

**“Fear of knowledge is natural; all of us experience it, and there is nothing we can do about it. But no matter how frightening learning is, it is more terrible to think of a man without knowledge.”**

**—don Juan Matus**

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**CARLOS  
CASTANEDA**

**THE FIRE  
FROM  
WITHIN**

**W**

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I WANT TO EXPRESS MY ADMIRATION AND GRATITUDE TO A MASTERFUL TEACHER, H.Y.L., FOR HELPING ME RESTORE MY ENERGY, AND FOR TEACHING ME AN ALTERNATE WAY TO PLENITUDE AND WELL-BEING.



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# Foreword

I have written extensive descriptive accounts of my apprentice relationship with a Mexican Indian sorcerer, don Juan Matus. Due to the foreignness of the concepts and practices don Juan wanted me to understand and internalize, I have had no other choice but to render his teachings in the form of a narrative, a narrative of what happened, as it happened.

The organization of don Juan's instruction was predicated on the idea that man has two types of awareness. He labeled them the right side and the left side. He described the first as the state of normal awareness necessary for everyday life. The second, he said, was the mysterious side of man, the state of awareness needed to function as sorcerer and seer. Don Juan divided his instruction, accordingly, into teachings for the right side and teachings for the left side.

He conducted his teachings for the right side when I was in my state of normal awareness, and I have described those teachings in all my accounts. In my state of normal awareness don Juan told me that he was a sorcerer. He even introduced me to another sorcerer, don Genaro Flores, and because of the na-

ture of our association, I logically concluded that they had taken me as their apprentice.

That apprenticeship ended with an incomprehensible act that both don Juan and don Genaro led me to perform. They made me jump from the top of a flat mountain into an abyss.

I have described in one of my accounts what took place on that mountaintop. The last drama of don Juan's teachings for the right side was played there by don Juan himself; don Genaro; two apprentices, Pablito and Nestor; and me. Pablito, Nestor, and I jumped from that mountaintop into an abyss.

For years afterward I thought that just my total trust in don Juan and don Genaro had been sufficient to obliterate all my rational fears on facing actual annihilation. I know now that it wasn't so; I know that the secret was in don Juan's teachings for the left side, and that it took tremendous discipline and perseverance for don Juan, don Genaro, and their companions to conduct those teachings.

It has taken me nearly ten years to recollect what exactly took place in his teachings for the left side that led me to be so willing to perform such an incomprehensible act: jumping into an abyss.

It was in his teachings for the left side that don Juan let on what he, don Genaro, and their companions were really doing to me, and who they were. They were not teaching me sorcery, but how to master three aspects of an ancient knowledge they possessed: awareness, *stalking*, and *intent*. And they were not sorcerers; they were seers. And don Juan was not only a seer, but also a nagual.

Don Juan had already explained to me, in his teachings for the right side, a great deal about the nagual and about *seeing*. I had understood *seeing* to be the capacity of human beings to enlarge their perceptual field until they are capable of assessing not only the outer appearances but the essence of everything. He

had also explained that seers *see* man as a field of energy, which looks like a luminous egg. The majority of people, he said, have their fields of energy divided into two parts. A few men and women have four or sometimes three parts. Because these people are more resilient than the average man, they can become naguals after learning to *see*.

In his teachings for the left side, don Juan explained to me the intricacies of *seeing* and of being a nagual. To be a nagual, he said, is something more complex and far-reaching than being merely a more resilient man who has learned to *see*. To be a nagual entails being a leader, being a teacher and a guide.

As a nagual, don Juan was the leader of a group of seers known as the nagual's party, which was composed of eight female seers, Cecilia, Delia, Hermelinda, Carmela, Nelida, Florinda, Zuleica, and Zoila; three male seers, Vicente, Silvio Manuel, and Genaro; and four couriers or messengers, Emilito, John Tuma, Marta, and Teresa.

In addition to leading the nagual's party, don Juan also taught and guided a group of apprentice seers known as the new nagual's party. It consisted of four young men, Pablito, Nestor, Eligio, and Benigno, along with five women, Soledad, la Gorda, Lidia, Josefina, and Rosa. I was the nominal leader of the new nagual's party together with the nagual woman Carol.

In order for don Juan to impart to me his teachings for the left side it was necessary for me to enter into a unique state of perceptual clarity known as heightened awareness. Throughout the years of my association with him, he had me repeatedly shift into such a state by means of a blow that he delivered with the palm of his hand on my upper back.

Don Juan explained that in a state of heightened awareness apprentices can behave almost as naturally as in everyday life, but can bring their minds to focus on anything with uncommon force and clarity. Yet, an

inherent quality of heightened awareness is that it is not susceptible to normal recall. What transpires in such a state becomes part of the apprentice's everyday awareness only through a staggering effort of recovery.

My interaction with the nagual's party was an example of this difficulty of recall. With the exception of don Genaro, I had contact with them only when I was in a state of heightened awareness; hence in my normal everyday life I could not remember them, not even as vague characters in dreams. The manner in which I met with them every time was almost a ritual. I would drive to don Genaro's house in a small town in the southern part of Mexico. Don Juan would join us immediately and the three of us would then get busy with don Juan's teachings for the right side. After that, don Juan would make me change levels of awareness and then we would drive to a larger, nearby town where he and the other fifteen seers were living.

Every time I entered into heightened awareness I could not cease marveling at the difference between my two sides. I always felt as if a veil had been lifted from my eyes, as if I had been partially blind before and now I could see. The freedom, the sheer joy that used to possess me on those occasions cannot be compared with anything else I have ever experienced. Yet at the same time, there was a frightening feeling of sadness and longing that went hand in hand with that freedom and joy. Don Juan had told me that there is no completeness without sadness and longing, for without them there is no sobriety, no kindness. Wisdom without kindness, he said, and knowledge without sobriety are useless.

The organization of his teachings for the left side also required that don Juan, together with some of his fellow seers, explain to me the three facets of their knowledge: the mastery of awareness, the mastery of *stalking*, and the mastery of *intent*.

This work deals with the mastery of awareness, which is part of his total set of teachings for the left side; the set he used in order to prepare me for performing the astonishing act of jumping into an abyss.

Due to the fact that the experiences I narrate here took place in heightened awareness, they cannot have the texture of daily life. They are lacking in worldly context, although I have tried my best to supply it without fictionalizing it. In heightened awareness one is minimally conscious of the surroundings, because one's total concentration is taken by the details of the action at hand.

In this case the action at hand was, naturally, the elucidation of the mastery of awareness. Don Juan understood the mastery of awareness as being the modern-day version of an extremely old tradition, which he called the tradition of the ancient Toltec seers.

Although he felt that he was inextricably linked to that old tradition, he considered himself to be one of the seers of a new cycle. When I asked him once what was the essential character of the seers of the new cycle, he said that they are the warriors of total freedom, that they are such masters of awareness, *stalking*, and *intent* that they are not caught by death, like the rest of mortal men, but choose the moment and the way of their departure from this world. At that moment they are consumed by a fire from within and vanish from the face of the earth, free, as if they had never existed.



**THE FIRE  
FROM  
WITHIN**





# 1

## *The New Seers*

I had arrived in the city of Oaxaca in southern Mexico on my way to the mountains to look for don Juan. On my way out of town in the early morning, I had the good sense to drive by the main square, and there I found him sitting on his favorite bench, as if waiting for me to go by.

I joined him. He told me that he was in the city on business, that he was staying at a local boardinghouse, and that I was welcome to stay with him because he had to remain in town for two more days. We talked for a while about my activities and problems in the academic world.

As was customary with him, he suddenly hit me on my back when I least expected it, and the blow shifted me into a state of heightened awareness.

We sat in silence for a very long time. I anxiously waited for him to begin talking, yet when he did, he caught me by surprise.

“Ages before the Spaniards came to Mexico,” he said, “there were extraordinary Toltec seers, men capable of inconceivable deeds. They were the last link in a chain of knowledge that extended over thousands of years.

“The Toltec seers were extraordinary men—powerful sorcerers, somber, driven men who unraveled mysteries and possessed secret knowledge that they used to influence and victimize people by fixating the awareness of their victims on whatever they chose.”

He stopped talking and looked at me intently. I felt that he was waiting for me to ask a question, but I did not know what to ask.

“I have to emphasize an important fact,” he continued, “the fact that those sorcerers knew how to fixate the awareness of their victims. You didn’t pick up on that. When I mentioned it, it didn’t mean anything to you. That’s not surprising. One of the hardest things to acknowledge is that awareness can be manipulated.”

I felt confused. I knew that he was leading me toward something. I felt a familiar apprehension—the same feeling I had whenever he began a new round of his teachings.

I told him how I felt. He smiled vaguely. Usually when he smiled he exuded happiness; this time he was definitely preoccupied. He seemed to consider for a moment whether or not to go on talking. He stared at me intently again, slowly moving his gaze over the entire length of my body. Then, apparently satisfied, he nodded and said that I was ready for my final exercise, something that all warriors go through before considering themselves fit to be on their own. I was more mystified than ever.

“We are going to be talking about awareness,” he continued. “The Toltec seers knew the art of handling awareness. As a matter of fact, they were the supreme masters of that art. When I say that they knew how to fixate the awareness of their victims, I mean that their secret knowledge and secret practices allowed them to pry open the mystery of being aware. Enough of their practices have survived to this day, but fortunately in a modified form. I say fortunately because

those activities, as I will explain, did not lead the ancient Toltec seers to freedom, but to their doom.”

“Do you know those practices yourself?” I asked.

“Why, certainly,” he replied. “There is no way for us not to know those techniques, but that doesn’t mean that we practice them ourselves. We have other views. We belong to a new cycle.”

“But you don’t consider yourself a sorcerer, don Juan, do you?” I asked.

“No, I don’t,” he said. “I am a warrior who *sees*. In fact, all of us are *los nuevos videntes*—the new seers. The old seers were the sorcerers.

“For the average man,” he continued, “sorcery is a negative business, but it is fascinating all the same. That’s why I encouraged you, in your normal awareness, to think of us as sorcerers. It’s advisable to do so. It serves to attract interest. But for us to be sorcerers would be like entering a dead-end street.”

I wanted to know what he meant by that, but he refused to talk about it. He said that he would elaborate on the subject as he proceeded with his explanation of awareness.

I asked him then about the origin of the Toltecs’ knowledge.

“The way the Toltecs first started on the path of knowledge was by eating power plants,” he replied. “Whether prompted by curiosity, or hunger, or error, they ate them. Once the power plants had produced their effects on them, it was only a matter of time before some of them began to analyze their experiences. In my opinion, the first men on the path of knowledge were very daring, but very mistaken.”

“Isn’t all this a conjecture on your part, don Juan?”

“No, this is no conjecture of mine. I am a seer, and when I focus my *seeing* on that time I know everything that took place.”

“Can you *see* the details of things of the past?” I asked.

“*Seeing* is a peculiar feeling of knowing,” he replied, “of knowing something without a shadow of doubt. In this case, I know what those men did, not only because of my *seeing*, but because we are so closely bound together.”

Don Juan explained then that his use of the term “Toltec” did not correspond to what I understood it to mean. To me it meant a culture, the Toltec Empire. To him, the term “Toltec” meant “man of knowledge.”

He said that in the time he was referring to, centuries or perhaps even millennia before the Spanish Conquest, all such men of knowledge lived within a vast geographical area, north and south of the valley of Mexico, and were employed in specific lines of work: curing, bewitching, storytelling, dancing, being an oracle, preparing food and drink. Those lines of work fostered specific wisdom, wisdom that distinguished them from average men. These Toltecs, moreover, were also people who fitted into the structure of everyday life, very much as doctors, artists, teachers, priests, and merchants in our own time do. They practiced their professions under the strict control of organized brotherhoods and became proficient and influential, to such an extent that they even dominated groups of people who lived outside the Toltecs’ geographical regions.

Don Juan said that after some of these men had finally learned to *see*—after centuries of dealing with power plants—the most enterprising of them then began to teach other men of knowledge how to *see*. And that was the beginning of their end. As time passed, the number of seers increased, but their obsession with what they *saw*, which filled them with reverence and fear, became so intense that they ceased to be men of knowledge. They became extraordinarily proficient in *seeing* and could exert great control over the strange worlds they were witnessing. But

it was to no avail. *Seeing* had undermined their strength and forced them to be obsessed with what they *saw*.

“There were seers, however, who escaped that fate,” don Juan continued, “great men who, in spite of their *seeing*, never ceased to be men of knowledge. Some of them endeavored to use *seeing* positively and to teach it to their fellow men. I’m convinced that under their direction, the populations of entire cities went into other worlds and never came back.

“But the seers who could only *see* were fiascos, and when the land where they lived was invaded by a conquering people they were as defenseless as everyone else.

“Those conquerors,” he went on, “took over the Toltec world—they appropriated everything—but they never learned to *see*.”

“Why do you think they never learned to *see*?” I asked.

“Because they copied the procedures of the Toltec seers without having the Toltecs’ inner knowledge. To this day there are scores of sorcerers all over Mexico, descendants of those conquerors, who follow the Toltec ways but don’t know what they’re doing, or what they’re talking about, because they’re not seers.”

“Who were those conquerors, don Juan?”

“Other Indians,” he said. “When the Spaniards came, the old seers had been gone for centuries, but there was a new breed of seers who were starting to secure their place in a new cycle.”

“What do you mean, a new breed of seers?”

“After the world of the first Toltecs was destroyed, the surviving seers retreated and began a serious examination of their practices. The first thing they did was to establish *stalking*, *dreaming*, and *intent* as the key procedures and to deemphasize the use of power plants; perhaps that gives us a hint as to what really happened to them with power plants.

“The new cycle was just beginning to take hold when the Spanish conquerors swept the land. Fortunately, by that time the new seers were thoroughly prepared to face that danger. They were already consummate practitioners of the art of *stalking*.”

Don Juan said that the subsequent centuries of subjugation provided for these new seers the ideal circumstances in which to perfect their skills. Oddly enough, it was the extreme rigor and coercion of that period that gave them the impetus to refine their new principles. And, owing to the fact that they never divulged their activities, they were left alone to map their findings.

“Were there a great many new seers during the Conquest?” I asked.

“At the beginning there were. Near the end there were only a handful. The rest had been exterminated.”

“What about in our day, don Juan?” I asked.

“There are a few. They are scattered all over, you understand.”

“Do you know them?” I asked.

“Such a simple question is the hardest one to answer,” he replied. “There are some we know very well. But they are not exactly like us because they have concentrated on other specific aspects of knowledge, such as dancing, curing, bewitching, talking, instead of what the new seers recommend, *stalking*, *dreaming*, and *intent*. Those who are exactly like us would not cross our path. The seers who lived during the Conquest set it up that way so as to avoid being exterminated in the confrontation with the Spaniards. Each of those seers founded a lineage. And not all of them had descendants, so the lines are few.”

“Do you know any who are exactly like us?” I asked.

“A few,” he replied laconically.

I asked him then to give me all the information he

could, for I was vitally interested in the topic; to me it was of crucial importance to know names and addresses for purposes of validation and corroboration.

Don Juan did not seem inclined to oblige me. "The new seers went through that bit of corroboration," he said. "Half of them left their bones in the corroborating room. So now they are solitary birds. Let's leave it that way. All we can talk about is our line. About that, you and I can say as much as we please."

He explained that all the lines of seers were started at the same time and in the same fashion. Around the end of the sixteenth century every nagual deliberately isolated himself and his group of seers from any overt contact with other seers. The consequence of that drastic segregation, he said, was the formation of the individual lineages. Our lineage consisted of fourteen naguals and one hundred and twenty-six seers, he said. Some of those fourteen naguals had as few as seven seers with them, others had eleven, and some up to fifteen.

He told me that his teacher—or his benefactor, as he called him—was the nagual Julian, and the one who came before Julian was the nagual Elias. I asked him if he knew the names of all fourteen naguals. He named and enumerated them for me, so I could learn who they were. He also said that he had personally known the fifteen seers who formed his benefactor's group and that he had also known his benefactor's teacher, the nagual Elias, and the eleven seers of his party.

Don Juan assured me that our line was quite exceptional, because it underwent a drastic change in the year 1723 as a result of an outside influence that came to bear on us and inexorably altered our course. He did not want to discuss the event itself at the moment, but he said that a new beginning is counted from that time; and that the eight naguals who have ruled the

line since then are considered intrinsically different from the six who preceded them.

Don Juan must have had business to take care of the next day, for I did not see him until around noon. In the meantime, three of his apprentices had come to town, Pablito, Nestor, and la Gorda. They were shopping for tools and materials for Pablito's carpentry business. I accompanied them and helped them to complete all their errands. Then all of us went back to the boardinghouse.

All four of us were sitting around talking when don Juan came into my room. He announced that we were leaving after lunch, but that before we went to eat he still had something to discuss with me, in private. He wanted the two of us to take a stroll around the main square and then all of us would meet at a restaurant.

Pablito and Nestor stood up and said that they had some errands to run before meeting us. La Gorda seemed very displeased.

"What are you going to talk about?" she blurted out, but quickly realized her mistake and giggled.

Don Juan gave her a strange look but did not say anything.

Encouraged by his silence, la Gorda proposed that we take her along. She assured us that she would not bother us in the least.

"I'm sure you won't bother us," don Juan said to her, "but I really don't want you to hear anything of what I have to say to him."

La Gorda's anger was very obvious. She blushed and, as don Juan and I walked out of the room, her entire face clouded with anxiety and tension, becoming instantly distorted. Her mouth was open and her lips were dry.

La Gorda's mood made me very apprehensive. I felt an actual discomfort. I didn't say anything, but don Juan seemed to notice my feelings.



“You should thank la Gorda day and night,” he said all of a sudden. “She’s helping you destroy your self-importance. She’s the petty tyrant in your life, but you still haven’t caught on to that.”

We strolled around the plaza until all my nervousness had vanished. Then we sat down on his favorite bench again.

“The ancient seers were very fortunate indeed,” don Juan began, “because they had plenty of time to learn marvelous things. Let me tell you, they knew wonders that we can’t even imagine today.”

“Who taught them all that?” I asked.

“They learned everything by themselves through *seeing*,” he replied. “Most of the things we know in our lineage were figured out by them. The new seers corrected the mistakes of the old seers, but the basis of what we know and do is lost in Toltec time.”

He explained. One of the simplest and yet most important findings, from the point of view of instruction, he said, is the knowledge that man has two types of awareness. The old seers called them the right and the left side of man.

“The old seers figured out,” he went on, “that the best way to teach their knowledge was to make their apprentices shift to their left side, to a state of heightened awareness. Real learning takes place there.

“Very young children were given to the old seers as apprentices,” don Juan continued, “so that they wouldn’t know any other way of life. Those children, in turn, when they came of age took other children as apprentices. Imagine the things they must have uncovered in their shifts to the left and to the right, after centuries of that kind of concentration.”

I remarked how disconcerting those shifts were to me. He said that my experience was similar to his own. His benefactor, the nagual Julian, had created a profound schism in him, by making him shift back and

forth from one type of awareness to the other. He said that the clarity and freedom he experienced in heightened awareness were in total contrast to the rationalizations, the defenses, the anger, and the fear of his normal state of awareness.

The old seers used to create this polarity to suit their own particular purposes; with it, they forced their apprentices to achieve the concentration needed to learn sorcery techniques. But the new seers, he said, use it to lead their apprentices to the conviction that there are unrealized possibilities in man.

“The best effort of the new seers,” don Juan continued, “is their explanation of the mystery of awareness. They condensed it all into some concepts and actions which are taught while the apprentices are in heightened awareness.”

He said that the value of the new seers’ method of teaching is that it takes advantage of the fact that no one can remember anything that happens while being in a state of heightened awareness. This inability to remember sets up an almost insurmountable barrier for warriors, who have to recollect all the instruction given to them if they are to go on. Only after years of struggle and discipline can warriors recollect their instruction. By then the concepts and the procedures that were taught to them have been internalized and have thus acquired the force the new seers meant them to have.

# 2

## *Petty Tyrants*

Don Juan did not discuss the mastery of awareness with me until months later. We were at that time in the house where the nagual's party lived.

"Let's go for a walk," don Juan said to me, placing his hand on my shoulder. "Or better yet, let's go to the town's square, where there are a lot of people, and sit down and talk."

I was surprised when he spoke to me, as I had been in the house for a couple of days then and he had not said so much as hello.

As don Juan and I were leaving the house, la Gorda intercepted us and demanded that we take her along. She seemed determined not to take no for an answer. Don Juan in a very stern voice told her that he had to discuss something in private with me.

"You're going to talk about me," la Gorda said, her tone and gestures betraying both suspicion and annoyance.

"You're right," don Juan replied dryly. He moved past her without turning to look at her.

I followed him, and we walked in silence to the town's square. When we sat down I asked him what on earth we would find to discuss about la Gorda. I

was still smarting from her look of menace when we left the house.

“We have nothing to discuss about la Gorda or anybody else,” he said. “I told her that just to provoke her enormous self-importance. And it worked. She is furious with us. If I know her, by now she will have talked to herself long enough to have built up her confidence and her righteous indignation at having been refused and made to look like a fool. I wouldn’t be surprised if she barges in on us here, at the park bench.”

“If we’re not going to talk about la Gorda, what are we going to discuss?” I asked.

“We’re going to continue the discussion we started in Oaxaca,” he replied. “To understand the explanation of awareness will require your utmost effort and your willingness to shift back and forth between levels of awareness. While we are involved in our discussion I will demand your total concentration and patience.”

Half-complaining, I told him that he had made me feel very uncomfortable by refusing to talk to me for the past two days. He looked at me and arched his brows. A smile played on his lips and vanished. I realized that he was letting me know I was no better than la Gorda.

“I was provoking your self-importance,” he said with a frown. “Self-importance is our greatest enemy. Think about it—what weakens us is feeling offended by the deeds and misdeeds of our fellow men. Our self-importance requires that we spend most of our lives offended by someone.

“The new seers recommended that every effort should be made to eradicate self-importance from the lives of warriors. I have followed that recommendation, and much of my endeavors with you has been geared to show you that without self-importance we are invulnerable.”

As I listened his eyes suddenly became very shiny.

I was thinking to myself that he seemed to be on the verge of laughter and there was no reason for it when I was startled by an abrupt, painful slap on the right side of my face.

I jumped up from the bench. La Gorda was standing behind me, her hand still raised. Her face was flushed with anger.

“Now you can say what you like about me and with more justification,” she shouted. “If you have anything to say, however, say it to my face!”

Her outburst appeared to have exhausted her, because she sat down on the cement and began to weep. Don Juan was transfixed with inexpressible glee. I was frozen with sheer fury. La Gorda glared at me and then turned to don Juan and meekly told him that we had no right to criticize her.

Don Juan laughed so hard he doubled over almost to the ground. He couldn't even speak. He tried two or three times to say something to me, then finally got up and walked away, his body still shaking with spasms of laughter.

I was about to run after him, still glowering at la Gorda—at that moment I found her despicable—when something extraordinary happened to me. I realized what don Juan had found so hilarious. La Gorda and I were horrendously alike. Our self-importance was monumental. My surprise and fury at being slapped were just like la Gorda's feelings of anger and suspicion. Don Juan was right. The burden of self-importance is a terrible encumbrance.

I ran after him then, elated, the tears flowing down my cheeks. I caught up with him and told him what I had realized. His eyes were shining with mischievousness and delight.

“What should I do about la Gorda?” I asked.

“Nothing,” he replied. “Realizations are always personal.”

He changed the subject and said that the omens

were telling us to continue our discussion back at his house, either in a large room with comfortable chairs or in the back patio, which had a roofed corridor around it. He said that whenever he conducted his explanation inside the house those two areas would be off limits to everyone else.

We went back to the house. Don Juan told everyone what la Gorda had done. The delight all the seers showed in taunting her made la Gorda's position extremely uncomfortable.

"Self-importance can't be fought with niceties," don Juan commented when I expressed my concern about la Gorda.

He then asked everyone to leave the room. We sat down and don Juan began his explanations.

He said that seers, old and new, are divided into two categories. The first one is made up of those who are willing to exercise self-restraint and can channel their activities toward pragmatic goals, which would benefit other seers and man in general. The other category consists of those who don't care about self-restraint or about any pragmatic goals. It is the consensus among seers that the latter have failed to resolve the problem of self-importance.

"Self-importance is not something simple and naive," he explained. "On the one hand, it is the core of everything that is good in us, and on the other hand, the core of everything that is rotten. To get rid of the self-importance that is rotten requires a masterpiece of strategy. Seers, through the ages, have given the highest praise to those who have accomplished it."

I complained that the idea of eradicating self-importance, although very appealing to me at times, was really incomprehensible; I told him that I found his directives for getting rid of it so vague I could not follow them.

"I've said to you many times," he said, "that in order to follow the path of knowledge one has to be

very imaginative. You see, in the path of knowledge nothing is as clear as we'd like it to be."

My discomfort made me argue that his admonitions about self-importance reminded me of Catholic dictums. After a lifetime of being told about the evils of sin, I had become callous.

"Warriors fight self-importance as a matter of strategy, not principle," he replied. "Your mistake is to understand what I say in terms of morality."

"I see you as a highly moral man, don Juan," I insisted.

"You've noticed my impeccability, that's all," he said.

"Impeccability, as well as getting rid of self-importance, is too vague a concept to be of any value to me," I remarked.

Don Juan choked with laughter, and I challenged him to explain impeccability.

"Impeccability is nothing else but the proper use of energy," he said. "My statements have no inkling of morality. I've saved energy and that makes me impeccable. To understand this, you have to save enough energy yourself."

We were quiet for a long time. I wanted to think about what he had said. Suddenly, he started talking again.

"Warriors take strategic inventories," he said. "They list everything they do. Then they decide which of those things can be changed in order to allow themselves a respite, in terms of expending their energy."

I argued that their list would have to include everything under the sun. He patiently answered that the strategic inventory he was talking about covered only behavioral patterns that were not essential to our survival and well-being.

I jumped at the opportunity to point out that survival and well-being were categories that could be in-

terpreted in endless ways, hence, there was no way of agreeing what was or was not essential to survival and well-being.

As I kept on talking I began to lose momentum. Finally, I stopped because I realized the futility of my arguments.

Don Juan said then that in the strategic inventories of warriors, self-importance figures as the activity that consumes the greatest amount of energy, hence, their effort to eradicate it.

“One of the first concerns of warriors is to free that energy in order to face the unknown with it,” don Juan went on. “The action of rechanneling that energy is impeccable.”

He said that the most effective strategy was worked out by the seers of the Conquest, the unquestionable masters of *stalking*. It consists of six elements that interplay with one another. Five of them are called the attributes of warriorship: control, discipline, forbearance, timing, and *will*. They pertain to the world of the warrior who is fighting to lose self-importance. The sixth element, which is perhaps the most important of all, pertains to the outside world and is called the petty tyrant.

He looked at me as if silently asking me whether or not I had understood.

“I’m really mystified,” I said. “You keep on saying that la Gorda is the petty tyrant of my life. Just what is a petty tyrant?”

“A petty tyrant is a tormentor,” he replied. “Someone who either holds the power of life and death over warriors or simply annoys them to distraction.”

Don Juan had a beaming smile as he spoke to me. He said that the new seers developed their own classification of petty tyrants; although the concept is one of their most serious and important findings, the new seers had a sense of humor about it. He assured me that there was a tinge of malicious humor in every one