

The

Solar

Path

Essays on the practice

of the Sabian Assembly

by Stan Carnarius

## The Solar Path

This is a nearly century-long program to accelerate individual spiritual development. It was created by Marc Edmund Jones, who most people think of as the man who reworked astrology for the modern world. Dr. Jones and his wife, Priscilla, spent many years traveling back and forth across the United States to make this program available to those who were ready for it.

These essays were written more recently in the normal course of Sabian Assembly functioning to accompany the issuing of lessons to members. They are offered as an introduction to the Sabian approach to the Solar Mysteries.

Some of the most-used Sabian tool concepts are these:

Clear thinking – THIS is not THAT

Existence is outer – going through the changes

Experience is inner - building consciousness

Lessons are written from subject point of view

Each person is functionally unique

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## How It Was

The first time I attended a Sabian Healing ritual was in a dedicated “barn” in Connecticut in 1948. That first morning, no one had eaten breakfast, the barn was still pretty chilly, and we had been asked not to talk before the Healing ritual. So I sat there in the cold silence wrapped in my blanket, waiting. I was 24 years old that summer.

Then Marc Edmund Jones walked in, dressed in a suit and tie, with a book in his hand. We settled down. He read the ritual from the book, to which we responded. After that general conversation got started, and the first day of a two-week conference had begun.

That disciplined silence in less than comfortable conditions followed by something a lot more than usual has stayed with me over all these years.

Here was the man who had written the book. He took us through the ritual in such a dignified way that the seriousness of what was happening just soaked into me. And the happy way people went about accomplishing breakfast afterwards told me that this was a natural condition. We were moving comfortably in several levels of experience, with the visible and its quirkiness and the invisible with its specialness going on at the same time.

Later in that week we all went down to a beautiful natural swimming hole in the nearby river. There was a rocky cliff at one side and a diving board someone had fastened down at the deep part. I remember standing there in the water near Marc Jones wondering what to say to him. I tried to think of something to ask him, but everything that I thought of seemed so obvious that I was tongue-tied and just stood there.

The most interesting thing that happened was when one of the participants climbed up the rocks of the cliff, studied the

diving board for a long time, then jumped off the cliff to land just right on the diving board which went way down and then up, to whip him into the air, where he soared for what seemed a long time with this look of careful attention on his face, then headfirst into the water. When I asked him what that was all about, he said, "I wondered what it would feel like to fly." I was impressed that someone could study all the angles and then do what was needed to have the experience without half killing himself by hitting the board wrong or slipping. He carried it off.

People were there from Illinois, Ohio. Pennsylvania. Massachusetts and New York and we gathered at intervals for lectures by three different speakers. I listened and marveled and took notes like the student I was – 40 pages, handwritten and mostly legible.

Inchoate

This is going to be a demonstration of the inadequacy of language. I have just returned home after an annual luncheon for retirees from the big company I worked with for twenty-five years. Many faces I expected to see were not there, so I found a couple people to sit with for lunch and the program went forward.

Visualize a very large hall with many long tables for over 400 people, and lunch being served by a platoon of local ladies who were really organized around the task. Our MC had some gentle jokes which exactly touched this audience. And there was an extra person at the head table up on the platform. He was our entertainer, which was a little baffling, since we had never had such a person before. He looked unusually

smooth in this audience with his all-black suit and easily gracious self-presentation.

As the last activity on the program, this person walked over to a large array of speakers I had not noticed, punched a button so the music came booming out, and he sang one of the favorite wedding songs. He was VERY good. From my years as a singer, earlier in my life, I could feel in my throat what he was doing, and it was absolute. He had the muscles, the timing, the voice, and the chutzpah to give us the song with total authority. I could feel myself loosening the intellectual harness within myself so I could move in the power of the music. Then he sang the song made famous by Frank Sinatra, "Do It My Way".

The clarity of the lyrics and the power of the music quickly became my only environment as I sank into a feeling of the total intransigence of the individual, and the purity of it, the force of it. Like a flower suddenly blooming inside me, this transcending eruption of our absolute foundation in individual experience was the FEELING that goes with Marc Jones' discussion of the priority of individual reality in the expansion of consciousness. The song ended and I sort of floated back to normal awareness, wiped the moisture off my cheek, and clapped with the crowd.

Now you see what I meant about the inadequacy of words. There is no way I can give you the urgency of being INSIDE a vast understanding as it fills the moment.

As my intellectual patterning came back into clarity, I realized that for many people experiencing music is extremely important. Maybe if you got a good recording of Sinatra singing this song, protected yourself from interruption, then turned the volume WAY up and swam in the resonance, you could get some of this intensity for yourself.

So I am glad I went to yet another retiree luncheon.

## What The Sabian Work Is All About

“Self-taught.” We don’t have many examples of that in our culture. Perhaps Abe Lincoln is our most famous exemplar. He taught himself to read by firelight and had little formal education, but was able to sort out the legal complexities of that society and rise in it. What he made of himself is celebrated in that beautiful statue in Washington D.C. His fame makes it easier to see his uniqueness.

Not so easy to see, is the uniqueness of each of us. We have been socialized in a culture that values conformity. As a result we have learned how to pretend we are sort of like everybody else and we are quick to criticize our own faults. We tend to check around us to see what is required. In effect, most of us have been shaped by the “lunar” way, which is to look for direction outside the self. In the school system, it is called pedagogy.

The problem is that we are social animals. The others are so important to us that we use all sorts of strategies to please them or at least to avoid displeasing them. We have a tendency to “go with the herd.” That is a way of describing our predicament. That is, we live in a mix of apparently conflicting needs, motivations and tendencies which is ongoing and ever-changing in what it presents as the compelling aspect. Life is a kind of social pond, lake or ocean in which we swim. The Sabian work puts the focus on the “swimmer.”

Each of us is a complex organism, with capacities for experience almost beyond imagination. We live in a body that mostly takes care of itself, as we use the body for sense experience, for emotional growth, mental outreach and learning, and spiritual extension beyond the obvious physical things of our lives. Our complexity matches the larger complexity in which we exist, which has been expressed in the formula: As above, so below. That expression comes from the



ancient occult tradition which is being echoed increasingly by current scientific conclusions. And what it rests on is the functioning integrity of each living organism.

Marc Jones had various ways of expressing that. In 1951, he wrote: "...become conscious or alive in a reality of which we are the authors and not the victims." Or..."every part of life becomes a clue to every other part" (FFN 322). In *The Sabian Manual* he used such terms as "greater self-realization" (p. 9) or "...whatever stirs deep within himself is to have the initiative always" (p. 14). He concluded that the "procedures and goals could not be educational in any established patterns if there was to be any possibility of breaking through either the unsuspected presuppositions of mind or the little-realized limitations of heart characteristic of the age." (p. 24)

What comes through is the need to transcend cultural conditioning in order to free the individual to grow from her own initiatives and emerge into a consciousness of personal reality of her own making – author rather than victim. Now that your toddler-within has been trained to fit into society, it is as if we are encouraging your older self to find her/his own way again, ...to GO for it, only now with a sense of responsibility.

### The Problem with Words

Words are not realities. Words in all the different languages are arrangements of learned sound patterns that have come to be associated with particular meanings. So words are symbols – phoneme patterns that are accepted as referring to particular things or experiences. As we talk with each other we create a flow of useful understandings. In effect, we are sharing

symbols. If done skillfully, the meaning of the symbol as I use it will have a similar symbolism for you. We will have the sensation of “understanding” each other. As we live together in our communities, we experience the flow of symbols common to the group and we can feel that language provides useful clarity. We take it for granted.

But it gets complicated. When you think of love, your personal experience of it comes into play. Then when the word “love” is supported by compelling musical sounds, the symbolism is strengthened. But for someone who has rarely felt loved, the symbolism takes on a different intensity.

We have had a lot of help with this perplexity from the field of semantics. Years ago S. I. Hayakawa point out to us all that “The map is not the territory.” (That is, the word is not the thing it describes.) The confusion runs so deep that it is probably necessary to wonder what “real” is. The quick answer is “what you can feel physically,” and that would probably suffice for most people. But physical sensations are soon gone. Have you ever tried to describe to an official what happened in an accident? . In his last book, Marc Jones talked about something happening so consistently that it was experienced as real. This gets us into the difference between existence and experience. Existence is understood as the flow of life activities one after the other through all the cycles until it is over. Experience is understood as deriving meaning from what happens in life so that there is an increase in consciousness. In other words, when something becomes “real” for you, it has a persisting meaning.

This gets particularly difficult when it comes to scriptures because, for many, the words on the page represent reality directly. I was fascinated by the study which showed that about half of college graduates in the U.S. say they believe that humans have been on this earth only about 10,000 years, as reported in the Bible. The scientific reckoning is that humans

were just learning how to raise crops and build settled communities about 10,000 years ago.

When you come right down to the real issue, words are the tools we use to share our inner, personal meanings with others. They can be used skillfully or clumsily, like any other tool.

What is the Sabian Purpose?

In a recent phone conversation with a member, I was startled by the question, "What is the purpose of the Sabian Assembly?" So I dug around in my files until I found Marc Jones' commentary on this from 1971: "Our original occult charter was as an experimental group and now, after some forty years in our wilderness of self-discovery in our collective identity that has its expression in our overall Sabian vision, the experiment has proved itself. Our pattern of performance is a success and our spiritual or invisible sponsorship has decided that it should be perpetuated for the years in tens or perhaps hundreds that it still proves useful for the welfare of humanity."

The success of the experimental method does not mean that the "experiment" is over. Being experimental IS the Sabian method. So what is meant by the word "experimental"? The first definition in the big Webster's is "relating to or based on experience." The esoteric matrix for this experiencing is the formal process of initiation.

Here is a way to say this. "The Sabian purpose is to provide a tested way to use life's complexities in experiencing the process of personal development."

In that essay, Marc Jones went on to discuss ways to handle the future of the group, and asked for no change in structure; that is, no headquarters or any "overemphasized

objective centrality.” He described the true occult leadership as “impartial arbitration in a context of complete psychological democracy, with an immutable fidelity to the common convenience in all divisions of labor among individuals happy in their mutual respect for their essential differences.”

Without arguing with religious practices, the Sabian approach to spiritual evolution concentrates on what things mean to individuals, while enlarging the context of consideration so they can see more widely the meanings in their own life. Our task is to let people know the Solar method is here in ways that allow those who are already looking for us to find us. We could think of our outreach efforts as “assisted gravitation” for those on the way to us.

## Lattice

Early in his last book (*Patterns of Consciousness*, Infinity Publishers) Marc Jones brought in an expression we have seen often in his other writings -- the term “lattice.” On page 3, he refers to “everyman’s lattice of orientation.” My dictionary links the term to the word “lath”, the thin, narrow strips of wood used as backing for plaster, and defines “lattice” as: “1. A structure of crossed wooden or metal strips usually arranged to form a diagonal pattern of open spaces between the strips.” This image is a quick way of describing something with many cross-connections.

Studying the message in Marc’s book, it is fascinating to see how he brings very complex things into sharper focus. For instance, he clarifies how time and space are not a priori realities, somehow existing in the abstract on their own, but

aspects of the particular experience of the individual. Time measures the psychological quality of experience, while space measures the quantity of interaction with others.

The focus of reality is not “out there” in the scientific generalities about the nature of the cosmos, it is in here in the life of each individual. As Marc puts it on page 4 of this book, “The vital principle is that every human individual in due course creates his own time scheme, or an ordering lattice of progressing activity in which his conscious living exists comprehensively in his own mind.”

Notice the term “conscious” in that sentence. I think he is talking about how we make sense of the events of our lives; the pattern that we can see although it may not be obvious to anyone else. It is our personal reality, which Marc further describes as the way we “grasp the promise of our beginnings and the fruits of our culminations” as well as “buttressing the joy of our ongoing with the cooperation we can command from others.”

And it is “comprehensive.” It is all there: the physical sensations, the recall, the hopes and fears, the way of interpreting the meanings of what others do and say, the habits of cooperating with or punishing the body, one’s own way of perceiving events and sensing their meaning, and the personal slant of visualizing one’s self in interaction.

Not that we think about all that in the moment; it is just there, going on all the time, like a moving picture in our nervous systems. The important point is that our reality is the continuously flowing personal experience at the basis of everything else. Because each of us tends to operate in our own particular way, others perceive us as somewhat predictable. That’s what it means to be familiar with someone – you kind of know what sort of person they are. That reliability, or predictability, is the beginning of society.

On page 5, Marc sums up how it all works in this way: “What has come to pass first through family and village commitments and then a prevailing culture establishing the codification of customs into law has led eventually to the common acceptance of social values, the standardization of money and the widely oriented group functions of effective civilization.”

The Assembly is not “Out there”

I suspect that the problem we are dealing with is the basic problem in the culture – the belief that transcendence or the Big Solution is “out there.” So the trouble with clarity, as Marc Jones saw it, was that people too often grant reality to the formulations that match their fears and hopes, as if the solution were something you could have and hold. It is the misunderstanding of the culture that things are real and that “having them” makes all the difference.

That is, of course, the secret of cult “success” – something is described as tangible and practical and those who accept it will be lifted out of their normal problems and suffering. The way it works is at least as old as the ancient Greek theater – where the *deus ex machina* would reach in at the crucial point in the plot and rescue the hero from whatever.

What we are dealing with is something that functions “in here.” The skill we need is that of describing inner process. We have 3000 lessons modeling what that means.

We can certainly talk about what the Assembly is in common, everyday terms that can be understood by people with some education.

The Sabian Assembly does not deal with people in

general, or how things work in an overall sense – that is the study of society. The Assembly focuses on the life of the individual as that person lives it – working through problems and frustrations and learning from them. The values and interests of the individual are what motivate him or her, and they get corrected by the way things work out in that life. Pain is understood as the signal of some imbalance in the life, so has value for learning purposes. The only limits to the evolution of the individual are those accepted by that person. Since most human life is lived at the subconscious level, it is very important to expand individual consciousness. A person who wakes up and begins to live more consciously can be of increasing value to the self and to others and also to society, but the value will be uniquely personal, flavored by that person’s consciousness and values.

I tried not to use any fancy language in that example. I imagine you could say all those things in your own way as you talk to somebody about what we are working at in the Assembly. It is all about the value, authority and finality of individual experience. It is not about a particular set of words or phrases offered as The Truth. It is not about existence, understood as animal vitality and life span. It is about experience – the meaningful participation of the human individual in his or her own life with increasing awareness and richness of participation in all the levels of potentiality.

## Ignorance

Since all thinking proceeds in terms of dichotomy (“this” is not “that”) and we put such emphasis on consciousness, what is its opposite? Unconsciousness? I don’t think so. The whole functioning person is made up of a lot of unconsciousness and subconsciousness as the body pretty much runs itself, while

consciousness is aware of as much as possible. Functionally, these three are like different degrees or stages in a continuum or different expressions of the same thing. For an example, consider how something in the news may trigger your fears on such a deep level you don't even realize it. But it works on you and as you get tense and restless and worried, it interferes with your sleep and then your digestion and pretty soon you sense that you are coming down with something. From an unconscious reaction it has progressed to the subconscious enough that you notice you are developing a problem, so that you can consciously go to work on it to begin to shift things around to a more healthful pattern. Or you may consciously augment the fear and go ahead and get sick. These are degrees of awareness, or consciousness.

The opposite of consciousness is ignorance. I realize this is a difficult word, because it has such negative connotations. Often we hear people on the street characterize the antisocial behavior of other people as "Ignorant!" The way I am using it here is in the sense of "ignoring" whatever is going on, in other words, having no awareness of it. When you think of all that is going on all the time in yourself and in the world around you, all the perceptions and reactions of everybody, the hormones squirting in the youth, and others, the juices rising in all the plants when Spring finally gets here, the constant fluctuations in the weather and the inexorable melting of those distant glaciers, each of us is paddling along in our own little tin canoe on a vast ocean of ignorance! We cannot possibly pay attention to everything that is going on in us and around us all the time.

This is why Marc Jones suggested that we mind our own business. We specialize in the events and meanings of our own individual lives as we expand in the social setting and physical conditions and family notions that belong to us. The way we become aware and handle what is happening to us shapes the package or personality we present to the world around us. The



Sabian approach encourages the development of health and good relationships and the ability to use abstractions well, then to enhance these things, and simultaneously to bring the power of ideas into play so that peoples' animal energies are lifted to the building and enhancement of civilization. It starts for each of us when we recognize personal relevance.

Expanding consciousness is not a general opening to vague possibilities in a kind of idealistic daydreaming. It is adding definite awareness of your own functioning in combination with the world around you so that you can act specifically on what you sense as potential. To say that in a different way, it means less ignoring of your self and your world. It means taking yourself seriously as the only self you have to work with just now, and becoming aware of constructive ways to be and do yourself.

## Self

One of the interesting issues we deal with in the Sabian work is what is meant by "self"? Our Buddhist friends argue that there is no such thing as a self; there is only the false self and the True Self. Our Freudian friends worry about how the ego has taken over. Our Jungian friends watch for the emergence of both anima and animus. In his book on Multiple Intelligences, Howard Gardner remarks that "the sense of self emerges as one of the most marvelous of human inventions – a symbol that represents all kinds of information about a person and that is at the same time an invention that all individuals construct for themselves." In discussions during a ping-pong game years ago, my opponent and I decided a useful way to get around all these different understandings would be to think of

the self as one's "organizing principle." We saw it as the way each of us organizes the events and feelings of our lives into a workable "package." The community each of us lives in has a tendency to view us as objects. Neighbors watch to see if we fit in. Employers check that we conform to work patterns. Acquaintances and new friends check us out against conventional patterns. And we have been conditioned, in many cases, to think of ourselves as objects – to dress and act in acceptable ways.

So the Sabian orientation can feel baffling at first, as it presents everything from subject point of view. That is, the Sabian lessons are written from the perspective of the individual doing the experiencing, the subject of the experience, doing it, rather than the object to which things are done. The long sentences and the careful qualifications and the nuances in meaning are all intended to allow the individual to be unique and hard to describe and special in all the ways that count.

This means that the Sabian work does not present a manual on how to succeed, as if you were some sort of commodity. Instead it challenges you to lift yourself on purpose, using ideas you care about to manage your physical self and your life so that you are enhancing the world you live in, rather than being exploited by it. It invites you to grow yourself up so that you can be more conscious and less habitual in living, and contribute.

To be a successfully conscious individual in a world that keeps pushing for conformity is an interesting kind of dance. We learn how to go along with what is expected. We "wear the clothing of the country we are in" while we go on being "ourselves" on the inside. This is probably why getting feedback is given such importance in the Sabian writings; it tells us how we are doing and what those others are perceiving. The mirror-imaging is at work helping us recognize what we are

manifesting and giving us useful signals about how our self-presentation is coming across. In the process we are learning how to function comfortably within complexity. Or, to say that more simply, as we pay attention to what is going on in us and in those around us and in the larger world that contains us, we become familiar with repeating patterns so that we stop being ignorant victims and increasingly become conscious participants.

## Belief

Thinking about “belief” can be a baffling experience. There is the content of a belief and the fact that it is not subject to proof, so there is an aspect of the unknown in every consideration of belief. Here is the definition.

BELIEF 1. Something believed; opinion; conviction. 2. Confidence in the truth or existence of something not immediately susceptible to rigorous proof.

Not that I want to be critical of anyone’s beliefs. We all have them, and they serve us well. They fill in the gaps in our experience and provide convenient rationalizations for many of our behaviors. The positive is that beliefs supply needed explanations when not having an explanation would be inconvenient or uncomfortable. The negative is that beliefs cover up our areas of ignorance.

To consider how it works, ask yourself the question, “What kind of person am I?” Are comments from parents ringing in your head in answer to that, or the reassurances of family? Or siblings? Or friends? And are you arguing with those voices in your head? It is probably a kind of dialogue: if

they are critical, you can find some good things to balance it; or if they say you are wonderful, you probably have some uncomfortable secrets to consider in the discussion. Or maybe there are no remembered comments and you are on your own in describing yourself. Are you coming up with facts or beliefs?

Your horoscope can help by outlining your potentials, but you still need to describe how you actually use your particular indicators. The interest in typologies fits in here also, as people use the Enneagram or the Myers–Briggs, and so on, to get some sense of the patterns that may help to account for their behavior.

What really works, when you get down to describing yourself, is listing what you have done. How satisfactory is your day-to-day ongoing? What have you added to make life more appealing? What ideas have occurred to you and been acted on to make something different? How have you brought important values to bear on your situations? In other words, it is experience that builds up the facts of a life, so being purposeful in managing your experience is what life mastery is all about.

The gnostic element of the Sabian work encourages knowing. The methodology of knowing is conscious experiencing which builds more balanced life meaning. The testing of beliefs in experience is a way to offset the unknown potentials of ignorance.

## Confidence

When you look around these days, it is possible to feel that we live in a really materialistic culture. Everybody seems to have a lot of stuff, and some of it the very latest gadgetry, which seems to them to be not only “nice” but

urgently important. And the general idea seems to have been to get rich or make it look as if you had gotten rich.

Trying to understand what is going on around us leads me to a lot of reading, and the point that rang my bell was the following, from The Atlantic (April 2009) “One of the things that’s interesting about the last year is that you realize how much of our capital system is based on confidence – business confidence. If I’m confident I can refinance my debts when they come due, I’ll spend money. If I’m not confident..I’m not spending any more money.” And what is “confidence?”

My dictionary defines it this way: “Confidence: 1. Belief in the powers, trustworthiness or reliability of a person or thing.” Notice that first word in the definition: “Belief.”

So my next step was back to Sabian lessons called The Fundamentals, and chapter XIV on Absolute Authority. This is the chapter in which Marc Jones emphasized the spiritual nature of money: “The conscious approach to life mastery is consequently the training and disciplining of self to this state of inner or real being. Money is particularly the safest barometer of the achievement because money is the most spiritual of all things visible and exchangeable.” Marc goes on to discuss how the value of money demonstrates the integrity of the government, while the use of money demonstrates the integrity of the individual.

Some intriguing things to think about here are (1) value is not a fixed, objective reality [the specific evaluation of the US dollar fluctuates according to the international currency market, while inflation has been slowly reducing the value of the dollar] (2) the important issue is personal accomplishment [life mastery comes from self-training and self-discipline and results in “inner or real being.”] (3) “Confidence” is a non-religious word. [it reminds us that our day-to-day activities take place in the flow of spirit] and (4) our belief in the value of the currency is what makes it work [the glue

holding our materialistic world together is spiritual – the shared belief that our money has value].

So where does confidence come from? Essentially the answer to that question is individual. For lots of people, confidence-building began with parental methods, some success in school, and finding a useful niche in society. We should not be surprised that lots of people have not had such experiences, and they express little confidence in the system in which we live. For us, “life mastery” puts a particular emphasis on the issue. To the extent that we have trained and disciplined ourselves, we can expect to experience some level of inner or real being. As we develop our skills for living, we can add value, learn from each other and contribute in ever-larger circles. The feedback we get from such efforts helps us build confidence. Another way to say that is the process of life mastery can build confidence, which is primary. A secondary indicator is the money.

## Solar

What do we mean by our use of the term “solar”? Does it mean going off on our own, without reference to what anybody else thinks? Or not having a guru? Or what? I always thought it was an emphasis on not being lunar, i.e. not getting spoon-fed what one needs to learn next. Here is what the Glossary (in Occult Philosophy) has to say:

Solar key, cf. microcosmic key to knowledge

Microcosmic key to knowledge (248) the approach to wisdom through the relations of sequence or on-a-line consequences in

realms of cause and effect...

Solar mysteries (46) Esoteric knowledge self-achieved and individually verified, as in particular contrast with the Lunar mysteries.

Lunar mysteries (46) Esoteric knowledge presented by an authority which cannot be questioned...and comprising both the popular dramatizations of the profane mysteries and the more orderly presentation of occult concepts to the neophyte as illustrated in the case of the basic truths.

Basic truth (93) one of the seven foundation doctrines in the Lunar mysteries. (Cf. exaltation, healing, illumination, karma, prophecy, reincarnation and transmutation.)

Macrocosmic key to knowledge (248) the approach to wisdom through the cosmic dimensions of individual or personal potential, or through a continual assimilation of self into not-self; the perspective upon existence established in a social and fundamentally spatial reality.

Whoa! Most of us don't communicate with ourselves and others in such language. But then we also aren't writing glossaries to clarify the meaning of terms. So let's try for it step by step. There are seven doctrines which are so well established that they can be treated as common knowledge – the “basic truths.” Beyond your understanding of each of these is your self-achieved esoteric knowledge. In other words, your experiences may have been so unique that no one else understands or even knows about them. But you have tested them and found them real, so there it is. And the test is what happens next in time. In the sequencing of your experience, the way this leads to that is the relevant test.

Should we be talking about our solar experiences? It all depends. A member was appalled at the disease called “scale” on one of my fruit trees so he cured it by focusing on it. He was

impatient with me that I hadn't already taken care of it. Another member tried to share his new discoveries in search of healing and greater understanding. Probably the most useful way to think about it is to remember that it is not what you know but what you do with it that counts. Our faltering culture does not need any more titillation but it certainly could use some new and different kinds of loving and healing.

## Criteria

What is the best way to describe the Sabian work? Should we to put it in the language we would use with "someone on the street"? Presumably that would mean simple words, but not necessarily. I tend to think of street language as using special terms, such as ever-changing slang, or quick shorthand exchanges. Or perhaps thinking of "someone on the street" could refer simply to a person with general characteristics similar to your own but whom you do not know well. So that would call for clear, simple words about things in wide common experience. Can you explain "the Solar Mysteries" in such simple terms? How about "the right of every person to learn their own truths and then live by them"?

Actually, I suspect the problem is much more difficult than that. It is the problem of bridging across widely different mindsets. Modern man is conditioned to think about material realities. That means us too. We also tend to look for things with "nailed-to-the-floor practicality." So when Marc Jones translates the Ancient Wisdom into modern terms, we may assume he is talking about the same reality we have been conditioned to see. However, he is not referring to material



reality in any way – it is all inner reality in the person, which he calls subject point of view. It is so far out of the materialist assumption pattern that we may not even realize we didn't get it. Evidence of that is clear every time we try to tell someone else about what the Sabian experience has meant to us, and we are at a loss for words to convey it.

It probably has a lot to do with the way our nervous systems are “wired.” We are wired for survival. Sudden changes, loud noises, big departures from the normal all catch our attention, but little changes (a few pounds here and there, another person's silences) tend to go unnoticed. Perhaps the best example is intuition. We all have intuition but a lot of people actively suppress it. The Solar Path is a conscious way to not only work with your intuition but a systematic way to build on it and go beyond it. An example of how somebody is communicating effectively in this area is a recent book by Dr. Judith Orloff, *Emotional Freedom*. She describes how intuition works and how to help it be more useful.

But there is much more to it than that. There is cooperation among the layers of inner reality, which is what makes it so hard to describe the workings of the esoteric. For example, I did not know I was preparing to meet the Spanish professor who strongly influenced the rest of my life by taking a whole first year of Spanish in two months of summer school, but when I walked into second-year Spanish in the Fall, there he was! The rest, as they say, is history.

What seems like a perfectly natural next step can turn out to have life-changing impact. Events are constantly changing, but the lasting change for the person is inward. When meaning changes for the individual, life becomes different inwardly.

## “Occult”

We live in a culture with certain characteristics. To fly in the face of what those characteristics require is irresponsible. On the other hand, the full range of human potential goes beyond what this culture defines as “normal.” In practice, the people who have unusual skills learn to keep quiet about them. When parents discover their child can see auras, they may punish the child so severely that he or she may never see another. The person with a gift for healing does it quietly, functioning in a virtual village.

The problem with calling something “occult” is that it points to inner or hidden things without clarification. In contrast, the word “religious” points to inner things which are always being explained by someone. Fearful people get concerned when things are announced as hidden. Marc Jones used the word “occult” as a way of describing inner phenomena with which he was familiar, so he could treat them with respect rather than fear.

Consider how we explain what we do in the Assembly. We offer the Solar Portal. This is a way of saying that in our process you are testing principles for yourself and accepting the ones that work for you, since there is no guru to tell you what to do. The complex sentences in our weekly lessons stimulate quite different experiences of relevance for different students. We do a Healing Ritual because we have found that the focused energies of the group can add to the self-healing energy of persons requesting healing. We conduct a cycle of Full Moon Meetings as a way of rehearsing our understanding of the opportunities to be less self-defeating in our personal growth

processes. We are invited to combine our efforts in Quadrangles as a way of practicing a more perfect understanding of each other in a team. We work our individual way through a five-year Acolyte program in order to experience, test and internalize an array of principles. Around those individual efforts, we function as a group to provide lessons to members, conduct periodic gatherings of members, and generally encourage each other by personal correspondence.

An interesting clue is the repeated admonition in the Healing Ritual to “BE STILL.” Sometimes that feels like a general invitation to join in the efforts of the human race to survive these times and bring some special gifts to the process, without troubling anybody with our particular jargon.

In other words, we don’t have to start by discussing that Marc Jones was working with the Brotherhood.. The fact is that the Solar Way of adult learning by direct personal experience is now a widely used approach to adult learning. Marc Jones’ insistence on using subject point of view is now being echoed in the discovery of quantum physics that all organisms function as subject. The daily use of affirmations and other spiritual practices are in complete harmony with the findings of Positive Psychology that it is better for the individual to be optimistic than pessimistic. “They” are catching up with “us.”

## Complexity

Over the years, students would protest to Marc Jones about the complexity of his lessons, and he would explain again why things are as they are. Maybe the way to clarify it is by comparing the Sabian work to regular schooling. For so many, going to school has meant attending graded classes and having heads stuffed with information. In a good school you had a chance to learn a lot, but in a bad school it was harder to learn very much. The basic idea in any kind of school was that information was in the books and your task was to get it into your head. It is called “book learning” for a good reason. Good teachers were the ones who somehow turned it into personal experience so you got something from it. Bad teachers were just as boring as the books. The point is that experience is the real teacher.

In other words, learning is an activity of the self; it is not just passive absorption. It is like nourishment: the chewing of food by your mouth helps your stomach absorb it. And the life we have to learn about is incredibly complicated. Look in any direction: what you see is complication. Then we simplify it by focusing on appearances. Or we register how we feel about appearances. We may try to keep life simple by living superficially, enjoying what the old Hindus called Maya, or in modern terms, consensual reality.

If you look at anything in terms of what it is doing, the complexity is evident. The functioning of your body, for instance, is a marvel, with thousands of transactions going on in every moment in the several systems that maintain the body in order for you to do what you want with it. We look around

in the natural beauties of springtime and feel grateful, while the green in the leaves is doing its work of turning sunlight into useful energy. Actually tracking the details of such complexity we leave up to the scientists whose job it is – the physicians, the biologists, the physicists, the cosmologists, and so on, just as in an earlier age, deeper understanding was left in the hands of priests.

Born into uniqueness, our existence expands into meanings which we call “experience.” Useful meanings are repeated and turn into habits. Anything that happens frequently enough is felt to be “real.” As things keep changing, we learn how to cycle through useful habits to build a way of life. As we discover what works for us, we build reasoning patterns that circle back to what is known and reassuring. Sometimes new learning feels uncomfortable, so some form of intensification, called pain, is needed to force our attention. And it is not a solitary process, since all along the way our interactions with others, for joy or sorrow, elaborate our experience.

However, please notice that this whole summary of the individual’s process of life is a generalization. Like statistics, it seems to be meaningful but it lacks the stark specialness of what happens in each person’s own, private adventure. The Sabian writings provide a lattice against which to take action – to array your unique story, then experience both relevance and learning YOU provide the specifics of your own process.

## Foreground / Background

We live mostly in our personal foreground, where the people, places and things are familiar and tend to stay the same for a while. To some extent our setting shapes our development. The Sabian work is a support system for individual self-development. But the details of each individual's development are functionally unique...and complicated. What happens to a person's early stages in the birth family makes a big, permanent impression on the life; as well as the impression left by early peer groups, the impact of schooling and early jobs, and so on. Even more important are the decisions of the individual. Personal choices shape patterns, and patterns contribute to outcomes. Each of us has an array of issues which get our sharpest focus as well as a variety of issues that are not felt to be primary. Nurture and heredity are both important.

In addition to self-development, the Sabian work sees great importance in the individual's interaction with others. We are not entities in isolation, but life forms that function in combination with others. Because there is no escape from continuous interaction with other people, our values are presented in two slogans: Respect for Personality and Mind Your Own Business.

We are also organic life forms, which means that in order to survive we form habits around behaviors that are productive for us. The habits that help us get through life successfully do not seem to include deep introspection on "How did I get this way?" Usually we are too busy coping with what is in front of us to figure out how it got there. And as social life forms, we automatically copy or imitate the behaviors that worked in our family or community. The name for the way we

“package” ourselves for society is Personality. We hope most fervently that other people will find our package acceptable and even desirable, and wouldn’t it be lovely if everybody were to respect our personality?

Waking to each new day brings our unique being out on the stage of life set with layers of background.. We have impressions about how things seem to be in our world. For instance, we may feel that American politics is usefully bipartisan, the financial community is earning its profits, the educational system is doing its best, the poor we will always have with us, the elite are contributing to society, it is OK for market researchers to probe our inner desires, and marketeers are feeding us tasty foods that are to some extent nourishing. This layer of background is our culture. A flooding new feature of this culture is the opportunity to communicate with anybody in real time. Television babysat our children and now we can be endlessly entertained by manipulating our electronic devices.

Behind this culture is our civilization – the deep understandings that shape what people sense as possible, or normal. It is American Pragmatism, building on the brave hopes of Rationalism from 18<sup>th</sup> Century Europe, but having to deal with the doubts created by now two depressions, our series of wars and persisting unrest in many parts of the world.

We define ourselves mostly in terms of our foreground. Our potential is highlighted by developing trends in our background.

## Hearing

It started with our study group's consideration of the Aristotle lesson on Hearing and went on through a whole range of considerations. For example, we noted that in school we are not taught how to listen. Readin, Ritin and Rithmetic are the traditional 3R's. Apparently, hearing is so obvious that there is no "larnin" to it. I worked for a company that was about to launch a major initiative, but somebody important pointed out that employees were not ready to support the launch because they were not skilled listeners. So we set out to train everybody on how to listen. It was very interesting to be working on something most of us just take for granted. It turned out that listening meant you should be doing something, not just standing there like a post while the other person talks. They called it Active Listening.

Then our group came to the statement in a Sabian lesson that "The senses are not of body..." so we circled the wagons and had a big discussion. What came out of it was better understanding of a central issue for the Sabian work – that experience begins with events which use the body in various ways, as in hearing, but the reality of the experience is in meaning, at the level of mind or spirit.

Noting our tendency to use emails for simple assertion, we went on to try to find the difference between listening and hearing. It seemed to us that hearing was what we do as we extract meaning from the noise vibrations that strike our ears. Listening felt to us more like a social skill – paying attention, allowing, interpreting, checking on what was meant, and so on. Listening is more interactive than simple hearing.



Then we did an exercise, as each person in the group discussed what they had been thinking about or working on in the discussion. As we reported out, it developed that each of us had been appreciating something in what one other person had been expressing and was appreciative in a way that reflected the speaker's own preoccupations. We were picking up on each other's concerns but always in light of our own ongoing mental processing.

Our next step, of course, was to wonder why such an exchange felt so good. Trust was obviously part of it – the feeling that we could check each others' thinking safely. So we took it the next step – if hearing is the use of the senses to develop meaning, then in a group the possibility is to share meaning. As one person expressed it, the purpose of our talking with each other in the group is to connect soul to soul.

## Individual Reality

The central issue for all life is tension, not tranquility. This is why the development of our brains focused on fight or flight for eons before moving on to develop the emotional level and then finally, during our own lifetimes, to finish with the frontal, rational part. Tension is about maintaining all the different kinds of balances that constitute an individual. Of course, you are not conscious of all those balances, but you feel

it when they go awry. Pain is the opportunity to learn something. That's why "they" tell us that our behavior is 95% subconscious. The body is a self-referential mechanism, which means that it checks on itself internally and adapts to what becomes necessary, without informing your conscious mind.

Which leaves us walking around in the world with built-in tendencies, (which Sabian astrology can describe) still working out the problems presented to us as infants and small children as we take whatever places we can make for ourselves in society, as we work on becoming more conscious. And when we find ways to do it, we contribute what we can. Marc Jones describes moving from bondage to habit, through gaining control of our animal impulses, getting interested in values and then excited enough about ideals to take them personally and bring them into actuality. This is your individual business.

But what happens when we have to work together? We fall back on what we have learned along the way. We know that other people can be really different from us, so we watch out. In a new group we keep a low profile. In a well-known group we gather with those who think like us. And when somebody brings up something that is clearly "wrong" we go silent, we change the subject, or maybe try to correct them. Our problem is that we are already programmed by our experiences and we use them as a template to judge what is happening now. We lose flexibility because our experiences have shaped us in a certain way. So we learn to let people be the way they are – to mind our own business.

The world around us does not operate in terms of individual reality. With convenience as the central issue, society has always been shaped to comfort the elite, and culture set up

to distract the masses. With sophisticated ways of studying what individuals want, industry uses generalizations keyed to such research to encourage people to buy and get convenient and even stylish. The generalizations are structured for profit, conditioning public expectations, and are effective in producing too many cars, downgrading the railroads, alarming obesity rates, rapacious financial communities, suburbs vs. inner-city ghettos, ineffective medical/pharmaceutical systems, mediocre schooling, partisan loyalties rather than community awareness in politics, and so on.

Nevertheless, our individual reality is personally experienced and acted upon. Whatever we have learned as individuals we apply in our own lives, in our families, and in our interactions with others. A useful question for the individual is “Am I just existing, or thriving, or actually contributing?”

## The Error Experience

It started as a dream. Somehow that effort was to state the Sabian principles, but my “dream computer” had a way of classifying some statements as error. So then the task became finding a way of satisfying the algorithms and removing the errors. Of course, in the dream there were many iterations. I found myself going over it again and again and feeling some satisfaction at getting rid of the errors. But then I noticed that there wasn’t much left of the content, so I wondered about how

to state what the positive content is. That woke me up!

Now awake and thinking in a more “rational” way, I began to think about an earlier effort in man’s gradual development of trying to get rid of errors. That was the Inquisition. The official guardians of the Faith developed the notion that word formulations were the key, so they had to police the way people expressed themselves in order to eradicate error. The “truth” had been decided upon by official councils, so they had some formulations to use in testing the acceptability of an individual’s way of expressing things in words.

As things turned out, the Inquisition evolved into an elaborate effort to block paradigm shift. Humankind’s experience was expanding geographically. Watching ship sails gradually sink out of sight as the ship went farther away, they figured out that this earth must be a huge sphere. Then pragmatic observation of celestial movements suggested that this big sphere was moving around the sun, rather than anchoring the whole system. So, no matter what the official councils had formulated on the basis of their elaborate political functioning, human experience was changing, and more adequate ways had to be found for expressing it.

This led me to thinking about a workshop my wife used to run, called Heretics Unlimited. She had such a good time with that program. People would come in feeling very tentative then gradually reveal how uncomfortable they felt when trying to conform to what other people seemed to want them to think. Then, after lots of discussion, participants would feel reassured that their odd way of looking at things was entirely appropriate

for their unique experience of life,

Then, of course, this brought me back to our Sabian issue of reality seen as what has continued to happen for the individual who is experiencing it, so that realities vary considerably from one person to another, and from group to group. And the puzzling connection that brings all these realities together, in their personal integrity, to form the group reality, which sometimes functions in the odd patterns of political action or reaction.

Considering that we go on adjusting our understanding of what reality is, based on what is continuing to happen to us, word formulations are too tricky to count on. They need to be allowed to shift over time to reflect the relationships occurring in space. Struggling with the word patterns in the cabalistic sentences in our lessons turns out to be a constant, reliable barometer of what one's own readiness is, no matter what Marc Jones may have been trying to get across in some of those long sentences. Since he tried to include everything relevant in those sentences, what you pick out of it IS your reality.

The long, long effort to understand

Mankind has been trying to make sense of the human process for a very long time. In the Christian world, for

example, at the first Council of Nicaea in 787 CE, the rich and powerful individuals who decide such things came up with the official assumption that our material body is imbued with rational spirit. Almost a century later, a similar body at the second Council of Nicaea in 869 reached the dualistic conclusion that humans are made up of spirit (mind) and body (matter). We began to think of “spirit” as conscience, inspiration, tuned into mystery, union with the Divine; more patriarchal in orientation. “Soul” or “anima” was more feminine in function as intuition, tuned to the limitations and realities of life, guiding us toward healing, life meaning, destiny and wholeness. The Reformation unleashed a proliferation of interpretations, which was intensified by the translation of the Bible, which had become available in book form, so people could read it and form their own conclusions. The eventual Quaker reaction was to simplify it all again, so there are no “visible sacraments” in Quaker practice.

The World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1898 brought Eastern ways of thinking into a more visible connection with our Western preoccupations. We had a greater availability of information on Theosophy, then Anthroposophy, then Vedanta, and finally Buddhism. Marc Jones upgraded the practice of astrology. The very old Sufi system of the Enneagram became more popular and was incorporated into Jesuit spiritual teachings. Eventually we had a series of books by a medical intuitive, Carolyn Myss, on how to work with your own soul development. Karen Armstrong has included Islam in her efforts to help us understand the practices of religion. One of our Sabian members has been sharing his expanding adventures in shamanism, working with a Toltec Elder

This long effort to understand ourselves better is occasioned by the basic difficulty of increasing human consciousness. At least, now the term itself is in frequent current usage, indicating a more widespread appreciation of the importance of the issue. Even the scientific community has taken an interest. One of the most useful examples of that is the book by Stanislav and Christina Grof, *The Stormy Search For The Self* (1990) in which they detail their work in helping people undergoing various degrees of the mystical experience, however difficult. The current publication I am finding most useful in this regard is *The Purpose-Guided Universe* (2010) by Bernard Haisch, an astrophysicist, in which he spells out the fine-tuning of the universe which supports life, reminds us that quantum physics posits the foundational nature of consciousness, and draws on the “perennial philosophy” to point to the validity of the mystical understanding of it all.

History shows all these crowds of people talking and talking about it, generalizing, arguing, battling each other because of disagreements. Meanwhile we issue the Sabian lessons to members who are working along, small step by small step, focusing our effort where it belongs – in the life of each individual.

## The Sabian Assembly:

With continuous activity since October 17, 1923, The Sabian Assembly provides an extensive array of materials and steps to assist the individual seeker to accelerate personal development through personal study, participation in group rituals, and the chance to elect a ten-year program of self-discipline.

Marc Edmund Jones, the individual who developed these materials, was born in 1888 and died in 1980. He served for 5 years as the minister for a congregation in California. He earned a PhD in Philosophy from Columbia University. He revolutionized the practice of astrology by making it less dependent on fortunetelling and more useful as a form of personalized counseling.

For further information on the Sabian Assembly, visit our two websites: [www.sabianassembly.org](http://www.sabianassembly.org). And [www.sabian.org](http://www.sabian.org).

This collection provides examples of the kind of currently written essays that accompany the regular issue of Sabian lessons. Also written by Stan Carnarius:

*Adventures of a Sabian Student* (2011, Infinity Publisher)

*Marc Edmund Jones, a biography* (2014, Infinity Publisher)