probably end up with a parking ticket rather than a meter; whereas if we’re clear about what we want, but let go of defining the *form* it should take, we find ourselves in a parking place almost without noticing it. Weird – but it works. Trying without trying; ‘doing no-thing’, as the Taoists would say.

What are some examples of your own? Go back to one of those examples. Can you remember feeling the lack of trust, the fear of uncertainty – and letting go anyway? And the surprise – joy, even! – when things ‘worked by themselves’?

The usual approach to power is about being prepared against surprise: we try to control every eventuality, we leave nothing to chance – we hope. But as one engineer commented, “Mother Nature

loves to throw a surprise party”: reality is full of surprises, always will be full of surprises. Yet surprises can work both ways, to our advantage as well as to our detriment: if we only allow things to happen in expected ways, we’re limiting the chances for things to work out on their own. So we’d be far better off instead preparing *for* surprise – working *with* the twists of reality rather than against them. And in any case, surprises are where the interest lies, the excitement lies. A life without surprises is a pretty boring one...

True power comes when we face the fear – accept it for what it is – and allow for surprises. The state that the writer Starhawk describes as ‘power-with’ arrives when we trust others – co-operation leads to an extraordinary power and multiplication of energy, especially when we help each other to work on the fears that would otherwise lead to a pointless power-struggle. And the other state she describes, ‘power-from-within’, arrives when we finally trust *ourselves*.

Power-from-within flows from the heart, from the whole core of someone’s being – and still leaves room for everyone else, in fact *includes* everyone else. Someone who has that kind of power seems to glow, seems to radiate light, an ease, a certainty, in everything they do in life. They don’t control: instead, they *dance* with life. People are drawn to them not out of compulsion or fear, but from sheer delight. In that sense, power-from-within probably *is* ‘the ultimate aphrodisiac’...

Compare those four forms of power: power-over, power-under, power-with, power-from-within. Who do you know that epitomises each of those forms of power, that makes that form of power a way of life?

The same threads pass through each of us: so reach into your memories and recall a time when you felt each form of power within yourself. How does each *feel* within you? Feel the fear that’s behind power-over, power-under; feel the power

and strength, the fear_less_ness, from which power-with and power-from-within wells out. And note how power-over and power-under keep your focus and attention 'out there', on the external world; whilst power-with and power-from-within come from and help to reinforce a more definite sense of *self*.

If that's so, who are you? "Who am I?" Look deeper into these threads for an answer...

A willingness to trust leads to a sense of *empowerment*, of 'dis-covering' power that lies within, a power that we all share. A power that is powerful *because* we share it: as another writer put it, this deeper power is 'the ability to empower oneself and others'. Since the threads pass through us all, there's ultimately no difference between 'self' and 'others': empowering others *is* empowering myself, empowering myself *is* empowering others.

But we always have a choice; and there's always a twist. If we give in to the all-pervading fears – which always seems easiest – and strive for power-over or power-under others, we pull everyone down, *including* ourselves. Somehow, it always loops back – if only in that the whole culture becomes more fear-ridden. Yet by looking within, by trusting others, by trusting who *we* are – "I am what I am!" – something else comes through: something else that makes it easier for *everyone* to reach that same power-from-within. That seems to be where the true power lies.

Or perhaps only part of that power. For many people, there's also a clear sense of a 'higher power', from whence their power comes. A power so strong that they feel they act simply as a channel, a conduit, like a dancer swept up in the energy of the moment. A power that's not external, but deeper within, somehow intensely personal; and 'higher' not in the sense of an overlord, but rather as greater, wider, wiser. More aware. More connected with totality; more closely connected with the infinite interweavings of the web

of wyrd. And as such gives us a sense of certainty, an ability to trust – and to act on that trust, as a way of life.

Do you have a sense of a ‘higher power’ within you – a Weaver of the wyrd? If so, how do you know when it’s there, when it’s available to you? Does it happen only in some activities – in your art, or exercise, or some aspect of work? Or only when you’re drunk, perhaps!

What do you *feel* when you ‘let it work through you’? In what way are you different when it does so? In what way are you different so as to let it do so?

In principle we all have access to this kind of power within, this link to the threads of wyrd. For some it’s a way of life; but for most of us it’s more something of which we only get occasional glimpses. Like the dim star at night, that sense of connection is *there* – and then it’s gone, as soon as we try to look at it.

Whatever it may be, our awareness of it *is* intensely personal. If we try to describe it to someone else, we soon get into tangles of confusion. The term ‘higher power’ is no more than a metaphor: a personal label such as ‘God’ or ‘my guardian angel’ may mean nothing to anyone else, since they may not – cannot – have our personal experience of what it means to us. It’s important to recognise, then, that for each of us this power is ours – and ours alone.

Yet the alone-ness itself can bring new fears – of loneliness, of isolation, of responsibility. Which, if we’re not careful, brings up new needs to control, to dominate – and brings us right back where we started...

New Age, new illusions?

The old religions resolved these fears by resorting to power-over in a different guise: only one ‘higher power’ permitted to exist, labelled as God, Allah, Buddha or whatever. “My way is the *only* way” – the origin of all religious wars. And its root is fear: “if I can convince others that what I believe is true, then perhaps it *is* true...”. Another variant on the old game of “what I tell you three times is *true*”, all mixed in with another infamous fear that “my place in heaven is dependent on the number of souls I can convert to the true faith”...

As the old authorities have faded, the self-styled ‘New Age’ has come to the fore. Rightly, there is once more a free and open discussion of a personal connection to ‘higher power’, and of a right – if not duty – to affirm oneself within the world. A new freedom to be ourselves, to be who we truly are.

It’s unfortunate, then, that so much New Age material instead re-affirms the same old fears, the same old illusions – in fact encourages them to grow...

All too often there’s new aggrandisement of power-over, buried beneath a veneer of novelty: one well-known writer, for example, claims that his book on affirmations “serves as a magnificent and devastating battle-plan whereby you will learn to expand your personal power and win back absolute control of your life.” We’re told that we should “mould reality to suit our positive ends” – and our personal point of view, of course, is always ‘positive’. That others might have a different point of view is to be ignored: for “we are Children of the Light”, which presumably means that all others are in Darkness...

It’s perhaps too easy to be cynical about it all. Within that mass of ‘New Age’ material there is undoubtedly much good sense – true gold amongst the dross. But we do need to use a great deal of care – especially since so much of it is little more than a new way to sell old fears in a pretty gift-wrapped package.

So much of religion is centred around fear of death: dealing with perhaps the most total and inevitable of all uncertainties. One well-known New Age solution is to declare that death does not exist: we can, it's claimed, be physically immortal – but only if we deny death's physical reality. This seems a little unrealistic... If denying our fear of death consists of refusing to face it, we in effect spend our lives in service to it by committing ourselves to avoiding it; whereas if we accept that fear, dance with it, we *live* each moment as it comes. Another twist in the web of wyrd...

It's rarely helpful to become preoccupied with death; but it can be useful to reflect on its reality every now and then. What fears come up for you? How do you face them? In what ways does living *with* those fears make it easier to *live* – to be *alive*?

The New Age provides no more certainties than the old religions did – probably even less, if anything, considering its all-too-casual attitude to discipline and sheer hard work. And I know I'm no guru either: I'm *me*, with my strengths, my weaknesses, my all-too-obvious failings. I don't have all the answers – about all that can be said is that I may sometimes have some useful questions...

Ultimately, the only guru we each have is ourselves. Oh, we can borrow other people for help from time to time: but they can't do the work for us. This section of the wyrd that I call 'me' is mine to deal with as best I can: it's my problem. To find out what I'm supposed to do with it, it's up to me to look inside, to call up that 'power from within' – and to do that I have to trust. Then, somehow, without knowing how, I'll *know*. And no, it isn't easy... letting go is never easy...

A time to trust

We can't control anything – or we can try, but it doesn't work. What we can do instead is *direct* what happens: make choices, act on them, see what we get. Make choices; knowing that we can never know, we trust that they *are* the right choices; and see what we get.

This is the aspect of wyrd that used to be known as 'providence'. Literally, it is 'that which provides' – when we trust it. If we can't trust it, we find ourselves reverting to control: and control, by the usual weird twists, ends up never quite providing us with what we need.

To let go control, we somehow have to let go the fear that underlies it. That's *not* easy. We never do have 'power over' our fears; we never do conquer fear. But we can learn to live with it; learn to *face* fear, learn not just to accept it but dance *with* it. And even use its energy to help us – much as we used the energy of anger to release us from the power-under game – to get us moving, to reclaim our power of choice.

There's a strange inversion, when accepting being scared puts us in touch with the sacred: our own true power *from within*. But to reach there we have to trust, trust ourselves and the interweavings of the wyrd. It's time to let go: let go of fear, and much else that holds us back from being who we are.

12 Weaving the threads of wyrd

So far we've talked a lot about *wyrd*: but what *is* it? The short answer is that it is what it is: there is no such thing as an 'explanation' as far as *wyrd* is concerned. But while we can't define it, we *do* all have our own experience of it. We're actually very familiar with it, and we have a very clear practical understanding of what *wyrd* is: it's just that we're not often aware of the fact.

If that isn't obvious, just think for a moment: when and where and under what conditions do you use the word 'weird'? Wherever you do, that's also *wyrd*. It's as simple as that...

So how do you use the word 'weird'? Think back on some experiences that you would regard as weird – preferably your own experiences rather than someone else's. Why would you describe them as weird? And was there any particular feeling or sense of awareness that suggests that you should describe them that way?

Build a new habit, perhaps, of noticing when you describe something as 'weird': look at the circumstances, the feelings, in each case as you do so. And use it to expand your understanding of the nature of *wyrd*: your connection with the tortuous nature of totality.

What we most easily recognise in something that's 'weird' is the twist, the surprise. "It's weird, meeting you like this", you might say; and they'd reply, "That's weird, we were just thinking of you".

But it's not so easy to see the subtle web of choices that links the weirdness together: there's always a twist, but there's also always a choice. One of the most important results of re-connecting ourselves with wyrd is that we discover we're not solely at its effect, 'at the mercy of our Fate': so we learn to recognise that we do have choices – and can thus reclaim them as our own.

But that disturbing sense of 'weirdness' that accompanies our contact with wyrd – "it sent shivers down my spine", we might say – makes it hard to see the choices we've made that have led us there. And again the wyrd interweaves through everything, often showing us things we don't want to face: "that old guy was really weird", might be your response to the frightening glimpse of totality represented by the antics of some strange old man. It's not comfortable to face your connection with him: him as part of you as part of him, all inextricably interwoven on the wyrd.

Comfortable or not, that's wyrd: it is what it is. We can't control it: it *is*. And yet it's often the only place where we truly have a choice. To reclaim those choices – to re-empower ourselves, to reclaim power with and within our lives – we have to face our fear of the wyrd: and we do that best by working *with* its weirdnesses, rather than trying to fight against them!

A web of connections

To work with wyrd, and to see it in action, we have to learn a different way of seeing – although more accurately we need to re-learn it, since it's a way of seeing that we knew well as children. We need to be able to see connections, patterns, samenesses within differences, in a way that at first seems quite alien to our usual concept of cause-and-effect. But this is true in science too: to understand the concepts of chaos, researchers had first to develop an eye for pattern – especially pattern that appeared on different scales at the same time, and what one writer described as "a taste for

randomness and complexities, for jagged edges and sudden leaps”. Chaos is weird – is wyrd – and full of strange connections: so much so that we need a different way of seeing before we can see them.

We usually only see separateness, difference, in self, in time, in space: the sense of ‘I’ and ‘not-I’, for example, or the way we distinguish *this* object from *that* one, or that event *then* from this event *now*. We analyse, break things apart into components, describe chains of cause and effect, refine probability into predictability. It all gives a satisfying sense of certainty, of security.

It happens to be wrong. Or incomplete, rather.

The separateness is only one side of the equation, so to speak. It’s like a threadbare fabric, consisting only of the weft: it has a shape, but there’s nothing holding it together. It’s the cross-warp of wyrd – those weird, improbable connections – that weaves in the connectedness, and makes it into a whole.

The improbabilities blur the boundaries. Remember the Möbius loop that we saw earlier, for example: the strip of paper obviously has two sides, yet the loop as a whole, through an improbable twist, has only one. There’s no set point at which it changes: the boundary is blurred. In effect, each point is both on the opposite side *and* the same side as every other. And although every point is different, every point passes through every other point. It’s weird – wyrd.

All these weird happenings in our lives are much the same: both separateness *and* sameness, connectedness, at the same point. We’re used to having one *or* the other: having both together is what makes it seem ‘weird’. And to regard it as ordinary – to *experience* it as ordinary – takes a little getting used to!

In wyrd, the inside is also the outside: we can experience others ‘out there’ or ‘in here’, and feel the connection and the separateness at the same time. The easiest way to do this is to

indulge in the age-old game of people-watching – but with a subtle difference.

Choose a cafe – my own favourite for this is one in the city's legal district. Sit quietly in a window, and move yourself slowly, gently, into an awareness of wyrd...

Allow the boundaries to blur: the shapes of passers-by become silhouettes, a two-dimensional array of shapes that merge, split-off, merge into other larger shapes... Allow the boundaries of time to blur: watch the shapes woven by those people in their pathways through space and time...

Look again at the clientele, the passers-by: so many of them in ritual dress, clothes as labels for masks. The lawyers and barristers in their formal wigs and gowns; the businessmen in the corner, in their crisp suits and ties, bragging about the 'killing' they've just made in a deal. The secretary stomping by in shoes that are 'killing' *her*: tight skirt, a mask of make-up, papers clutched in front of her. And the old man, limping, sweeping the pavement outside. Stereotypes; each one acting out an archetypal thread in the fabric of life.

But they're all there inside you too. The patterns of the wyrd echo on every scale: the things you see about each person here are metaphors for how the same threads pass through you.

The barrister, releasing her long blonde hair from under the formal wig; and the lawyer, almost a 'beard with man attached': in what ways do you conceal or express your individuality? Watch them change masks as they shed their layers in the cafe: what masks do you wear in different surroundings?

The businessmen: yes, they're self-serving, uncaring, aggressive, greedy – and, incidentally, evading reality, because they're drunk. But how do the same adjectives apply to you? You wouldn't be able to see this in them if it wasn't there in you...

The secretary: you can feel, without trying, that none of this fits her. Reach out, feel deeper, and you may well find yourself

sharing her anger: she hates these clothes, this job, the people who stare at her – but she's told that she 'has to' do this. So reach deeper again: what masks do you wear because others say you 'have to'? And what are you 'holding to your chest', as a shield against the world?

And what does the old man tell you? Where are you limping inside? Where is this road inside that you're sweeping, slowly, painfully – and which you know no-one notices?

Drink up your coffee: time to go. And as you leave, look back through the window at the place where you were: and see yourself sitting there, looking through the window at yourself, like you have done at all the passers-by. The observer and the observed, interlinked on the threads of time – and wyrd.

The boundaries blur; yet there are still boundaries. Other people are still 'other'; yet we can experience the sameness within us. Non-attachment, we might say, that's also non-detachment. That's wyrd.

When we finally allow ourselves through into this awareness, it's a truly enlivening experience – among other things, we *experience* the end of the myth of separateness, and with it find a release from that crushing sense of isolation that pervades our culture. But there is a catch: non-detachment *must* also be non-attachment, especially when it comes to building an awareness of other people and their feelings. Without maintaining a clear sense of separation at the same time as building the connections, there's a real danger of 'enmeshment' in everyone else – and a risk of losing our sense of self entirely.

I learnt this the hard way a long while back, as a student in London. I went on a strict vegetarian diet for a while, 'to improve my sensitivity' for some experiments I was doing – and couldn't work out why I felt so ill every day. The answer was that I'd succeeded rather too well! As part of the practice, I was reaching out, feeling

my connection with everyone else, even while sitting on a bus: so I was sharing that person's headache, the next one's sore knee, the next one's dislike of her job, and the man beside me's argument with his wife. Being 'attached' to everyone, I took it all on as part of me... and experienced it accordingly. *Not* a good idea: that experiment came to a very quick end! We'll come back to this issue in more detail later on.

The ordinariness of wyrd

It's important to realise that these experiences are nothing special. They may be weird, but so what? The wyrd itself is entirely ordinary – a part of the ordinary world that we've forgotten to see, perhaps, but ordinary nonetheless. Once we stop looking only at the separateness of things, and instead remember how to see in a way that's both non-attached *and* non-detached, the wyrd once more becomes part of our ordinary, everyday world – and we can then learn to work with it.

To not see wyrd, despite its effects being all around us, is a habit we all learn in this culture: and it's that, and the strange – literally 'weird' – feeling that we get when it forces its way into our awareness, that makes our experience of wyrd seem so 'extra-ordinary'. Like most habits, this one tends to block our ability to see what's going on around us – and blocks our awareness of wyrd, making its 'un-ordinariness' into a self-confirming myth.

One way to break the habit is to go back and deliberately re-view some of your experiences of wyrd as if they're part of your ordinary world. Those weird coincidences just become 'Normal Rules'; the weird antics of that old man become a normal reflection of your own fears, echoed by him through the wyrd. Allow these things to become normal, ordinary.

Seeing them this way, what do they now show you? What can you learn from them?

The wyrd is entirely ordinary: we usually don't see it because we've *learnt* to not see it. The only thing that's unusual about our usual experience of wyrd is that in some weird way it's managed to work its way through our defences against it! Once we re-learn how to see it, it sometimes seems surprising just how common it is, rather than how rare: but it shouldn't seem surprising at all, considering that wyrd is the interweaving of everything, everywhere, everywhen...

In particular, it's important to understand that having 'weird experiences' doesn't make *us* special – or anyone else, for that matter. It's an easy mistake to make. In the past, whole religions have been constructed from some minor interaction with the wyrd that's been exaggerated out of all proportion; in the present, we see it most often in fundamentalism and much of the New Age movement, and their obsessions with 'received truth' and the (egotistical) role of 'the Chosen Ones'. But once we get a grasp on the *ordinariness* of wyrd, this loses its entirely unwarranted glamour. Something's weird, you say: so what? It's nothing new. People have always experienced weird coincidences and 'channelled' information, people have always had strange meetings with strange entities: the history books are full of them. So it's nothing special: it's just wyrd, doing its usual weird interweavings; the 'strange entities' most often just 'id-entities with mistaken identities'. If we're ever in doubt, it's useful to remember the old Zen saying: "Chop wood; carry water. Enlightenment! Chop wood; carry water..."

Wyrd is nothing special: it's nothing to get frightened about, and in a way it's also nothing to get excited about. Sure, it's weird, but so what? – it is what it is, it does what it does. But it can be useful – if we know how to use it. And that, in the end, is all that matters.

What makes it hard is that wyrd so often speaks in metaphor. Those ‘received truths’ of which so much is made in New Age circles may be weird, for example, but in fact the interpretations are rarely wyrd enough! They’re too literal: they don’t allow for the twist that’s always there in our interactions with the wyrd. As with wants and needs, the metaphor – the twist – has to be translated before we can put the information to use.

To take one example, we could look at a fairly common experience, that of ‘past lives’. The experience – a very real and definitely weird experience – is of seeming to live in another body, another space, another time, at the same time as in this one: and often of recognising, in some weird way, other people you know in ‘this’ life. In some cases the information brought back can be linked to tangible archaeological finds, or other evidence that couldn’t have been known beforehand. So the literal interpretation is that it *is* a past life: one of many past lives, shared with the same people over and over again.

Have you had experiences that seem to be of ‘past lives’ – or ‘deja vu’, perhaps, which is sometimes interpreted that way? Remind yourself of them. Now re-view them as if they’re unusual but *ordinary*, just an ordinary aspect of the wyrd. What difference does that make?

Think for a moment, though: this literal interpretation depends on a very crude and linear concept of time. And the sheer number of reincarnated Napoleons and Virgin Marys and Atlantean priests and priestesses would make anyone suspicious... If the wyrd’s interweavings in time are as twisted as the sense of humour it certainly seems to have, we can safely assume that for a few of these experiences, the literal interpretation may well be correct – the experience is indeed of *some* past life, though not necessarily linked

to any present one other than through the wyrd. But in most cases – certainly from my own experiences – it’s wiser to interpret ‘past lives’ as mirrors of the *present*: reflections of the outside and inside, much as we saw in the cafe: the apparent past-life-as-Napoleon as an active metaphor for the thread of ‘Napoleon’ within us. Once we know how to interpret the metaphor, it can tell us much about ourselves that otherwise we probably wouldn’t see (or face): but first we have to understand that it *is* a metaphor, and interpret it accordingly.

It’s an ordinary experience; it’s also weird. The weird is ordinary; the ordinary is wyrd. Because it’s wyrd, there’s always a twist; yet for the same reason, there’s always a choice – one that relates not to some metaphoric past-life, but to the practical, tangible here-and-now. By reclaiming our awareness of wyrd, we can reclaim the choices that are concealed in those experiences – and begin once more to put them to use.

Do what you will

If we don’t see that we have a choice, then wyrd will always seem to be something that’s happening *to* us – rather than *with* us. Not seeing the choice, we don’t *have* a choice – and the whole weird happening is then ‘out of control’. And that’s frightening. So we tend to block wyrd out of our lives more and more – not realising that in reality it’s there to help us, if only we’d let it do so. The wyrd is the interweaving of everything, everywhere, everywhen: once we choose to look at what it shows us, we’ll find that somewhere in there will be not only what we need, but also the way to reach it. The choice is ours: we just have to remember, though, that there’s always that twist...

Rather than complaining about life or blaming it all on someone or something 'out there', consider yourself the weaver of it. Life as a cloth of choices, conscious and unconscious: which threads do you choose? They're all there on the wyrd. All you have to do is reach out and connect with them, and you'll find they're right there, in your hands... and then realise they've been there all along. What do you find?

Because of our interweavings with others' choices, and because of the twist that's always there, our experience is not solely our choice – and yet to a large degree that's exactly what it is. If we won't face the results directly, the wyrd will usually find a way to show us anyway: and then offer us the chance – but with a twist – to choose again. It can take more than a little courage to accept this! But it's important to acknowledge the choices we make: that's why it can be dangerous not to know what we truly want – dangerous for ourselves, and also dangerous for others, as we saw earlier with issues such as blame and boundaries.

Look back again at some of those weird experiences that you've remembered. Re-view them this time as being linked to choices of your own: were you wanting to meet that person, for example, or was there something you wanted to avoid? What were the threads of choice – or avoidance of choice – that made up the weaving of that incident?

The problem is that so many of our choices are unconscious: they're 'made for us' by habit, by fears, by default, by allowing others we assign power-under or power-over to make them on our behalf, and so on. And because they're unconscious choices, they're hard for us

to see – or often to accept as our own. By re-connecting with the wyrd, we find out what those choices are – and can thus reclaim the power to change them if we will.

Connecting with the wyrd is itself a choice, a deliberate act of will. We saw this earlier with affirmations: we make the choice – the written ‘affirmation of intent’ – as an act of will, a deliberate choice. We then let go, without letting go – non-attachment is also non-detachment – and trust the wyrd to work as it chooses. And the results can be magic.

Literally magic: it *is* magic, if we accept Crowley’s definition of magic as ‘the art and science of causing change in conformity with will’. In this sense, though, magic is best understood as a way of working on our beliefs, which changes our perceptions, which in turn changes our experience: so it’s more ‘the technology of inviting change’ than ‘the science of causing change’. We don’t *cause* change as such: we choose, and something happens. Not always what we *expect* to happen, though, because there’s always a twist...

And it’s magic in another, quite different sense. The dictionary may define magic as ‘illusion and trickery’, but that’s not what we mean when we describe some special occasion as ‘magical’! Magic is also joy... the discovery of joy: and that too can be found within the threads of wyrd.

Yet oddly enough, to reclaim that most true of all emotions is a deliberate choice – an act of will rather than an evasion of ‘won’t’. So to quote Crowley again, “‘Do what thou wilt’ shall be the whole of the law, ere it harm none”. The wyrd is yours, is ours, is everyone and everywhere. The choice is yours – do what you will!

...but be sure that you will it!

There is, of course, a catch: there’s always a twist somewhere! It’s not quite as simple as “do what you will”, because we’re also

responsible for the choices: it always loops round in the wyrd. That's one reason why magic is also defined as 'the art of the wise' – because we need to be wise to survive it! And the wyrd doesn't maintain a simple set of accounts, like some kind of 'double-entry life-keeping': it plays subtler games than that... "Do what you will", it might say: "but be *very* sure that you will it..."

When we talk in terms of magic here, we're not talking about the modern technological magic – the kind that does exactly what we tell it, and nothing else. (Though oh! how often have I heard the despairing cry: "this machine's done exactly what I told it to do – so what on earth did I tell it to do?") The wyrd is quite different, is something deeper, older: and while our usual everyday magic was made with reason, and for a reason, this older magic is simply a part of things. It is not *for* any purpose: it just *is*. "It is magic of the heart, not of the head", as the novelist Alan Garner once put it. "It can be felt, but not known; it may work to your need, but not to your command". And if we try to control it in our usual way, we'll soon find ourselves in deep trouble: we very quickly discover that it has a will of its own.

Once again re-view those weird experiences: but this time in the sense that 'the wyrd has a will of its own: it will answer to your need, but not to your command'. Remember the confusion between need and want – 'command' – that we looked at earlier: can you see in each experience the wyrd's response 'to your need but not to your command'? And which explains why what it gave you wasn't necessarily what you wanted...?

Whether it actually *does* have 'a will of its own' – or whether what we see is just the reflection of our own (child-*ish* rather than child-*like*) frustration – is a moot point: though since the wyrd is the

interweaving of everything, everywhere, everywhen, there's likely to be something resembling 'will' somewhere! But in any case it's long been understood that it's wise to treat it *as if* it has a will of its own – in much the same way as we declare affirmations 'as if' they're true, in order for them to become so.

We can't control the wyrd: we can work with it, but we can't fight *against* it. We can't fight the Fates... And we can't *command* it: if we treat it with disrespect, we may well find that "there are memories about the Old Magic that wake when it moves". Sometimes we get exactly what we ask for: so we need to be very careful for what we ask!

We can't control the wyrd: but we *can* direct our relationship with it, our path within and through it. It depends to a great deal on commitment, and on respect – both of the nature of wyrd, and of ourselves – and a willingness to start from where things *are*, rather than where we'd like them to be. Slowly, steadily, we discover that we can indeed do anything we choose. But this is wyrd that we're working with: so there's also always a twist... Do what you will, then: but be very sure that you will it!

25 A wyrd way of life

Slowly, subtly, the changes happen, like the changes in the seasons of the year. I still have no idea why I'm here: but now it doesn't seem to matter quite so much. I'm still on my own: but that's how it is, in this moment, at this time, and I find I *enjoy* it as such. "There's a whole in my bucket, dear Liza, dear Liza..."

Down by the river, I exchange smiles with a couple walking hand-in-hand down the path, as a cyclist whistles past. Sharing the quiet joys of a bright spring day: a real sense of power, of enjoyment – a very different kind of power, one that exists *because* it's shared, one that opens up a new sense of self, a new sense of choice. And although those plastic bags can still be seen entangled in the trees, new leaves have appeared, as if by magic, concealing most of them; and there's a blanket of springtime flowers on the river-bank, to remind me that nature *does* heal itself, without needing our active intervention to make it do so. Life *is*; and for now, right now, that seems to be enough.

Slowly, subtly, changes do happen. Somehow, in some weird way, life *does* get easier, gentler – yet I've done 'no-thing' to make it so. Slowly – though never steadily! – I notice that I *do* get what I need in life. Not necessarily always what I want, of course: yet over time, it becomes as interesting when I *don't* get what I want, as when I do.

I still have choices: in fact I sense that what happens to me is far more my choice than it's ever seemed before. It's not in my control: but then it never was. But I choose a direction: and something happens. There's always a choice, there's always a twist: so each happening is no longer either a success or a failure, but something that tells me more about who I am, more about my *choice* of who I am – and about my strange yet strengthening connection with the

web of wyrd. Weird...

We each choose our own wyrd: and regarding our lives as 'the way of wyrd' allows us to be more deeply connected to it, yet paradoxically far less vulnerable to its ebbs and flows. The changes we discover from making that change – working *with* life's weirdnesses – are very real: and yet most of them come from 'no-thing' more than a change in our point of view. And we discover, too, that as we change, the world changes with us: our own better experience leads to a better world for all. Given the choice – and since we *do* always have the choice – is that not what we'd prefer to choose?