Thoughts on Wizards

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I believe that there are men and women who know themselves to be light-friends, servants of truth; who know that they are engaged in a battle for the survival of life in the world, and for the flourishing of life potential wherever it is found; who seek victory through kindling and rekindling of spirits; and who are awesome to those for whom their lives and works pose challenge to choose, at very deepest level, among ways of life. I call such people wizards, after Gandalf, of J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings.*

It is the work of wizards to confront us with lives, art, and philosophy wherein we may contemplate visions of worlds whose heroes do important and dramatic deeds in struggle for good, bearing testimony to the greatness possible in humanity.

Tolkien himself is a wizard who has written a great work that makes us long for a world better than the one we have known. To read him is to dare to look into a vision-stone that invites us to take life seriously, to see the world as a place of wonder where quests await us, and to understand that we may rise to the level of our quest. For me, *The Lord of the Rings* is more than magnificent story; it is a challenge to venture into this world on great quest.

Let us consider four questions:

> What sort of people are wizards?
> Why do they do their work?
> How do they do it?
> And what difference does it make for us?

No one is born a wizard; becoming a light-friend is a result of quest and discovery — it does not come without effort.

There are two characteristics that must be found in an apprentice wizard: the first is a passion for this world, for all the single, concrete things in it in their endless diversity, a constant wonder, drawn onward by love; the second is a passion for understanding, made effective by a demand for coherence.

If one is ready to accept a contradiction then anything follows: understanding is reduced to chaos. If one wants truth, and is committed to the fact that a thing cannot both be and not be something, simultaneously, and in the same respect, then contradictions cannot be accepted into one's ideas about the universe. It is the refusal to accept contradictions that is the foundation of integrity.

E who seeks to understand must hold together in firm integrity, and must expect no less of er world. E must question it until it yields sense. Consider the character of Gandalf, who said, "When I know anything, I know best." Such confidence in judgment need be earned; it is not a thing given to those content to remain confused.

An integral life will contain many unexpected emergences of pattern. The universe yields coherent answers to questions asked by those who are loyal to their own minds and to their passion for understanding. It offers the reward of emergent pattern to integrity. It is thus that the apprentice

wizard learns that the adventure in living need never fade. E comes to understand that integrity is a tool to make life worth living.

Peter Kropotkin, the geographer who discovered the structure of the Siberian mountains, understood the spiritual qualities of pattern-finding:

> There are not many joys in human life equal to the joy of the sudden birth of a generalization, illuminating the mind after a long period of patient research. What has seemed for years so chaotic, so contradictory, and so problematic takes at once its proper position within an harmonious whole. Out of a wild confusion of facts and from behind the fog of guesses, — contradicted almost as soon as they are born —, a stately picture makes its appearance, like an Alpine chain suddenly emerging in all its grandeur from the mists which concealed it the moment before, glittering under the rays of the sun in all its mightiness and beauty.
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> —Peter Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*

The search for coherence often yields surprising pattern, but nothing is so surprising as the apparent convergence of all patterns upon a single hidden point. Wherever we start, we find patterns that unite patterns; we find hierarchical structures of patterns. It seems that there is a source of hidden order in the universe, and that it is abstract in nature.

Natural childish love for the world, by the pathway of devotion to truth through integrity, evolves into reverence for hidden order. A child becomes a conscious servant of light, and a new apprentice wizard is in the world.

In a few words William Blake expressed the wonder of identity hidden in diversity:

> To see the World in a grain of sand, and a heaven in a wild flower; hold infinity in the palm of your hand, and eternity in an hour.
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> —William Blake, *Auguries of Innocence*

The crude tool of logic, which permits us to limit our belief to the non-contradictory, becomes transmuted into a glowing arrow pointing towards the One which binds together the raging storm of All.

In the third century Plotinus wrote a description applicable to wizards:

> Those godlike men who, in their mightier power, in the keenness of their sight, have clear vision of the splendor above and rise to it from among the fog and cloud of earth, and hold firmly to that other world, looking beyond all here, delighted in the place of reality, their native land, like a man returning after long wanderings to the pleasant ways of this own country.
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> —Plotinus, *Fifth Ennead*, IX

The wizard has learned that deliberate application of intelligence to the world finally reveals a profoundly ordered source of light, irradiant through all matter, illuminating each existent. Wizards, being of powerful spirit and mind, see deeply into the detail of the world, and broadly conceive similarities, find identity that generates diversity, and put what they have learned into the world, through works of magical effects upon those who are able to respond.

But there are times and places where the light seems blocked, or dimmed. Gandalf says to Denethor:

> But all worthy things that are in peril as the world now stands, those are my care. And for my part, I shall not wholly fail of my task, though Gondor should perish, if anything passes through this night that can still grow fair or bear fruit and flower again in days to come.
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> —J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, Bk. V, Ch. 1

How is it that a darkness capable of constraining the flowering of living things is possible? When we can answer, we shall know why wizards do their work, and why even in deep darkness there is hope of light.

We learn that there is truth; but we could not know it unless we also know that there is falsehood, and commit ourselves to reject it, even at the cost of apparent advantage. We find that the light-source does not contradict itself, and that those who wish to grow in its image must remain integral.

Now we come to the essence of the wizard's battle. It is not certain that the light will remain in our world, for one may know something to be false, and yet persist in asserting it to be true. We are the only creature complex enough to have learned to lie.

Falsehoods are barriers erected between life and its fullest bloom. They must fail through lack of that vital coherence that is the light in life; a lie is an attempt to impose the impossible upon the universe. Those who do not care what sort of lives they lead may accept falsehoods without concern; but those committed to the quest to make their lives manifestations of the light through works, come to understand that a lie is their ruin. They regard their integrity as a space-clearer which, by rejection of falsehoods, holds open the possibility to create works that

successfully imitate the hidden light-source. They refuse to honor lies; and so preserve their highest life-potential.

But through the power of fear and force some may impose the burden of lies on others. Those who employ lies as implements of domination, persuade us to act as if things were true that in fact we believe to be false, and false that we believe to be true. In this manner is life set against itself, and death of spirit ordained.

In the human realm alone can there be deliberate assertion of known falsehood; thus we are the field of battle between light and darkness; and among those who knowingly assert and maintain falsehoods are the Dark Lords of this world who enslave mankind.

> Great is bankruptcy; the great bottomless gulf into which all falsehoods, public and private, do sink, disappearing; whither, from the first origin of them, they were all doomed. For nature is true and not a lie. No lie you can speak or act but it will come, after longer or shorter circulation, like a bill drawn on nature's reality, and be presented there for payment, with the answer, No effects. Pity only that it had so long a circulation: that the original forgers were so seldom he who bore the final smart of it! Lies, and the burden of evil they bring, are passed on; shifted from back to back, and from rank to rank; and so land ultimately on the dumb lowest rank, who with spade and mattock, with sore heart and empty wallet, daily come in contact with reality, and can pass the cheat no further.
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> —Thomas Carlyle, *The French Revolution*

The light in the world pulses, expanding and contracting: sometimes it covers a broad area, but is diffuse; at other times it is crushed into narrow cross-section, but is intense. When the light is compressed loyalty to it grows stronger in those who can still see it (Wilhelm Röpke, *The Social Crisis of Our Times*, Introduction). Through sense of loss, and fear of greater loss, wizards become conservers of the best that men have learned, and summarize the highest wisdom of the past in new structures of

vision, more elegant than any before. And some, like Gandalf, may undertake to amplify the light, and again illuminate the world.

Tolkien might well be speaking of our own world. The light, in our time, is under great pressure; it may not survive the present onslaught of barbarism that is everywhere seeking to bring personal quests under the domination of political lies. (Alexander Solzhenitsyn, 'Nobel Lecture')

But if it is right to correlate compression of light with its intensification, there is still hope. For great wizards may have been called into battle, and may have provided us with powerful tools, which even now they seek to use in the world. If they succeed, the light of lives well lived will drown out the darkness.

We should remember what Gandalf has told us, and look for wizards when we expect them least, and in unlikely times. One of the great artifacts of wizardry is Tolkien's work. It would be tragic loss to treat it as nothing but pleasant escape from reality.

In times of compression of light, wizards are found who are marked among us by the weight and scope of their vision, who are big-pattern seers, who build powerful generalizations which integrate much that is significant in life-choices. It is the task of such wizards to so concentrate the remnant of light that it will become a brilliant flame which they may project again into the world, generating a resurgence of truth and a displacement of lies.

Sauron seeks to unify all of mankind, to make each of us his servant, bound to him through acceptance of lies. Gandalf knows that of all the lies we accept, the greatest is that we never cared for life, that there was no spark in each of us to illuminate things that we eagerly explored, and loved. Such things differ from person to person; but each of us has once loved something, and found it beautiful. To abandon loved things because of lies accepted is the most deadly treachery to joyful life. Refusal to root

our spirits into the soil of native loves is the end of the possibility of happiness, and the beginning of the pursuit of illusion.

Each of us is born a bearer of life-theme; but it may be denied — its light cut off, as if tree severed its roots, aspiring to be cloud, bound to nothing. But the integral spirit will not become withered tree. E holds er life source in strong grasp, that the world's liars not shatter er original loves, which are life theme to unfold into symphonic structure of vision, thought, and action.

Where will is unified through fear and force, error proliferates; where will is diversified through commitment to individual life-theme, truth emerges. On this principle wizards found strategy.

Wizards seek to break the unification of human wills, which the Dark Lords have achieved through skillful lies. There is only one way this may be done: encourage the spark in each one of us that makes us long for adventure. Through commitment to individual quest there may arise a fellowship of light-friends, whose works tend toward a single order, though founded in the greatest diversity. Darkness begins in unity and ends in chaos; light begins in diversity and flows toward unity.

In times when darkness presses upon humanity, many are the sparks of quest that lie buried in ash and hopelessness. Wizards become seekers of embers, and learn to stir them into raging flame; they become kindlers and rekindlers of spirit.

Cirdan said as much to Gandalf:

> For this is the Ring of Fire, and with it you may rekindle hearts in a world that grows chill.
>
> —*The Lord of the Rings*, Appendix B

But how is this to be done? Through history: speaker to humanity of a glorious past; through art: herald of a glorious future; and through philosophy: tool for holding visions firm against the dark.

Beethoven, wizard, said:

> Music is a higher revelation than all wisdom and philosophy, the wine which inspires one to new generative processes, and I am the Bacchus who presses out this glorious wine for mankind and makes them spiritually drunken. When they have again become sober they have drawn from the sea all that they can bring to dry land ... music is the incorporeal entrance into the higher world of knowledge which comprehends mankind but which mankind cannot comprehend.

Wizards, however loved, are fearsome. They bring us to a place within our spirits where we must make difficult and risk-filled choices about how we shall live. Are we to stand upon a motionless center, about which to spin our lives? Or are we to find ourselves on a road that goes ever on? To meet a wizard, and to take er seriously, is to face such questions. Indeed, that is the essence of a wizard: e is living question for all who would hold a spark within that they would not see die in ash, but brightly flame.

And this is why it takes a certain courage to look long and deep into Tolkien's Middle-Earth; we find that it is our own world; that the battle is here; and that Tolkien is a wizard who confronts us with questions we had never clearly seen, and might have wished to avoid.

But there is much to gain if we join the fellowship of light-friends: there is order in the universe, and whether it be designed by supreme consciousness, or spontaneously emergent, those who commit themselves to it, and to the life-potential therein residing, will find themselves blessed by it, as their lives take on harmonious qualities that beyond all power of foresight are slowly revealed.

I once heard psychologist Nathaniel Branden say that what we fear is not dying, but dying without having lived. If this is true, and I think it is, we should attend carefully to wizards, who encourage us to live with all our power. We who find our

quests will achieve the fullest bloom latent in our beginnings. Then will we say that we have truly lived, and that it was good.

Hear Ayn Rand, a great wizard from a dark land, who devoted her life to creating visions of the Promethean in humanity:

> In the name of the best within you, do not sacrifice this world to those who are its worst. In the name of the values that keep you alive, do not let your vision of man be distorted by the ugly, the cowardly, the mindless in those who have never achieved his title. Do not lose your knowledge that man's proper estate is an upright posture, and intransigent mind and a step that travels unlimited roads. Do not let your fire go out, spark by irreplaceable spark, in the hopeless swamps of the approximate, the not-quite, the not-yet, the not-at-all. Do not let the hero in your soul perish, in lonely frustration for the life you deserved, but have never been able to reach. Check your road and the nature of your battle. The world you desired can be won, it exists, it is real, it is possible, it is yours.
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> —Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*

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