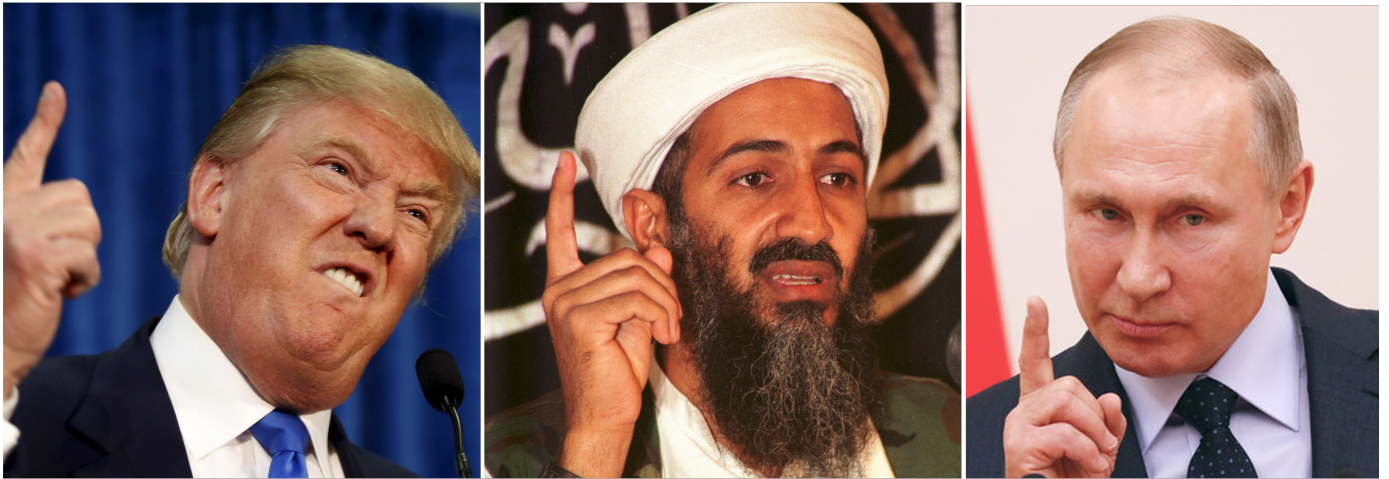


Part III.
Teasing Out The False Citadel



☞ *The Witness of Miracles*

Teasing Out the False Citadel

Today, inescapably, we live in a global world. But as we listen to the Evening News, this news is seldom *good*. Instead, falseness and bewilderment often reigns, and has gained an amplified megaphone--while the planet groans in the beginnings of a death rattle, belching out wild fires, greenhouse gasses, and flooding from what has, and continues to be done to it. We are living in a time of profound change—where everything is changing—except often, what *needs* to change. And so, this is also a time of an increasing, collective *madness*.

And if this madness is hard to see, it's because it has become the new normal. For when degradations become normative, they become not only hard to see, but near impossible to treat. (We've seen this with narcissism, which the official diagnostic and statistical manual of American

psychiatry can only recognize in between 0 and 6.2 percent of the population). And today, catastrophic things we thought “could never happen here,” are now a feature of daily life, as in our politics. And that in itself means that these are *not* “normal times” at all.

Instead, the only planet we have is now threatened—and the urgencies of global warming alone make our epoch different from any other. This *should* be the greatest of wake-up calls. Yet our response, collectively, has not been *urgent* enough. Something more primitive has replaced, or distracted us from our very survival instinct. We have--quite literally--been losing our senses, along with our collective attention span. And unlike most other animals, we’ve ceased to be grounded in *being* itself. And with the loss of the soul’s true ground of being, we also lose the capacity to recognize what’s true in anything, or anyone else.

This collective lack of discernment makes us more susceptible to psychopathic leaders who now threaten our world with reptilian hungers that can never be gratified, while they trumpet a false nostalgia and the promise to make their nations “great again”—whether Russia, America, or China—and where they would reign without term limits, as if in an age of divine kings and emperors, while threatening retribution to all who would challenge what they attempt to usurp and promote.

Now, no nation is truly safe—whether Ukraine, Taiwan, or an America on the cusp of losing its democracy. Today individuals and their nations can no longer agree on something so basic as *facts*. Instead, we are constantly bombarded by stale, self-serving and polarizing arguments that never resolve. And where humanity itself seems stuck at an *evolutionary impasse*.

For today, the truly wise who might better guide us are marginalized, or viewed as heretics without a significant following, and so they rarely appear on TV, or the leading print and online media. While public discourse is often led by those with a narrow bandwidth commenting upon and analyzing those who are more polarized still, yet who have the *largest* followings of all. Large parts of the population have simply grown fatigued from this kind of public discourse, and have stopped paying attention at all. Which is understandable—but not good for democracies --whose health *requires* an informed and proactive public. And America’s democracy is now struggling, just barely keeping its head above turbulent waters that threaten its survival.

In the terms of this book, such a psychic landscape is one where the False Citadel is wreaking havoc. People are being led by the wrong kind of will. And have grown oblivious to the kind of will that has guided the world's sages for millennia. Thus, we should—at the very least -- have a large enough conceptual framework for this *false form of will* that we can at least *identify it* when we see it.

I will spend the concluding section of this book evocatively tracing its outlines so as to better identify it. But identifying it is not enough. As Rilke once wrote while contemplating the archaic figure of a god dug up lacking its head: *You must change your life.*

But in what ways? There will likely be nuances of that necessary transformation that are unique for each of us. Yet as a species, we are all likely to have to give something up that we'd felt attached or entitled to, yet that we don't really need to support our well-being. We'll all need to ask ourselves what we're willing to give up—and it could change over time. For change is the only constant in evolution.

But importantly, we'll need to become better aligned with the *transpersonal will* that had guided the world's sages for millennia. For the *good news* is *that* form of will is as available for us today as it ever was. (Though you *do* have to court it—like any beloved). And this will require a radical allowing, as well as a radical discipline in remaining vigilant when we're in danger of being capsized from our true nature by the bad news of which there's no shortage today. But once we've learned better how to align with the transpersonal will, we'll have a better shot at beginning to make some *good news* of our own.

Otherwise, if we just continuously take in the reportage of Fox News—or for that matter, CNN, or MSNBC, it's easy to become polarized ourselves--or collectively *depressed*. For it seems there's no external place to be free from what now seems to plague us all.

Recent experience seems to teach that we can't fully rely on governments—our own, or any others—to save us. Nor can we count on our political parties—or any ism, whether liberalism or conservatism. Or the talking heads on TV that appear whenever we've witnessed the latest assault upon our collective well-being. Nor should we feel effortlessly entitled to divine support as if it

exists as a *fait accompli* that we have stored away in our back pocket like a Cosmic Get Out of Jail Card. These naïve assumptions keep us captive in one of the soul's most impotent and frustrating time zones—what I call *The Long Wait*. For better and for worse, the only true refuge lies within ourselves, and the true human beingness as it's embodied in each other, And with the above as a preamble, I'll now attempt to evocatively reflect the False Citadel...

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Any “holy fervor” is apt to be a False Citadel--as is any appropriation of God to our own point of view, or political platform. (“Insofar as I restrain the Jews, I am doing the work of the Lord”--wrote Adolf Hitler in *Mein Kampf*).

Though providing an intoxicating rush, fervors tend to be wild rides that overshoot the bounds of sobriety--and at times, the bounds of morality. While conflating God with our own point of view is self-aggrandizing--and hardly holy. Though some battles are worth fighting, the term “holy war” is an oxymoron. Warfare itself is *bellish*.

In this light, the Crusades were a manifestation of False Citadel. For this warfare--*as if* for God--which lasted for two hundred years during the Middle Ages, was expressive of a series of polarizing campaigns between warring enemies, the allegedly *righteous* duality of “us versus them.”

Political conventions and presidential campaigns often reek of False Citadel. For these, as well as most of the fights we have, even with our loved ones, are cases of being stubborn for some cause -- or point of view--yet often filled with an inflated self-righteousness that mars one's deeper nature, while lending a distortive view of one's “enemy.”

Seeing someone through “enemy glasses” is itself a manifestation of False Citadel. And when the other--or the other's point of view—is *demonized*, the possibility for any kind of true dialogue is lost. Polarization, long-held grudges, political grid-lock, and never-ending battles are the result. We become the *wrong* kind of fortress: walled-off within a closed conceptual stance. For here there's no gap or opening for a more balanced or higher-ordered perspective to emerge. The resulting contentiousness fails to recognize the unity that exists beyond the dualistic mind, with “Unity” itself being one of the names for God.

Here, in teasing out the Citadel from its false version, we might contrast *two different Muslim warriors*. On the one hand, there was Osama bin Laden (whom we'll speak more of in the next chapter). On the other hand, there was the nondual perspective of Ali in the last Rumi poem: "*I have no longing except for the One.*" Ali's extraordinary restraint stems from the extent to which his nondual vision had become *stabilized* in his awareness. It's available even in the heat of battle. He spares the knight who had just spit in his face "*because in this moment I am you and you are me.*"

The struggles between warring camps can never be comprehensively resolved from the perspective of the dualistic mind that engages in them. The poetic tradition points us away from these dualistic impasses when William Blake writes "*opposition is true friendship,*" or Rumi says: "*There's a country beyond right and wrong-- I'll meet you there...*"

The true Citadel has *humility*, as well as access to the Yellow *Latifa's curiosity* (which is continually *willing* to ask, "what is *my* part?" in any relational conflict). The false Citadel further strengthens our existing point of view. The true Citadel is a *corrective* to the ego, and not something that fortifies it. It helps to liberate us from our conditioned patterns and programmed beliefs.

The false Citadel often has a "fuck you" in it. Examples of this might be Donald Trump touting his infamous wall, while demonizing asylum-seekers, or anyone countering his sense of lawless entitlement and grandiosity. The same falsity and lawless entitlement might be seen in Putin's war against Ukraine. And a "fuck you" might also be observed in the polarizing opposition of America's two political parties regarding almost any legislation proposed by the other... or the knight that spit in Ali's face... or bin Laden's stance toward the United States, a "wind full of anger," the poison of spit that *never* becomes "the honey of friendship."

There are a lot of false structures that we've been exposed to, or inculcated with as part of our conditioning process. They are components of what Toltec shamanism has referred to as "the Foreign Installation," or what Sufis have termed "the Commanding Self." For these mental structures are culturally derived imprints, and *not* part of our *indigenous being*. And these derivative structures (which may begin to "command" us) may also include our various forms of political, religious, or cultural indoctrination.

But the falsity in these structures can give rise to something similarly tainted. For they can give rise to a knee-jerk opposition toward any teachings--or accounts of the news-- that don't conform to those with which we're already familiar. Or there may be a ready "fuck you" toward anything having to do with politics--a fuck you toward what is being said by someone we've decided we don't like-- even if what they are saying is actually *true*. Or there may be a fuck you towards any kind of program or ambition, a fuck you toward any further form of development at all...

I've been seeing a bit of this with some of the children of baby boomers—who are so turned off by the flaky aspects of their parents, that they now may find it hard to evidence *any* kind of commitment. This can lead them to take refuge in a false Citadel of getting stoned, while overdosing on social media or video games--a nihilistic, defended kind of ego structure whose attitude is "*no one tells me what to do.*" (Though here they may not be so different than their boomer parents). And a similar nihilism can be seen now in what has become the MAGA wing of America's Republican Party.

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Aside from *a confused issue with authority* (that it often assumes it possesses) the false Citadel generally has something ill-conceived surrounding issues of *protection* or *safety*; something ill-conceived that often turns out to be quite costly. (George W. Bush's "War on Terror" would be an example. Putin's atrocious war against Ukraine would be another. As would Ronald Reagan's "Star Wars" Defense System, Trump's attempt to build a giant wall. Or the "protection" and "order" promised by autocrats in general).

Paranoia results in False Citadels--as well as conspiracy theories, scapegoating, and an aggression that stems from fear. This is a central, unconscious personality dynamic most easily observed in the ego structures of enneatype 6. But fear can lead any of us to lose our ground in the belly center; it can lift us up into our heads, where it becomes easier to disown our *own* aggression, now projecting it solely onto others.

For example, the justification for Putin's war against Ukraine was that Ukraine is led by *Nazis* committing *genocide*. Whoa, who *really* was committing the genocide? Similarly, Republicans in 2021 proposed 250 new laws to restrict voting in 43 states as a response to Trump's unsubstantiated claim

that the 2020 election was “stolen” from him--while the insurrection of January 6, 2021 should make clear who was really trying to steal the election. In such cases, the problem now seems *out there*.

Yet there is a spectrum between justifiable fear--and the neurotic fear of paranoid personality disorders--and between the anger projected outwardly by paranoids and the *Blame Externalization* that is a diagnostic trait of *psychopaths*. And things can get really dicey for a culture--and the *world*--when the psychopaths are leading the charge.

Yet to the extent one's view has become encapsulated by an egoic structure, and is thus lacking a sense of Basic Trust, *there is no doctrine, leader, technology, or amplitude of military appropriation truly capable of guaranteeing that we will feel safe*.

The False Citadel would make a fortress of its *beliefs*, but beliefs don't actually make us safe either. In fact, to the extent that beliefs are at some remove from the moment to moment unfolding of Reality itself, they all have something at least slightly *psychotic* about them. In this light, *any belief that is fanatically held is an example of False Citadel*. (Say that an election has been “stolen” when it really hasn't--or that Ukraine's leaders are Nazis).

In fact, *any* attempt to gain or maintain power, security, or safety through egoic strategies, and partnerships that aren't grounded in a deeper sense of truth are False Citadels. Phenomena as diverse as addictions, quack cures, scapegoating, gerrymandering, or making friends with bullies are manifestations of a False Citadel; as is militant nationalism, the defense of political leaders or parties when they depart from truth, or any disproportionate use of aggression.

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I once flew to Tel Aviv, and then took a shuttle van to Jerusalem, a city that's been contested since the days of the Crusades. It was a Saturday afternoon, and a sweltering 95 degrees outside. As the shuttle van came to a stop light in Jerusalem, a bearded man wearing a heavy looking black overcoat and a black fur hat, ran over to our van and aggressively pounded his fist on the hood.

But he wasn't demanding to be let in to our air-conditioned van in order to get out of the heat (made worse by how he was dressed). For as he pounded his fist on the hood, he kept shouting the words, *Shabbat! Shabbat!* He was--quite militantly--an ultra-Orthodox Jew,

and *outraged* that anyone would be driving in a car on the Sabbath.

The point to be taken here is that a knee-jerk aggression resulting from someone not sharing our *own* beliefs is a manifestation of False Citadel. And that there is *hubris* at work any time we conflate our personal beliefs with universal truth—and become righteously indignant when others deviate from our own ethnocentric, or ego-centric, moral code.

The memory of this fist-pounding brings up another: A spiritual teacher I saw pounding his fist on the meditation hall floor, and shouting “*bullshit!*” in response to teachings another spiritual teacher was giving. And another manifestation of False Citadel occurred a few months later, when the teacher who’d shouted “bullshit” was spat upon while he himself was teaching. And these spiritual teachers weren’t mullahs--or rabbis-- in some sweltering, Middle Eastern country.