

# The Tonal and the Nagual: The Totality of Oneself

Excerpted from *Tales of Power* by Carlos Castaneda.

Castaneda is in conversation with his teacher, don Juan Matus.

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Don Juan and I met again the next day at the same park around noon. He was still wearing his brown suit. We sat on a bench; he took off his coat, folded it very carefully, but with an air of supreme casualness, and laid it on the bench. His casualness was very studied and yet it was completely natural. I caught myself staring at him. He seemed to be aware of the paradox he was presenting to me and smiled. He straightened his necktie. He had on a beige long-sleeved shirt. It fitted him very well.

“I still have on my suit because I want to tell you something of great importance,” he said, patting me on the shoulder. “You had a good performance yesterday. Now it is time to come to some final agreements.”

He paused for a long-moment. He seemed to be preparing a statement. I had a strange feeling in my stomach. My immediate assumption was that he was going to tell me the *sorcerers' explanation*. He stood up a couple of times and paced back and forth in front of me, as if it were difficult to voice what he had in mind.

“Let's go to the restaurant across the street and have a bite to eat,” he finally said.

He unfolded his coat, and before he put it on he showed me that it was fully lined.

“It is made to order,” he said and smiled as if he were proud of it, as if it mattered.

“I have to call your attention to it, or you wouldn't notice it, and it is very important that you are aware of it. You are aware of everything only when you think you should be; the condition of a warrior, however, is to be aware of everything at all times.”

“My suit and all this paraphernalia is important because it represents my condition in life. Or rather, the condition of one of the two parts of my totality. This discussion has been pending. I feel that now is the time to have it. It has to be done properly, though, or it will never make sense.

I wanted my suit to give you the first clue. I think it has. Now is the time to talk, for in matters of this topic there is no complete understanding without talking.”

“What is the topic, don Juan?”

“The totality of oneself,” he said.

He stood up abruptly and led me to a restaurant in a large hotel across the street. A hostess with a rather unfriendly disposition gave us a table inside in a back corner. Obviously the choice places were around the windows.

I told don Juan that the woman reminded me of another hostess in a restaurant in Arizona where don Juan and I had once gone to eat, who had asked us, before she handed out the menu, if we had enough money to pay.

"I don't blame this poor woman either," don Juan said, as if sympathizing with her. "She too, like the other one, is afraid of Mexicans."

He laughed softly. A couple of people at the adjacent tables turned their heads around and looked at us.

Don Juan said that without knowing, or perhaps even in spite of herself, the hostess had given us the best table in the house, a table where we could talk and I could write to my heart's content.

I had just taken my writing pad out of my pocket and put it on the table when the waiter suddenly loomed over us. He also seemed to be in a bad mood. He stood over us with a challenging air.

Don Juan proceeded to order a very elaborate meal for himself. He ordered without looking at the menu, as if he knew it by heart. I was at a loss; the waiter had appeared unexpectedly and I had not had time to read the menu, so I told him that I would have the same.

Don Juan whispered in my ear, "I bet you that they don't have what I've ordered."

He stretched his arms and legs and told me to relax and sit comfortably because the meal was going to take forever to be prepared.

"You are at a very poignant crossroad," he said. "Perhaps the last one, and also perhaps the most difficult one to understand. Some of the things I am going to point out to you today will probably never be clear. They are not supposed to be clear anyway. So don't be embarrassed or discouraged. All of us are dumb creatures when we join the world of sorcery, and to join it doesn't in any sense insure us that we will change. Some of us remain dumb until the very end."

I liked it when he included himself among the idiots. I knew that he did not do it out of kindness, but as a didactic device.

"Don't fret if you don't make sense out of what I'm going to tell you," he continued. "Considering your temperament, I'm afraid that you might knock yourself out trying to understand. Don't! What I'm about to say is meant only to point out a direction."

I had a sudden feeling of apprehension. Don Juan's admonitions forced me into an endless speculation. He had warned me on other occasions, in very much the same fashion, and every time he had done so, what he was warning me about had turned out to be a devastating issue.

"It makes me very nervous when you talk to me this way," I said.

"I know it," he replied calmly. "I'm deliberately trying to get you on your toes. I need your attention, your undivided attention."

He paused and looked at me, I laughed nervously and involuntarily. I knew that he was stretching the dramatic possibilities of the situation as far as he could.

"I'm not telling you all this for effect," he said, as if he had read my thoughts. "I am simply giving you time to make the proper adjustments."

At that moment the waiter stopped at our table to announce that they did not have what we had ordered. Don Juan laughed out loud and ordered tortillas and beans. The waiter chuckled scornfully and said that they did not serve them and suggested steak or chicken. We settled for some soup.

We ate in silence. I did not like the soup and could not finish it, but don Juan ate all of his.

"I have put on my suit," he said all of a sudden, "in order to tell you about something, something you already know but which needs to be clarified if it is going to be effective. I have waited until now, because Genaro feels that you have to be not only willing to undertake the road of knowledge, but your efforts by themselves must be impeccable enough to make you worthy of that knowledge. You have done well. Now I will tell you the *sorcerers' explanation*."

He paused again, rubbed his cheeks and played with his tongue inside his mouth, as if he were feeling his teeth.

"I'm going to tell you about the *tonal* and the *nagual*" he said and looked at me piercingly.

This was the first time in our association that he had used those two terms. I was vaguely familiar with them through the anthropological literature on the cultures of central Mexico. I knew that the "tonal" (pronounced, toh-na'hl) was thought to be a kind of guardian spirit, usually an animal, that a child obtained at birth and with which he had intimate ties for the rest of his life. "Nagual" (pronounced, nah-wa'hl) was the name given to the animal into which sorcerers could allegedly transform themselves, or to the sorcerer that elicited such a transformation.

"This is my *tonal*" don Juan said, rubbing his hands on his chest.

"Your suit?"

"No. My person."

He pounded his chest and his thighs and the side of his ribs.

"My *tonal* is all this."

He explained that every human being had two sides, two separate entities, two counterparts which became operative at the moment of birth; one was called the "tonal" and the other the "nagual."

I told him what anthropologists knew about the two concepts. He let me speak without interrupting me.

"Well, whatever you may think you know about them is pure nonsense," he said. "I base this statement on the fact that whatever I'm telling you about the *tonal* and the *nagual* could not possibly have been told to you before. Any idiot would know that you know nothing about them, because in order to be acquainted with them, you would have to be a sorcerer and you aren't. Or you would've had to talk about them with a sorcerer and you haven't. So disregard everything you've heard before, because it is inapplicable."

"It was only a comment," I said.

He raised his brows in a comical gesture.

“Your comments are out of order,” he said. “This time I need your undivided attention, since I am going to acquaint you with the *tonal* and the *nagual*. Sorcerers have a special and unique interest in that knowledge. I would say that the *tonal* and the *nagual* are in the exclusive realm of men of knowledge. In your case, this is the lid that closes everything I have taught you. Thus, I have waited until now to talk about them.”

“The *tonal* is not an animal that guards a person. I would rather say that it is a guardian that could be represented as an animal. But that is not the important point.”

He smiled and winked at me.

“I’m using your own words now,” he said. “The *tonal* is the social person.”

He laughed, I supposed, at the sight of my bewilderment.

“The *tonal* is, rightfully so, a protector, a guardian – a guardian that most of the time turns into a guard.”

I fumbled with my notebook. I was trying to pay attention to what he was saying. He laughed and mimicked my nervous movements.

“The *tonal* is the organizer of the world,” he proceeded. “Perhaps the best way of describing its monumental work is to say that on its shoulders rests the task of setting the chaos of the world in order. It is not farfetched to maintain, as sorcerers do, that everything we know and do as men is the work of the *tonal*.”

“At this moment, for instance, what is engaged in trying to make sense out of our conversation is your *tonal*; without it there would be only weird sounds and grimaces and you wouldn’t understand a thing of what I’m saying.”

“I would say then that the *tonal* is a guardian that protects something priceless, our very being. Therefore, an inherent quality of the *tonal* is to be cagey and jealous of its doings. And since its doings are by far the most important part of our lives, it is no wonder that it eventually changes, in every one of us, from a guardian into a guard.”

He stopped and asked me if I had understood. I automatically nodded my head affirmatively and he smiled with an air of incredulity.

“A guardian is broad-minded and understanding,” he explained. “A guard, on the other hand, is a vigilante, narrow-minded and most of the time despotic. I say, then, that the *tonal* in all of us has been made into a petty and despotic guard when it should be a broad-minded guardian.”

I definitely was not following the trend of his explanation. I heard and wrote down every word and yet I seemed to be stuck with some internal dialogue of my own.

“It is very hard for me to follow your point,” I said.

“If you didn’t get hooked on talking to yourself you would have no quarrels,” he said cuttingly.

His remark threw me into a long explanatory statement. I finally caught myself and apologized for my insistence on defending myself.

He smiled and made a gesture that seemed to indicate that my attitude had not really annoyed him.

“The *tonal* is everything we are,” he proceeded. “Name it! Anything we have a word for is the *tonal*. And since the *tonal* is its own doings, then everything, obviously, has to fall under its domain.”

I reminded him that he had said that the *tonal* was the social person, a term which I myself had used with him to mean a human being as the end result of socialization processes. I pointed out that if the *tonal* was that product, it could not be everything, as he had said, because the world around us was not the product of socialization.

Don Juan reminded me that my argument had no basis for him, and that, long before, he had already made the point that there was no world at large but only a description of the world which we had learned to visualize and take for granted.

“The *tonal* is everything we know,” he said. “I think this in itself is enough reason for the *tonal* to be such an overpowering affair.”

He paused for a moment. He seemed to be definitely waiting for comments or questions, but I had none. Yet I felt obligated to voice a question and struggled to formulate an appropriate one. I failed. I felt that the admonitions with which he had opened our conversation had perhaps served as a deterrent to any inquiry on my part. I felt strangely numb. I could not concentrate and order my thoughts. In fact I felt and knew, without the shadow of a doubt, that I was incapable of thinking and yet I knew this without thinking, if that were at all possible.

I looked at don Juan. He was staring at the middle part of my body. He lifted his eyes and my clarity of mind returned instantly.

“The *tonal* is everything we know,” he repeated slowly. “And that includes not only us, as persons, but everything in our world. It can be said that the *tonal* is everything that meets the eye.”

“We begin to groom it at the moment of birth. The moment we take the first gasp of air we also breathe in power for the *tonal*. So, it is proper to say that the *tonal* of a human being is intimately tied to his birth.

“You must remember this point. It is of great importance in understanding all this. The *tonal* begins at birth and ends at death.”

I wanted to recapitulate all the points that he had made. I went as far as opening my mouth to ask him to repeat the salient points of our conversation, but to my amazement I could not vocalize my words. I was experiencing a most curious incapacity, my words were heavy and I had no control over that sensation.

I looked at don Juan to signal him that I could not talk. He was again staring at the area around my stomach.

He lifted his eyes and asked me how I felt. Words poured out of me as if I had been unplugged. I told him that I had been having the peculiar sensation of not being able to talk or think and yet my thoughts had been crystal clear.

“Your thoughts have been crystal clear?” he asked.

I realized then that the clarity had not pertained to my thoughts, but to my perception of the world.

“Are you doing something to me, don Juan?” I asked.

“I am trying to convince you that your comments are not necessary,” he said and laughed.

“You mean you don’t want me to ask questions?”

“No, no. Ask anything you want, but don’t let your attention waver.”

I had to admit that I had been distracted by the immensity of the topic.

“I still cannot understand, don Juan, what you mean by the statement that the *tonal* is everything,” I said after a moment’s pause.

“The *tonal* is what makes the world.”

“Is the *tonal* the creator of the world?”

Don Juan scratched his temples.

“The *tonal* makes the world only in a manner of speaking. It cannot create or change anything, and yet it makes the world because its function is to judge, and assess, and witness. I say that the *tonal* makes the world because it witnesses and assesses it according to *tonal* rules. In a very strange manner the *tonal* is a creator that doesn’t create a thing. In other words, the *tonal* makes up the rules by which it apprehends the world. So, in a manner of speaking, it creates the world.”

He hummed a popular tune, beating the rhythm with his fingers on the side of his chair. His eyes were shining; they seemed to sparkle. He chuckled, shaking his head.

“You’re not following me,” he said, smiling.

“I am. I have no problems,” I said, but I did not sound very convincing.

“The *tonal* is an island,” he explained. “The best way of describing it is to say that the *tonal* is this.”

He ran his hand over the table top.

“We can say that the *tonal* is like the top of this table. An island. And on this island we have everything. This island is, in fact, the world.”

“There is a personal *tonal* for every one of us, and there is a collective one for all of us at any given time, which we can call the *tonal* of the times.”

He pointed to the rows of tables in the restaurant.

“Look! Every table has the same configuration. Certain items are present on all of them. They are, however, individually different from each other; some tables are more crowded than others; they have different food on them, different plates, different atmosphere, yet we have to admit that all the tables in this restaurant are very alike. The same thing happens with the *tonal*. We can say that the *tonal* of the times is what makes us alike, in the same way it makes all the tables in this restaurant alike. Each table separately, nevertheless, is an individual case, just like the personal *tonal* of each of us. But the important factor to keep in mind is that everything we know about ourselves and about our world is on the island of the *tonal*. See what I mean?”

“If the *tonal* is everything we know about ourselves and our world, what, then, is the *nagual*?”

“The *nagual* is the part of us which we do not deal with at all.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“The *nagual* is the part of us for which there is no description – no words, no names, no feelings, no knowledge.”

“That’s a contradiction, don Juan. In my opinion if it can’t be felt or described or named, it cannot exist.”

“It’s a contradiction only in your opinion. I warned you before, don’t knock yourself out trying to understand this.”

“Would you say that the *nagual* is the mind?”

“No. The mind is an item on the table. The mind is part of the *tonal*. Let’s say that the mind is the chili sauce.”

He took a bottle of sauce and placed it in front of me.

“Is the *nagual* the soul?”

“No. The soul is also on the table. Let’s say that the soul is the ashtray.”

“Is it the thoughts of men?”

“No. Thoughts are also on the table. Thoughts are like the silverware.”

He picked up a fork and placed it next to the chili sauce and the ashtray.

“Is it a state of grace? Heaven?”

“Not that either. That, whatever it might be, is also part of the *tonal*. It is, let’s say, the napkin.”

I went on giving possible ways of describing what he was alluding to: pure intellect, psyche, energy, vital force, immortality, life principle. For each thing I named he found an item on the table to serve as a counterpart and shoved it in front of me, until he had all the objects on the table stashed in one pile.

Don Juan seemed to be enjoying himself immensely. He giggled and rubbed his hands every time I named another possibility.

"Is the *nagual* the Supreme Being, the Almighty, God?" I asked.

"No. God is also on the table. Let's say that God is the tablecloth."

He made a joking gesture of pulling the tablecloth in order to stack it up with the rest of the items he had put in front of me.

"But, are you saying that God does not exist?"

"No. I didn't say that. All I said was that the *nagual* was not God, because God is an item of our personal *tonal* and of the *tonal* of the times. The *tonal* is, as I've already said, everything we think the world is composed of, including God, of course. God has no more importance other than being a part of the *tonal* of our time."

"In my understanding, don Juan, God is everything. Aren't we talking about the same thing?"

"No. God is only everything you can think of, therefore, properly speaking, he is only another item on the island. God cannot be witnessed at will, he can only be talked about. The *nagual*, on the other hand, is at the service of the warrior. It can be witnessed, but it cannot be talked about."

"If the *nagual* is not any of the things I have mentioned," I said, "perhaps you can tell me about its location. Where is it?"

Don Juan made a sweeping gesture and pointed to the area beyond the boundaries of the table.

He swept his hand, as if with the back of it he were cleaning an imaginary surface that went beyond the edges of the table.

"The *nagual* is there," he said. "There, surrounding the island. The *nagual* is there, where *power* hovers."

"We sense, from the moment we are born, that there are two parts to us. At the time of birth, and for a while after, we are all *nagual*. We sense, then, that in order to function we need a counterpart to what we have. The *tonal* is missing and that gives us, from the very beginning, a feeling of incompleteness. Then the *tonal* starts to develop and it becomes utterly important to our functioning, so important that it opaques the shine of the *nagual*, it overwhelms it. From the moment we become all *tonal* we do nothing else but to increment that old feeling of incompleteness which accompanies us from the moment of our birth, and which tells us constantly that there is another part to give us completeness."

"From the moment we become all *tonal* we begin making pairs. We sense our two sides, but we always represent them with items of the *tonal*. We say that the two parts of us are the soul and the body. Or mind and matter. Or good and evil. God and Satan. We never realize, however, that we are merely pairing things on the island, very much like pairing coffee and tea, or bread and tortillas, or chili and mustard. I tell you, we are weird animals. We get carried away and in our madness we believe ourselves to be making perfect sense."



Don Juan stood up and addressed me as if he were an orator. He pointed his index finger at me and made his head shiver.

“Man doesn’t move between good and evil,” he said in a hilariously rhetorical tone, grabbing the salt and pepper shakers in both hands. “His true movement is between negativeness and positiveness.”

He dropped the salt and pepper and clutched a knife and fork.

“You’re wrong! There is no movement,” he continued as if he were answering himself. “Man is only mind!”

He took the bottle of sauce and held it up. Then he put it down.

“As you can see,” he said softly, “we can easily replace chili sauce for mind and end up saying, ‘Man is only chili sauce!’ Doing that won’t make us more demented than we already are.”

“I’m afraid I haven’t asked the right question,” I said. “Maybe we could arrive at a better understanding if I asked what one can specifically find in that area beyond the island?”

“There is no way of answering that. If I would say, Nothing, I would only make the *nagual* part of the *tonal*. All I can say is that there, beyond the island, one finds the *nagual*”

“But, when you call it the *nagual*, aren’t you also placing it on the island?”

“No. I named it only because I wanted to make you aware of it.”

“All right! But becoming aware of it is the step that has turned the *nagual* into a new item of my *tonal*”

“I’m afraid you do not understand. I have named the *tonal* and the *nagual* as a true pair. That is all I have done.”

He reminded me that once, while trying to explain to him my insistence on meaning, I had discussed the idea that children might not be capable of comprehending the difference between “father” and “mother” until they were quite developed in terms of handling meaning, and that they would perhaps believe that it might be that “father” wears pants and “mother” skirts, or other differences dealing with hairstyle, or size of body, or items of clothing.

“We certainly do the same thing with the two parts of us,” he said. “We sense that there is another side to us. But when we try to pin down that other side the *tonal* gets hold of the baton, and as a director it is quite petty and jealous. It dazzles us with its cunningness and forces us to obliterate the slightest inkling of the other part of the true pair, the *nagual*”.

As we left the restaurant I told don Juan that he had been correct in warning me about the difficulty of the topic, and that my intellectual prowess was inadequate to grasp his concepts and explanations. I suggested that perhaps if I should go to my hotel and read my notes, my comprehension of the subject might improve. He tried to put me at ease; he said that I was worrying about words. While he was speaking I experienced a shiver, and for an instant I sensed that there was indeed another area within me.

I mentioned to don Juan that I was having some inexplicable feelings. My statement apparently aroused his curiosity. I told him that I had had the same feelings before, and that they seemed to be momentary lapses, interruptions in my flow of awareness. They always manifested themselves as a jolt in my body followed by the sensation that I was suspended in something. We headed for downtown, walking leisurely. Don Juan asked me to relate all the details of my lapses, I had a hard time describing them, beyond the point of calling them moments of forgetfulness, or absent-mindedness, or not watching what I was doing.

He patiently rebuffed me. He pointed out that I was a demanding person, had an excellent memory, and was very careful in my actions. It had occurred to me at first that those peculiar lapses were associated with stopping the internal dialogue, but I also had had them when I had talked to myself extensively. They seemed to stem from an area independent of everything I knew.

Don Juan patted me on the back. He smiled with apparent delight.

“You’re finally beginning to make real connections,” he said.

I asked him to explain his cryptic statement, but he abruptly stopped our conversation and signaled me to follow him to a small park in front of a church.

“This is the end of our journey to downtown,” he said and sat down on a bench. “Right here we have an ideal spot to watch people. There are some who walk by on the street and others who come to church. From here we can see everyone.”

He pointed to a wide business street and to the gravel walk leading to the steps of the church.

Our bench was located midway between the church and the street.

“This is my very favorite bench,” he said, caressing the wood.

He winked at me and added with a grin, “It likes me. That’s why no one was sitting on it. It knew I was coming.”

“The bench knew that?”

“No! Not the bench. My *nagual*.”

“Does the *nagual* have consciousness? Is it aware of things?”

“Of course. It is aware of everything. That’s why I’m interested in your account. What you call lapses and feelings is the *nagual*. In order to talk about it we must borrow from the island of the *tonal*, therefore it is more convenient not to explain it but to simply recount its effects.”

I wanted to say something else about those peculiar feelings, but he hushed me.

“No more. Today is not the day of the *nagual*, today is the day of the *tonal*” he said. “I put on my suit because today I am all *tonal*.”

He stared at me. I was about to tell him that the subject was proving to be more difficult than anything he had ever explained to me; he seemed to have anticipated my words.

"It is difficult," he continued. "I know it. But considering that this is the final lid, the last stage of what I've been teaching you, it is not too farfetched to say that it envelops everything I mentioned since the first day we met."

We remained quiet for a long while. I felt that I had to wait for him to resume his explanation, but I had a sudden attack of apprehension and hurriedly asked, "Are the *nagual* and the *tonal* within ourselves?"

He looked at me piercingly.

"Very difficult question," he said. "You yourself would say that they are within ourselves. I myself would say that they are not, but neither of us would be right. The *tonal* of your time calls for you to maintain that everything dealing with your feelings and thoughts takes place within yourself. The sorcerers' *tonal* says the opposite, everything is outside. Who's right? No one. Inside, outside, it doesn't really matter."

I raised a point. I said that when he talked about the *tonal* and the *nagual* it sounded as if there was still a third part. He had said that the *tonal* "forces us" to perform acts. I asked him to tell me who he was referring to as being forced.

He did not answer me directly.

"To explain all this is not that simple," he said. "No matter how clever the checkpoints of the *tonal* are the fact of the matter is that the *nagual* surfaces. Its coming to the surface is always inadvertent, though. The *tonal's* great art is to suppress any manifestation of the *nagual* in such a manner that even if its presence should be the most obvious thing in the world, it is unnoticeable."

"For whom is it unnoticeable?"

He chuckled, shaking his head up and down. I pressed him for an answer.

"For the *tonal*" he said. "I'm speaking about it exclusively. I may go around in circles but that shouldn't surprise or annoy you. I warned you about the difficulty of understanding what I have to tell. I went through all that rigamarole because my *tonal* is aware that it is speaking about itself.

In other words, my *tonal* is using itself in order to understand the information I want your *tonal* to be clear about. Let's say that the *tonal*, since it is keenly aware of how taxing it is to speak of itself, has created the terms 'I,' 'myself,' and so forth as a balance and thanks to them it can talk with other *tonals*, or with itself, about itself."

"Now when I say that the *tonal* forces us to do something, I don't mean that there is a third party there. Obviously it forces itself to follow its own judgments."

"On certain occasions, however, or under certain special circumstances, something in the *tonal* itself becomes aware that there is more to us. It is like a voice that comes from the depths, the voice of the *nagual*. You see, the totality of ourselves is a natural condition which the *tonal* cannot obliterate altogether, and there are moments, especially in the life of a warrior, when the totality becomes apparent. At those moments one can surmise and assess what we really are."

"I was concerned with those jolts you have had, because that is the way the *nagual* surfaces. At those moments the *tonal* becomes aware of the totality of oneself. It is always a jolt because that awareness disrupts the lull. I call that awareness the totality of the being that is going to die. The idea is that at the moment of death the other member of the true pair, the *nagual*, becomes fully operative and the awareness and memories and perceptions stored in our calves and thighs, in our back and shoulders and neck, begin to expand and disintegrate. Like the beads of an endless broken necklace, they fall asunder without the binding force of life."

He looked at me. His eyes were peaceful. I felt ill at ease, stupid.

"The totality of ourselves is a very tacky affair," he said. "We need only a very small portion of it to fulfill the most complex tasks of life. Yet when we die, we die with the totality of ourselves. A sorcerer asks the question, 'If we're going to die with the totality of ourselves, why not, then, live with that totality?'"

He signaled me with his head to watch the scores of people that went by.

"They're all *tonal*" he said. "I am going to single some of them out so your *tonal* will assess them, and in assessing them it will assess itself."

He directed my attention to two old ladies that had emerged from the church. They stood at the top of the limestone steps for a moment and then began to walk down with infinite care, resting on every step.

"Watch those two women very carefully," he said. "But don't see them as persons, or as faces that hold things in common with us; see them as *tonals*"

The two women got to the bottom of the steps. They moved as if the rough gravel were marbles and they were about to roll and lose their balance on them. They walked arm in arm, propping each other up with the weight of their bodies.

"Look at them!" don Juan said in a low voice. "Those women are the best example of the most miserable *tonal* one can find."

I noticed that the two women were small-boned but fat. They were perhaps in their early fifties. They had a painful look in their faces, as if walking down the church steps had been beyond their strength.

They were in front of us; they vacillated for a moment and then they came to a halt. There was one more step on the gravel walk.

"Watch your step, ladies," don Juan shouted as he stood up dramatically.

The women looked at him, apparently confused by his sudden outburst.

"My mom broke her hip right there the other day," he added and dashed over to help them.

They thanked him profusely and he advised them that if they ever lost their balance and fell down, they had to remain motionless on the spot until the ambulance came. His tone was sincere and convincing. The women crossed themselves.

Don Juan sat down again. His eyes were beaming. He spoke softly.

“Those women are not that old and their bodies are not that weak, and yet they are decrepit.

Everything about them is dreary – their clothes, their smell, their attitude. Why do you think that’s so?”

“Maybe they were born that way,” I said.

“No one is born that way. We make ourselves that way. The *tonal* of those women is weak and timid.”

“I said that today was going to be the day of the *tonal*; I meant that today I want to deal with it exclusively. I also said that I had put on my suit for that specific purpose. With it I wanted to show you that a warrior treats his *tonal* in a very special manner. I’ve pointed out to you that my suit has been made to order and that everything I have on today fits me to perfection. It is not my vanity that I wanted to show, but my warrior’s spirit, my warrior’s *tonal*.”

“Those two women gave you your first view of the *tonal* today. Life can be as merciless with you as it is with them, if you are careless with your *tonal*. I put myself as the counterpoint. If you understand correctly I should not need to stress this point.”

I had a sudden attack of uncertainty and asked him to spell out what I should have understood.

I must have sounded desperate. He laughed out loud.

“Look at that young man in green pants and a pink shirt,” don Juan whispered, pointing to a very thin and very dark complexioned, sharp-featured young man who was standing almost in front of us.

He seemed to be undecided whether to go towards the church or towards the street. Twice he raised his hand in the direction of the church as though he were talking to himself and were about to start moving towards it. Then he stared at me with a blank expression.

“Look at the way he’s dressed,” don Juan said in a whisper. “Look at those shoes!”

The young man’s clothes were tattered and wrinkled, and his shoes were in absolute pieces.

“He’s obviously very poor,” I said.

“Is that all you can say about him?” he asked.

I enumerated a series of reasons that might have accounted for the young man’s shabbiness: poor health, bad luck, indolence, indifference to his personal appearance, or the chance that he may have just been released from prison.

Don Juan said that I was merely speculating, and that he was not interested in justifying anything by suggesting that the man was a victim of unconquerable forces.

“Maybe he’s a secret agent made to look like a bum,” I said jokingly.

The young man walked away towards the street with a disjointed gait.

"He's not made to look like a bum; he is a bum," don Juan said. "Look how weak his body is. His arms and legs are thin. He can hardly walk. No one can pretend to look that way. There is something definitely wrong with him, not his circumstances, though. I have to stress again that I want you to *see* that man as a *tonal*"

"What does it entail to *see* a man as a *tonal*?"

"It entails to cease judging him in a moral sense, or excusing him on the grounds that he is like a leaf at the mercy of the wind. In other words, it entails *seeing* a man without thinking that he is hopeless or helpless."

"You know exactly what I am talking about. You can assess that young man without condemning or forgiving him."

"He drinks too much," I said.

My statement was not volitional. I just made it without really knowing why. For an instant I even felt that someone standing behind me had voiced the words, I was moved to explain that my statement was another of my speculations.

"That was not the case," don Juan said. "Your tone of voice had a certainty that you lacked before. You didn't say, 'Maybe he's a drunkard.'"

I felt embarrassed although I could not exactly determine why. Don Juan laughed.

"You *saw* through the man," he said. "That was *seeing*. *Seeing* is like that. Statements are made with great certainty, and one doesn't know how it happened."

"You know that young man's *tonal* was shot, but you don't know how you know it."

I had to admit that somehow I had had that impression.

"You're right," don Juan said. "It doesn't really matter that he's young, he's as decrepit as the two women. Youth is in no way a barrier against the deterioration of the *tonal*."

"You thought that there might be a great many reasons for that man's condition. I find that there is only one, his *tonal*. It is not that his *tonal* is weak because he drinks; it is the other way around, he drinks because his *tonal* is weak. That weakness forces him to be what he is. But the same thing happens to all of us, in one form or another."

"But aren't you also justifying his behavior by saying that it's his *tonal*?"

"I'm giving you an explanation that you have never encountered before. It is not a justification or a condemnation, though. That young man's *tonal* is weak and timid. And yet he's not unique. All of us are more or less in the same boat."

At that moment a very large man passed in front of us heading towards the church. He was wearing an expensive dark gray business suit and was carrying a briefcase. The collar of his shirt was unbuttoned and his necktie loose. He was sweating profusely. He had a very light complexion which made the perspiration all the more obvious.

"Watch him!" don Juan ordered me.

The man's steps were small but heavy. There was a wobbling quality to his walking. He did not go up to the church; he circumvented it and disappeared behind it.

“There is no need to treat the body in such an awful manner,” don Juan said with a note of scorn. “But the sad fact is that all of us have learned to perfection how to make our *tonal* weak. I have called that indulging.”

He put his hand on my notebook and did not let me write any more. His rationale was that as long as I kept on taking notes I was incapable of concentrating. He suggested I should relax, shut off the internal dialogue and let go, merging with the person being observed.

I asked him to explain what he meant by “merging.” He said there was no way to explain it, that it was something that the body felt or did when put in observational contact with other bodies. He then clarified the issue by saying that in the past he had called that process *seeing*, and that it consisted of a lull of true silence within, followed by an outward elongation of something in the self, an elongation that met and merged with the other body, or with anything within one’s field of awareness.

At that point I wanted to get back to my writing pad, but he stopped me and began to single out different people from the crowd that passed by.

He pointed out dozens of persons covering a wide range of types among men, women and children of various ages. Don Juan said that he had selected persons whose weak *tonal* could fit into a categorization scheme, and thus he had acquainted me with a preconceived variety of indulging.

I did not remember all the people he had pointed out and discussed. I complained that if I had taken notes I could have at least sketched out the intricacies of his schemata on indulging. As it was he did not want to repeat it or perhaps he did not remember it either.

He laughed and said that he did not remember it, because in the life of a sorcerer it was the *nagual* that was accountable for creativity.

He looked at the sky and said that it was getting late, and that from that moment on we were going to change direction. Instead of weak *tonals* we were going to wait for the appearance of a “proper *tonal*.” He added that only a warrior had a “proper *tonal*,” and that the average man, at best, could have a “right *tonal*.”

After a few minutes’ wait he slapped his thigh and chuckled.

“Look who’s coming now,” he said, pointing to the street with a movement of his chin. “It is as if they were made to order.”

I saw three male Indians approaching. They had on some short brown woolen ponchos, white pants that came to their mid calf, long-sleeved white tops, dirty worn-out sandals and old straw hats. Each of them carried a bundle tied to his back.

Don Juan stood up and went to meet them. He spoke to them. They seemed surprised and surrounded him. They smiled at him. He was apparently telling them something about me; the three of them turned around and smiled at me. They were about ten or twelve feet away; I listened carefully but I could not hear what they were saying.

Don Juan reached in his pocket and handed them some bills. They appeared to be pleased; they moved their feet nervously. I liked them very much. They looked like children. All of them had small white teeth and very pleasing mild features. One, by all appearances the oldest, had whiskers. His eyes were tired but very kind. He took off his hat and came closer to the bench. The others followed him. The three of them greeted me in unison. We shook hands. Don Juan told me to give them some money. They thanked me and after a polite silence they said good-bye. Don Juan sat back down on the bench and we watched them disappear in the crowd.

I told don Juan that for some strange reason I had liked them very much.

"It isn't so strange," he said. "You must've felt that their *tonal* is just right. It is right, but not for our time."

"You probably felt they were like children. They are. And that is very tough. I understand them better than you, thus I couldn't help but feel a tinge of sadness. Indians are like dogs, they have nothing. But that is the nature of their fortune and I shouldn't feel sad. My sadness, of course, is my own way of indulging."

"Where are they from, don Juan?"

"From the Sierras. They've come here to seek their fortune. They want to become merchants. They're brothers. I told them that I also came from the Sierras and I'm a merchant myself. I said that you were my partner. The money we gave them was a token; a warrior should give tokens like that all the time. They no doubt need the money, but need should not be an essential consideration for a token. The thing to look for is feeling. I personally was moved by those three."

"Indians are the losers of our time. Their downfall began with the Spaniards and now under the reign of their descendants the Indians have lost everything. It is not an exaggeration to say that the Indians have lost their *tonal*"

"Is that a metaphor, don Juan?"

"No. It is a fact. The *tonal* is very vulnerable. It cannot withstand maltreatment. The white man, from the day he set foot on this land, has systematically destroyed not only the Indian *tonal* of the time, but also the personal *tonal* of every Indian. One can easily surmise that for the poor average Indian the reign of the white man has been sheer hell. And yet the irony is that for another kind of Indian it has been sheer bliss."

"Who are you talking about? What kind of Indian is that?"

"The sorcerer. For the sorcerer the Conquest was the challenge of a lifetime. They were the only ones who were not destroyed by it but adapted to it and used it to their ultimate advantage."

"How was that possible, don Juan? I was under the impression that the Spaniards left no stone unturned."

"Let's say that they turned over all the stones that were within the limits of their own *tonal*. In the Indian life, however, there were things that were incomprehensible to the white man; those things he did not even notice. Perhaps it was the sheer luck of the



sorcerers, or perhaps it was their knowledge that saved them. After the *tonal* of the time and the personal *tonal* of every Indian was obliterated, the sorcerers found themselves holding on to the only thing left uncontested, the *nagual*. In other words, their *tonal* took refuge in their *nagual*. This couldn't have happened had it not been for the excruciating conditions of a vanquished people. The men of knowledge of today are the product of those conditions and are the ultimate connoisseurs of the *nagual* since they were left there thoroughly alone. There, the white man has never ventured. In fact, he doesn't even have the idea it exists."

I felt compelled at that point to present an argument. I sincerely contended that in European thought we had accounted for what he called the *nagual*. I brought in the concept of the Transcendental Ego, or the unobserved observer present in all our thoughts, perceptions and feelings. I explained to don Juan that the individual could perceive or intuit himself, as a self, through the Transcendental Ego, because this was the only thing capable of judgment, capable of disclosing reality within the realm of its consciousness.

Don Juan was unruffled. He laughed.

"Disclosing reality," he said, mimicking me. "That's the *tonal*."

I argued that the *tonal* may be called the Empirical Ego found in one's passing stream of consciousness or experience, while the Transcendental Ego was found behind that stream.

"Watching, I suppose," he said mockingly.

"That's right. Watching itself," I said.

"I hear you talking," he said. "But you're saying nothing. The *nagual* is not experience or intuition or consciousness. Those terms and everything else you may care to say are only items on the island of the *tonal*. The *nagual*, on the other hand, is only effect. The *tonal* begins at birth and ends at death, but the *nagual* never ends. The *nagual* has no limit. I've said that the *nagual* is where *power* hovers; that was only a way of alluding to it. By reasons of its effect, perhaps the *nagual* can be best understood in terms of *power*. For instance, when you felt numb and couldn't talk earlier today, I was actually soothing you; that is, my *nagual* was acting upon you."

"How was that possible, don Juan?"

"You won't believe this, but no one knows how. All I know is that I wanted your undivided attention and then my *nagual* went to work on you. I know that much because I can witness its effect, but I don't know how it works."

He was quiet for a while. I wanted to keep on the same topic. I attempted to ask a question; he silenced me.

"One can say that the *nagual* accounts for creativity," he finally said and looked at me piercingly. "The *nagual* is the only part of us that can create."

He remained quiet, looking at me. I felt he was definitely leading me into an area I had wished he would elucidate further. He had said that the *tonal* did not create anything,

but only witnessed and assessed. I asked how he explained the fact that we construct superb structures and machines.

“That’s not creativity,” he said. “That’s only molding. We can mold anything with our hands, personally or in conjunction with the hands of other *tonals*. A group of *tonals* can mold anything, superb structures as you said.”

“But what’s creativity then, don Juan?”

He stared at me, squinting his eyes. He chuckled softly, lifted his right hand over his head and twisted his wrist with a sharp jerk, as if he were turning a door knob.

“Creativity is this,” he said and brought his hand with a cupped palm to the level of my eyes.

It took me an incredibly long time to focus my eyes on his hand. I felt that a transparent membrane was holding my whole body in a fixed position and that I had to break it in order to place my sight on his hand.

I struggled until beads of perspiration ran into my eyes. Finally I heard or felt a pop and my eyes and head jerked free.

On his right palm there was the most curious rodent I had ever seen. It looked like a bushytailed squirrel. The tail, however, was more like a porcupine’s. It had stiff quills.

“Touch it!” don Juan said softly.

I automatically obeyed him and ran my finger on its soft back. Don Juan brought his hand closer to my eyes and then I noticed something that threw me into nervous spasms. The squirrel had eyeglasses and big teeth.

“It looks like a Japanese,” I said and began to laugh hysterically.

The rodent then started to grow in don Juan’s palm. And while my eyes were still filled with tears of laughter, the rodent became so enormous that it disappeared. It literally went out of the frame of my vision. It happened so rapidly that I was caught in the middle of a spasm of laughter.

When I looked again, or when I wiped my eyes and focused them properly, I was looking at don Juan. He was sitting on the bench and I was standing in front of him, although I did not remember having stood up.

For a moment my nervousness was uncontainable. Don Juan calmly got up, forced me to sit, propped my chin between the bicep and forearm of his left arm and hit me on the very top of my head with the knuckles of his right hand. The effect was like the jolt of an electric current. It calmed me down immediately.

There were so many things that I wanted to ask. But my words could not wade through all those thoughts. I then became keenly aware that I had lost control over my vocal cords. I did not want to struggle to speak, however, and leaned against the back of the bench. Don Juan said forcefully that I had to pull myself together and stop indulging. I felt a bit dizzy. He imperatively ordered me to write my notes and handed me my pad and pencil after picking them up from underneath the bench.

I made a supreme effort to say something and again I had the clear sensation that a membrane was enveloping me. I puffed and groaned for a moment, while don Juan laughed, until I heard or felt another pop.

I began to write immediately. Don Juan spoke as if he were dictating to me.

“One of the acts of a warrior is never to let anything affect him,” he said. “Thus, a warrior may be seeing the devil himself, but he won’t let anyone know that. The control of a warrior has to be impeccable.”

He waited until I had finished writing and then asked me laughingly, “Did you get all that?”

I suggested that we should go to a restaurant and have dinner. I was famished. He said that we had to stay until the “proper *tonal*” appeared. He added in a serious tone that if the “proper *tonal*” did not come that day we had to remain on the bench until it cared to show up.

“What is a proper *tonal*?” I asked.

“A *tonal* that is just right, balanced and harmonious. You are supposed to find one today, or rather your *power* is supposed to bring one to us.”

“But how can I tell it apart from other *tonals*?”

“Never mind that. I will point it out to you.”

“What is it like, don Juan?”

“Hard to tell. It depends on you. This is a show for you, therefore you will set up those conditions yourself.”

“How?”

“I don’t know that. Your *power*, your *nagual*, will do that.

“There are, roughly speaking, two sides to every *tonal*. One is the outer part, the fringe, the surface of the island. That’s the part related to action and acting, the rugged side. The other part is the decision and judgment, the inner *tonal*, softer, more delicate and more complex.

“The proper *tonal* is a *tonal* where the two levels are in perfect harmony and balance.”

Don Juan stopped talking. It was fairly dark by then and I had a hard time taking notes. He told me to stretch and relax. He said that it had been quite an exhausting day but very prolific and that he was sure the proper *tonal* would show up.

Dozens of people went by. We sat in a relaxed silence for ten or fifteen minutes. Then don Juan stood up abruptly.

“By golly you’ve done it! Look what’s coming there. A girl!”

He pointed with a nod of his head to a young woman who was crossing the park and was approaching the vicinity of our bench. Don Juan said that that young woman was the

proper *tonal* and that if she would stop to talk to either one of us it would be an extraordinary omen and we would have to do whatever she wanted.

I could not clearly distinguish the young woman's features, although there was still enough light. She came within a couple of feet but went by without looking at us. Don Juan ordered me in a whisper to get up and go talk to her.

I ran after her and asked for directions. I got very close to her. She was young, perhaps in her mid-twenties, of medium height, very attractive and well-groomed. Her eyes were clear and peaceful. She smiled at me as I spoke. There was something winning about her. I liked her as much as I had liked the three Indians.

I went back to the bench and sat down.

"Is she a warrior?" I asked.

"Not quite," don Juan said. "Your *power* is not that keen yet to bring a warrior. But she's a just right *tonal*. One that could turn into a proper *tonal*. Warriors come from that stock."

His statements aroused my curiosity. I asked him if women could be warriors. He looked at me, apparently baffled by my question.

"Of course they can," he said, "and they are even better equipped for the path of knowledge than men. But then men are a bit more resilient. I would say, however, that, all in all, women have a slight advantage."

I said that it puzzled me that we had never talked about women in relation to his knowledge.

"You're a man," he said, "therefore I use the masculine gender when I talk to you. That's all. The rest is the same."

I wanted to question him further but he made a gesture to close the topic. He looked up. The sky was almost black. The banks of clouds looked extremely dark. There were still, however, some areas where the clouds were slightly orange.

"The end of the day is your best time," don Juan said. "The appearance of that young woman at the very edge of the day is an omen. We were talking about the *tonal*, therefore it is an omen about your *tonal*."

"What does the omen mean, don Juan?"

"It means that you have very little time left to organize your arrangements. Any arrangements that you might have constructed have to be viable arrangements because you don't have time to make new ones. Your arrangements must work now, or they are not arrangements at all."

"I suggest that when you go back home you check your lines and make sure they are strong. You will need them."

"What's going to happen to me, don Juan?"

“Years ago you bid for *power*. You have followed the hardships of learning faithfully, without fretting or rushing. You are now at the edge of the day.”

“What does that mean?”

“For a proper *tonal* everything on the island of the *tonal* is a challenge. Another way of saying it is that for a warrior everything in this world is a challenge. The greatest challenge of all, of course, is his bid for *power*. But *power* comes from the *nagual*, and when a warrior finds himself at the edge of the day it means that the hour of the *nagual* is approaching, the warrior’s hour of *power*.”

“I still don’t understand the meaning of all this, don Juan. Does it mean that I am going to die soon?”

“If you’re stupid, you will,” he retorted cuttingly. “But putting it in milder terms, it means that you’re about to shiver in your pants. You bid for *power* once and that bidding is irreversible. I won’t say that you’re about to fulfill your destiny, because there is no destiny. The only thing that one can say then is that you’re about to fulfill your *power*. The omen was clear. That young woman came to you at the edge of the day. You have little time left, and none of it for crap. A fine state. I would say that the best of us always comes out when we are against the wall, when we feel the sword dangling overhead. Personally, I wouldn’t have it any other way.”

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