IN SEARCH OF SHAMBHALA

Konstantin Rudnev's Esoteric Thought



Edited by Massimo Introvigne and Karolina Maria Kotkowska

CESNUR

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Introduction

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Beyond the Court Cases

In 2026, CESNUR devoted two publications to the case of the Russian spiritual teacher Konstantin Rudnev. A special issue of *The Journal of CESNUR* (vol. 10, no. 5) collected ten articles by international scholars on the injustices Rudnev suffered in Russia, Montenegro, and Argentina, on his early life, and on his teachings (Richardson 2026). It was followed by the book *Dangerous Justice: Argentina's Criminal System in the Mirror of the Rudnev Case* (Introvigne and Vardé 2026b), which examined the Argentine proceedings against Rudnev and what they reveal about pre-trial detention, anti-trafficking legislation, and the transnational circulation of anti-cult stereotypes. Both publications built on a long article by one of us (Introvigne) and María Vardé, which reconstructed the trajectory of the case from Novosibirsk to Bariloche (Introvigne and Vardé 2026a).

This book is different. Its subject is not the criminal cases against Rudnev or the controversies surrounding him, but his esoteric teachings. The two are not unrelated. In Russia and Argentina alike, prosecutors and journalists have quoted passages from Rudnev's books, or from texts wrongly attributed to him, isolated from the system of ideas that gives them meaning. A myth read as a manual, a spiritual exercise read as a technique of manipulation, or a novel read as a confession can easily become "evidence." Yet Rudnev's writings have rarely been studied as what they are: the expression of a complex esoteric worldview, with its own cosmology, anthropology, ethics, and practices. The contributors to this volume have read them with the ordinary tools of religious studies and of the academic study of Western esotericism, paying attention to genre, sources, internal coherence, and the purposes for which the texts were written.

Esoteric ideas have a powerful hold on the imagination. This is partly because they are less familiar than the religious beliefs held by most of society. This relative unfamiliarity may make them seem somewhat exotic and mysterious, and thus

particularly appealing. However, once removed from their original context, these ideas may become difficult to understand and may be misinterpreted or even ridiculed. Understanding specific concepts requires familiarity with the interpretive framework within which their author operates.

It is generally accepted, for example, that the great monotheistic religions should not be interpreted solely on the basis of brief passages taken out of context. Their sacred texts are also interpreted with due consideration for the historical and cultural circumstances in which they emerged and were transmitted. Yet new spiritual currents and new religious movements are often not afforded a comparable degree of interpretive charity or contextualization. To understand the concepts presented by Konstantin Rudnev, as with those of any contemporary spiritual teacher, it is therefore necessary to examine his thought as a coherent whole, including its interpretive framework and system of meanings. Only then can individual elements be properly interpreted. Citing arbitrary fragments or misattributing authorship—that is, attributing to an author texts written by others—does not present a teacher's ideas accurately. Rather, such practices serve to ridicule or distort these teachings, presenting them in a misleading light or making them appear absurd.

Scholars, particularly those working in the history of ideas and intellectual history and studying esoteric currents, should approach the systems they investigate as impartially as possible and without prejudice, refraining from normative judgments and seeking to understand these systems on their own terms. An essential part of this process is contextualizing these systems and relating them to other established currents of esotericism, religion, and spirituality.

On the one hand, such research seeks to chart a conceptual landscape, identifying its principal areas of interest and the meanings associated with them. The chapters of this book are devoted precisely to mapping the extensive corpus of Konstantin Rudnev's writings. On the other hand, they situate the ideas expressed in these texts in relation to other, better-known systems of thought, esoteric currents, and organizations. Accordingly, we also seek to identify the various allusions and references found in Rudnev's work. His writings draw on a wide range of sources, among which nineteenth- and twentieth-century esoteric currents and their subsequent reinterpretations occupy an important place. From this perspective, Rudnev's ideas belong to established esoteric discourses that, while perhaps less familiar to the general public, are well known to, and studied by, scholars of esotericism.

Konstantin Rudnev: A Short Biographical Note

It is not our intention to tell Rudnev's story again. Readers will find it in the publications mentioned above, and particularly in a spiritual biography published by one of us (Introvigne 2026) and in the article by Introvigne and Vardé (2026a). However, a few basic elements about Rudnev's formation and the development of his key ideas may help readers approach the chapters that follow.

Konstantin Rudnev was born in Novosibirsk on August 4, 1967. The central figure of his childhood was not his parents but his grandmother, a deeply religious native of Moscow who had survived the Stalinist repressions and had been exiled to Novosibirsk after World War II. Under her influence, Rudnev and his brother first glimpsed a life outside the ideological confines of the Soviet state. As a teenager, Rudnev was often bullied by his peers, and he came to regard his difficulty in handling these situations as a sign of imperfection that he should overcome by transforming himself. When he was about fifteen, his brother showed him an article on yoga published in one of the few Soviet magazines that offered non-ideological information. An intense practice of yoga at home and the reading of whatever spiritual literature was available followed.

The year 1987 marked a turning point. The brothers met a man they regarded as "very advanced" in esoteric terms, and the encounter triggered what Rudnev's brother calls an "opening of consciousness." During Perestroika, the brothers also frequented Christian groups such as Adventists and Baptists. They did not join them, but Rudnev was impressed by their devotion. Called up for military service in an army plagued by violent hazing, Rudnev chose a path common among young men of his generation and feigned mental illness. He was discharged from both the hospital and the army in 1988–1989 and immediately started a yoga group. Postural hatha yoga soon became for him only the gateway to a broader spiritual teaching. He was influenced by the books of Carlos Castaneda (1925–1998), studied Siberian shamanism, and experimented with the "astral karate" of the controversial late-Soviet teacher Valery Averyanov.

Rudnev decided to devote himself full-time to teaching, although the Soviet authorities regarded his lack of conventional employment as "parasitism." He developed a critical view of the state, which in his opinion seeks to turn people into "fools and cowards" to control them more easily, a criticism he later extended to the Putin regime. The growing popularity of his groups, whose members the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian anti-cult movement estimated at some 20,000 in the early twenty-first century, created friction with both. Rudnev established organizations called the Siberian Association of Yogis and the Olirna Association. "Ashram Shambhala" was a name some of his followers gave

to the place where they lived near him, later adopted by journalists and investigators, while Rudnev called his teaching "Sekoru Dharma."

Under police surveillance from 1999, Rudnev was arrested in 2010 after a spectacular raid and sentenced in Novosibirsk in 2013 to eleven years in jail, at the end of a trial shaped by a long media campaign against him. In prison, he continued to write, and some of the works discussed in this book date from those years. Released in 2021, he left Russia, lived for some time in Montenegro, where he was harassed by the police on the basis of the old Russian accusations, and finally settled in Bariloche, Argentina. There, he was arrested in March 2025 and accused of leading a human trafficking organization, a case discussed in detail in *Dangerous Justice* (Introvigne and Vardé 2026a, 14–23; 2026b). While in detention and later under house arrest in Argentina, he wrote a series of Manifestos, which are analyzed in one of the chapters of this book.

The Key Ideas

Rudnev's worldview blends Siberian shamanism with Eastern notions such as Tantra and karma, as well as with elements derived from modern Western esotericism. Its central idea is that the physical world is not our true home but a training ground, which Rudnev compares to a gym or a business trip, where souls learn through challenges, mistakes, and suffering before returning to divine unity. Four divine forces, each connected with a dimension of time, govern the universe: Tengri, eternity; Ulgen, the future; Umai, the present; and Erlik, the past and the realm of the dead. The human person is not a unified being but a composite of five souls, Aiy, Bos, Tes, Sur, and Kut, each responsible for a different mode of perception or life force. Extraterrestrial civilizations, often ridiculed by Rudnev's critics, appear in his teachings as distant intelligences that seeded consciousness on Earth and still observe humanity's development.

This cosmology is matched by a severe diagnosis of modern society, which according to Rudnev keeps human beings asleep through the media, propaganda, and education, and imposes on them roles and stereotypes that he calls the "Devil's pattern." Suffering, in this framework, becomes a catalyst for awakening, although Rudnev insists that spiritual progress is measured by the capacity to spread compassion, not by extraordinary experiences. Practices such as Tantra and Maithuna, which Rudnev expanded into a comprehensive discipline of everyday life, the Gyud method based on hypnosis, the Sampo or astral karate, the collective Field of Love, and Orphism, which uses music and art for spiritual purposes, are all intended to dismantle imposed identities and rebuild the self

around its divine core. Death is a transformation, followed by a period of forty to forty-nine days in which the soul detaches itself from the earthly world, and by a judgment understood as a moment of deep empathy with all those one's life has affected. The ideal person who emerges from this system is the Warrior of Light, who awakens from the spell of modern life and commits to service, awareness, and the mastery of subtle energies.

The title of this book alludes to the name "Ashram Shambhala" by which Rudnev's movement has become known. It also alludes to the place Shambhala occupies in Rudnev's own writings, where it appears as a center of higher spiritual knowledge in the tradition of Theosophy and of Nicholas Roerich (1874–1947), and to the image of the spiritual journey as a search, which runs through all his works.

Although Shambhala has roots in Hindu mythology, the myth became particularly prominent through the Kalachakra tradition of Tibetan Buddhism. Its reception in the West was subsequently shaped by Theosophy and, in particular, by the writings and spiritual vision of Nicholas Roerich and his wife Helena Roerich (1879–1955), whose interpretation of Shambhala became central to the teachings of Agni Yoga (Znamenski 2011). Shambhala thus offers more than a key to understanding one of the recurring themes in Rudnev's writings: it also provides a point of entry into the broader intellectual context of his work, in which Eastern religious ideas are approached through the mediating frameworks of Western esotericism and Russian spiritual thought.

The Structure of the Book

The book opens with a chapter by one of us (Kotkowska), which reads Rudnev's *Darshans*, the eleven volumes of dialogues that form the core of his corpus, together with *Darshan Tantra*, the novel *Secrets of the Dead*, and a series of instructional videos produced by his students, through the categories of the academic study of Western esotericism. The chapter discusses the gradual revelation of knowledge and the social and political reasons that, according to Rudnev, kept it hidden; the struggle against "incorrect thinking" and negative emotions, represented in *Secrets of the Dead* as astral parasites; the unusual centrality of war and state power in *Darshan Tantra*; the redirection of sexual energy; and the roles of planetary influences and Egregores. It then explores the multiverse of *Secrets of the Dead* and its many debts to the Theosophical imagination, showing how elements borrowed from earlier traditions acquire new meanings within Rudnev's system. The chapter also shows that *The Way of the Fool*, a text quoted by Rudnev's

opponents and prosecutors as "the main scripture" of his movement, was in fact written by one of his students and never had the central role critics attribute to it.

Márk Nemes examines the Manifestos Rudnev wrote in Argentina, first in detention and then under house arrest, in light of four volumes of the *Darshans* and of *Darshan Tantra*. After summarizing Rudnev's doctrine of the seven bodies, of "incorrect thinking," and of sexual energy, Nemes argues that the Manifestos convey a dual message. On the surface, they offer a broadly accessible holistic and humanistic critique of prisons, media, and systems of control. Beneath it, readers familiar with the *Darshans* can recognize references to esoteric teachings on the Atman, the Inner Light, the Warrior of Light, karma, and inner alchemy. Nemes also proposes reading the Manifestos as "process art," through which Rudnev comes to terms with his own experiences of persecution.

One of us (Introvigne) and María Vardé discuss *The Dawn of Inliranga*, a novel that presents Rudnev's teachings through the adventures of a group of students of a Tantric school. They argue that the book organizes its heterogeneous materials around an anthropology of influence, in which spiritual work consists of making perceptible the forces that shape thoughts, emotions, and identities. The chapter compares Rudnev's practices of attention and self-observation with those of George Ivanovich Gurdjieff (1866?–1949), situates the novel within the late- and post-Soviet milieu of spiritual seekers, and examines in their context passages that critics have used against Rudnev.

In the following chapter, one of us (Introvigne) studies *Siberian Shamanism*, one of Rudnev's early works, which according to his wife, Tamara Rudneva, contains the foundations of his teaching. Starting from a typology of spiritual seekers Rudnev used informally, the chapter reconstructs the book's cosmology of the four gods, its anthropology of the five souls, and its image of the World Tree. It identifies Rudnev's sources among the Sakha, the Altai, and the Nanai, as well as in Slavic mythology, and concludes that the book is an original synthesis, using Siberian materials to express a philosophy of consciousness, time, and liberation.

Finally, Susan J. Palmer explores the shamanic dimensions of Rudnev's life and teachings on the basis of an interview he gave her through his wife. Rudnev recounts how his interest in Siberian shamanism developed under the Soviet regime, his apprenticeship with an Altai shaman, and his discovery of Castaneda's books through *samizdat*. Palmer compares Siberian shamanism and the Toltec "way of knowledge" described by Castaneda, as Rudnev understands them, discussing the practice of "stalking," the use of psychotropic substances, shamanic healing, and the contrasting eschatologies centered on Erlik and the Eagle.

The authors of these chapters do not necessarily agree on every point, and readers will find different emphases and interpretations. What they share is a method. Before judging Rudnev's teachings, or using them in a court of law, one should read them, in their entirety and in their context. We hope that this book will contribute to such a reading.

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Astral Bodies and Earthly Matters: A Multiverse of Meanings and Its Esoteric Key in Konstantin Rudnev's Teachings

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Introduction

The materials presenting the teachings of Konstantin Rudnev exhibit numerous characteristics of a new religious movement, but they can also be analyzed using the categories developed in the study of Western esotericism. Beyond direct or indirect references to various religious traditions, Rudnev's teachings include concepts typical of esoteric currents, such as the transmission of knowledge from an enlightened master to disciples, the gradual revelation of teachings, and the existence of other worlds and intermediary beings. They can also be considered from the perspective of countercultural currents, which constitute one of the analytical frameworks used in this kind of study. Secrecy and the selective transmission of knowledge often constitute central categories for understanding the organization, authority, and self-conceptualization of esoteric movements (Faivre 1994; Bogdan 2007; Hanegraaff 2025). In this context, the distinction between what is revealed and what remains hidden is not only a structural feature of the movements but also part of their conceptual framework.

These ideas are closely linked to practices aimed at transformation across multiple levels, including thought, emotions, bodily attitudes, and life choices. In movements that draw on Tantric traditions, practices may also include activities related to sexual energy, including its transmission, cultivation, and application. Such approaches often face social misunderstanding because they intersect two sensitive domains: sexuality and religion (Introvigne 2005, 2022). However, these practices cannot be examined in isolation from the beliefs that underpin them (for a discussion of the reception of Tantric elements in Western contexts, see Urban 2006, 2015; Strube 2022).

At the same time, Rudnev's teachings represent a distinctive synthesis in which various elements take on meanings specific to this system. This is evident, for example, in his interpretation of astrology, which differs from approaches found in other contemporary currents. The teachings also include ideas concerning war, Dark Powers, and various forms of external influence on human existence. Dwelling between earthly concerns, including political affairs, everyday life, major

and minor life decisions, and even the struggle not to succumb to negative emotions such as sadness, on the one hand, and subtle realms, the astral world, parallel universes, spiritual hierarchies, and even states of God-consciousness, on the other, Rudnev's writings are not only complex and multilayered but also highly practical. These teachings are presented not only in Rudnev's main writings, designated as *Darshans*, which also include the *Darshan Tantra*, but also in narrative works such as *Secrets of the Dead*. This chapter examines selected elements of Rudnev's teachings and the practices connected with them, focusing on the relationship between esoteric concepts and their practical manifestations.

Initiation into Darshans

Most of the movement's teachings are presented in eleven books of *Darshans* (*Darshan[s]* n.d.), ranging from introductory to advanced topics and intended for students at progressively higher levels of development. Beyond the form of the teachings, they all share certain elements, such as the opening statement:

> Attention!
> This book bears a special code.
> The more times you read it,
> the sooner all your problems will be solved.

Reading texts on spiritual teachings is presented as transformative and as constituting a form of initiation. The opening statement employs a specific rhetorical strategy: although it takes the form of a warning, it warns "against" something readers would presumably seek—the solution of their problems. It thus encourages repeated engagement with the texts while presenting them as containing meanings and effects that unfold gradually through continued reading. In this sense, repeated reading itself becomes one of the practices through which engagement with the teachings is cultivated.

At the same time, unlike esoteric texts intentionally constructed as complex symbolic systems accessible only to initiates, Rudnev's *Darshans* employ a highly accessible style. Their narrative structure, which gradually introduces teachings, supports sustained engagement and keeps the texts readable for a broad audience.

Reading Secrets of the Dead

This accessibility continues in another of Rudnev's works. In *Secrets of the Dead* (Rudnev n.d.c), the author takes the reader on a very long journey. Although the title might suggest a demanding read—emotionally, since it concerns death, and

formally, since texts dealing with what lies beyond the veil often take the form of complex treatises—the book surprises in two respects. Its aim is highly practical: it is intended as a remedy for both the problems of everyday life and the grand metaphysical questions usually associated with life after death, and the two are interconnected. The book is also remarkable for its accessible form; indeed, it could almost be described as a novel.

The protagonist who guides readers through life—not only his own, and not only earthly life—is Ian, a young man who has committed suicide. His story serves not only as a pretext for presenting, albeit in abbreviated form, most of the fundamental teachings in Rudnev's more detailed *Darshans*, but also, I would argue, as an occasion to develop some of them further. As befits an adventure story, the book also contains an interesting plot twist. At the outset, we learn that Ian's testimony is the result of channeling, while toward the end, together with the protagonist, we reach the point where Ian, residing in the subtle world, joins a group of students attending a hypnotic session and conveys his entire knowledge, experience, and story to one of the participants. The reader thus witnesses the very process through which the plot comes into being (Rudnev n.d.c, 237–38). The book also tells us, however, that other, less obvious inspirations arising in people's minds may likewise originate from the subtle worlds (Rudnev n.d.c, 40–1).

One of the main characters is the Master, whom readers should probably identify with the author. The persecuted innocent who encourages his students to devote themselves to spiritual work in defiance of an oppressive society is clearly a role in which Konstantin Rudnev can easily be recognized.

From insects that make negative thoughts visible to the highest samadhi, *Secrets of the Dead* is in effect a summary of Rudnev's teachings and may serve as an introductory text for those unfamiliar with this system. Above all, however, it is a text concerned with practical application in everyday, material life.

Although the work takes the form of a novel, its purpose is clearly spiritual, and the teachings it contains may have, for the author and his students, a sacred status, addressing matters of vital importance. Are we dealing with fiction or with a sacred text of spiritual origin? Or perhaps with both? I do not intend to resolve these questions, but analyzing such a content-rich text is certainly demanding. From the perspective of intellectual history, the book also reveals, or perhaps emphasizes more than other texts do, interesting currents within twentieth-century Western esotericism, which become important elements in this assemblage.

The Hidden Knowledge and Its Causes

The belief that "you are not your mind" is central to Rudnev's teachings. It is not new. The idea of distancing oneself from one's own thinking, remaining in the "now" in a state of presence rather than in the noise of thoughts, and observing those thoughts is a technique known, among others, in Buddhism. In the West, it periodically gains popularity in self-development literature, with Eckhart Tolle's *The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment* serving as a prominent example (Tolle 1997). First published in 1997, the book had, by 2025, been translated into dozens of languages and sold millions of copies. The topic of distancing oneself from one's own mind, along with simple exercises intended to facilitate this process, has undoubtedly achieved international recognition.

In Rudnev's system, the subject is invited to similar attention, but with a specific nuance. Thinking occupies a central position in the system. More precisely, incorrect thinking and the struggle against it are central (Rudnev n.d.b, 5). Other practices, such as deep meditation or the specific form of meditation often referred to as "The Dot" (Trataka), also lead to changes; however, these changes may occur very slowly or not at all (Rudnev n.d.b, 16).

By contrast, focusing on thinking and its consequences produces immediately observable effects. Fighting incorrect thinking makes people stop acting like slaves. Both the family and the state are presented as forces that impose incorrect thinking and reduce individual choices to socially prescribed patterns of behavior.

According to Rudnev, two main reasons keep this knowledge from being widely accessible. "For… two reasons, this method is, so to speak, unpopular, hidden, or shared only with certain people," states one text summarizing Rudnev's ideas, titled *The Main Ideas of the Teaching*, in the form of questions and answers (Rudnev n.d.b, 16). What, then, are these reasons?

The first relates to the environments in which traditional meditative practices developed, such as monasteries and caves, which are not easily accessible. Second, working with incorrect thinking reveals patterns and forms of conditioning imposed by society and the state, whose punitive reaction would be immediate (Rudnev n.d.b, 16). Thus, the decisive factors are historical and socio-political. The negative role of political pressure appears as a particularly prominent theme in other writings presenting Rudnev's ideas (*Darshan[s]* n.d., I, 53–60; II, 6–16; Rudnev n.d.a, 6–8, 73–5).

This simple activity is among the most powerful practices in the teachings. Changing incorrect thinking is simple in theory, yet widely regarded as socially and politically unacceptable. However, changing one's thinking and moving

beyond imposed patterns does not mean active rebellion. Rather, it involves restraint, self-discipline, and refraining from certain actions.

Negative Thoughts and Incorrect Thinking

Although this work describes many spiritual practices, from the simplest to the highly complex, the minimum practice it presupposes is refraining from giving in to negative emotions. This has little to do with the fashionable practice of visualization aimed at achieving worldly benefits, such as success at work or a trip to one's dream vacation destination. Instead, the book presents, in vivid detail, the mechanism by which dark forces produce negative thoughts. Thoughts are energetic outgrowths that enormous astral insects, spiders, and worms feed on (Rudnev n.d.c, 19, 89, 152). These creatures stimulate the individual to produce such thoughts and then feed on them. Bad thoughts, sadness, even grief, anguish, or remaining in a toxic relationship are represented as a spider sitting on one's head, a huge leech attached to the body, a disgusting beetle, a fly, or something similar, which can be observed in the subtle world and literally feeds on these emotions, growing as it does so. In contrast to popular affirmations and positive thinking, Rudnev focuses on overcoming negative thoughts in the subtle worlds and on the development of the individual, whose physical existence on Earth is only a transitional period and by no means the end of learning.

Compared with Rudnev's *Darshans*, *Secrets of the Dead* shifts the emphasis from incorrect thinking to emotions. In the *Darshans*, the author devoted considerable attention to the issue of incorrect thinking, which he presented as the result of the influence of social structures, from the smallest units, such as the family, to the largest, such as the state, whose aim is to subordinate the individual and thereby gain control over their life and goals (cf. *Darshan[s]* n.d., I, 53–60; II, 6–16; Rudnev n.d.a, 6–8, 73–5).

The basis of individual liberation, and consequently of the liberation of entire groups, was therefore freedom from incorrect thinking. Rudnev identified various ways of achieving this goal, including spiritual practices known from earlier traditions, which, however, required conditions difficult to maintain in everyday life. In *Secrets of the Dead*, by contrast, emotions are the point of departure, above all negative emotions and the negative thoughts associated with them. They lead to poor well-being and, in extreme cases, to suicidal thoughts and attempts, while both these emotions and incorrect thinking are connected with a lack of any sense of meaning in life and in the world. Understanding how emotions function on the spiritual plane is intended to help individuals distance themselves

from them; only that distance can lead to intellectual change and different life decisions, which are much harder to bring about when one remains directly entangled in the situation one is experiencing.

The way negative emotions are represented in the spiritual world also plays an important role here: as repulsive entities clinging to people, such as huge slugs or a spider sitting on one's head. These vivid representations may be understood as a way to bring the principle of distancing oneself from negative emotions into everyday practice. Self-torment becomes associated with disgust, and this association becomes a practical tool. More active techniques of working on the spiritual plane are also presented here in considerable detail. To simplify considerably, Tantra (cf. Rudnev n.d.a) may serve as the energetic fuel for such tasks, while astral karate serves as their tool.

Wars and Dark Powers—A Spiritual Minority Against the System

Rudnev's *Darshan Tantra* is a peculiar text. It clearly illustrates one of the central themes of the other eleven *Darshans*, which is unusual in the broader context of Western neo-Tantric texts: war. *Darshan Tantra*'s principal concern is the imbalance of power, state policies, and the consequences they produce, particularly the pressure placed on individuals to participate in wars. The word "war" appears thirty-nine times in the text, accompanied by six references to the military.

War is not understood as an exceptional event detached from the ordinary functioning of the state. Rather, it represents the culmination of a process in which the social system becomes so thoroughly subjugated that individuals are compelled—or manipulated into voluntarily consenting—to sacrifice their lives, health, and vital energy to political authority during armed conflict (Rudnev n.d.a, 7, 54, 102, 134). In this sense, war constitutes the highest expression of both individual and collective subjugation (Rudnev n.d.a, 50–61). The work with sexual energy can stop wars (Rudnev n.d.a, 65, 103). This points to the next dimension of practices.

At the same time, as numerous examples throughout the text illustrate, the more totalitarian the regime, the more extensive its encroachments on individual freedom and the rights of various minority groups (Rudnev n.d.a, 44). Minorities—whether religious, cultural, sexual, or otherwise—embody alternative ways of living that exist outside the dominant system and its prescribed patterns of behavior, which the system cannot tolerate. Being part of a minority can be (but is not necessarily) a step toward spiritual development outside the state's programs.

Sexual Energy and Orgasm as Castration

The Tantric lectures in *Darshan Tantra* are described as taking place (symbolically) "in the very ancient Khajuraho Temple" (Rudnev n.d.a, 4). Before entering, the disciples contemplate the erotic sculptures adorning the temple walls. Khajuraho is indeed a group of temples in India famous for its erotic depictions, though these account for only about 10 percent of the sculptures (Desai 1996), with the remaining works depicting various other scenes from everyday life. Moreover, the relationship between these erotic representations and Tantra is by no means self-evident, although some scholars have suggested it (Rabe 2000).

The temple is referenced numerous times throughout the text (e.g., Rudnev n.d.a, 3, 4, 14–5, 33, 42, 61, 81, 138). It assumes its most prominent role in the opening sections—serving as an indispensable backdrop and introduction to sexual energy and the function of eroticism in primordial religion—and in the final part of the book, where the author focuses on the levels of initiation and describes the dance of the priestess within this temple (Rudnev n.d.a, 146–75).

The Sage solemnly declared to his pupils that "During that time, people possessed the Ancient True Knowledge. They understood that sexual energy could be used for spiritual development and union with God" (Rudnev n.d.a, 4). Thus, the work's central theme emerges: sexual energy as a forgotten means of spiritual development, with the ultimate goal of union with God.

An important distinction must be made between the sexual act itself and sexual energy (Rudnev n.d.a, 3–15). In Rudnev's work, the primary emphasis is on sexual energy rather than on sexual intercourse. Although Maithuna (sexual union) is presented as the pinnacle of Tantric practice (Rudnev n.d.a, 135–36), the focus is not on the sexual act itself. For those who practice with awareness, sex is never truly about sex. Orgasm is regarded as an absolute waste of energy from both a spiritual and a personal perspective (Rudnev n.d.a, 25–8, 100–2), and, on the physical level, as a kind of temporary castration (Rudnev n.d.a, 122).

Sexual energy is considered the most important—or at least one of the most important—energies available to human beings. Various practices serve as means of raising this energy level. Their purpose, however, is not to discharge it outwardly, but rather to redirect it toward internal centers (Rudnev n.d.a, 14, 66, 134).

Techniques Described in Darshan Tantra

What opponents usually consider problematic, immoral, or otherwise controversial in Tantric source materials is the set of techniques described. Anyone seeking such controversy within *Darshan Tantra* will, however, be rather disappointed. The techniques fall into three categories: those explicitly described, those merely mentioned, and those absent from the text. We learn that Tantric techniques can be practiced individually, in couples, with "Onomae" ("It is a being from the subtle world—our second half, our opposite-gender counterpart, which exists on the astral level": Rudnev n.d.a, 115), in groups, or even independently, on the astral plane—the latter being the most difficult yet a highly effective approach (Rudnev n.d.a, 142–43).

While "standard" intercourse may result in a physical child, the redirection of energy can generate other, subtler bodies. These subtle bodies serve as the vehicle toward the ultimate goal; thus, action initiated through them is deemed superior to action originating from the physical body (which inherently also engages the other bodies).

The reader is presented with descriptions of five stages of the Tantric ritual: the first is Mansa, "a tea ceremony" (Rudnev n.d.a, 138). The second is Mudra, during which students pair off, sit face-to-face, and hold hands to form an energetic circle (Rudnev n.d.a, 139). The third is Madhyama-natya, a specialized circle dance. The fourth stage, Matya, is designated for advanced practitioners and incorporates both dance and touch (Rudnev n.d.a, 140). The fifth and final stage is Maithuna, which involves sexual contact (Rudnev n.d.a, 141). Beyond these examples, which are condensed into four pages of a book spanning over 170 pages, very few techniques are explicitly described. Here as elsewhere, Rudnev assigns new meanings to traditional Tantric terms, sometimes in variant spellings. In the classical "five Ms" (*pañcamakāra*), *madya* means wine, *māṃsa* meat, *matsya* fish, *mudrā* parched grain (or gesture), and *maithuna* sexual union; in Rudnev's ritual, "Mansa" becomes a tea ceremony and "Matya" a dance involving touch.

The text addresses questions regarding how to manage sexual energy upon its arousal. One should welcome this energy and direct it toward other centers. One method is prayer or dancing (Rudnev n.d.a, 11, 24). Indeed, prayer is portrayed as a highly undervalued practice (Rudnev n.d.a, 80–5). If an individual's energy is already concentrated in the lower body and they wish to elevate it, one viable method is to perform squats or other exercises (Rudnev n.d.a, 101).

Furthermore, the book posits that women possess ninety percent of Svadhisthana—the sexual center that holds sexual energy—whereas men hold only ten percent (Rudnev n.d.a, 158). The energetic connection ("sans-connection": Rudnev n.d.a, 35) established during sexual intercourse persists even if the partners separate or divorce (Rudnev n.d.a, 36), with the man continuously draining the woman of her energy. Consequently, severing these connections is deemed crucial (a doctrine this group shares with other Tantric movements, such as the Path of YahRa: Introvigne 2019). Although in *Darshan Tantra* the Sage promises to discuss these practices later, the book never reveals which specific techniques may lead to the cessation of these bonds.

Finally, while the redirection of energy and the criticism of orgasm are recurring themes throughout the work, the concept of semen retention—along with specific techniques aimed at achieving it, on which a large Tantric and neo-Tantric literature exists—is never explicitly introduced.

Beyond Books

Beyond the written teachings, Rudnev's students have produced a five-part instructional video series (privately provided to me) devoted to Tantric techniques and practices. Unlike in *Darshan Tantra*, however, the videos present these practices within a broader conceptual framework rather than as isolated techniques. The explanations of Tantric methods are intertwined with Rudnev's broader ideas about human conditioning, social programs, external influences, and the role of state structures.

The presentation of Tantra follows a gradual progression, comparable to the structure found in the written teachings. Sexual practices are introduced only after preliminary stages that include self-development, control over the body, mind, and emotions, cultivation of awareness, and work with sexual energy. The videos present Tantra as a system in which sexual practices constitute just one element of a broader process of transformation rather than an independent activity. The progression culminates in the description of Maithuna as an advanced Tantric practice that requires prior preparation. Before Maithuna, the teachings emphasize a gradual process of preparation involving meditation, contemplation of the ideal, yogic asanas, pranayama, Tantric dance, and practices aimed at developing control over the body, mind, emotions, and sexual energy.

The fourth part offers the most detailed practical description, presenting the "Maithuna Sexual Kata" as a sequence of twelve positions ("bonds": Hawk Bond, Swan Bond, Rooster Bond, Snake Bond, Angus Bond, Fish Bond, Deer Bond,

Horse Bond, Boar Bond, Wolf Bond, Tiger Bond, and Dragon Bond). Each position is described not merely as a bodily arrangement but as a stage of energetic work involving concentration, breath control, moving energy through the body's channels, activating chakras, and awakening Kundalini. The practice is presented as requiring conscious control over sexual energy rather than its ordinary release through orgasm. Instead, sexual energy is redirected through the body and transformed into higher states of consciousness. The final stages of the "Kata" are framed as the formation of a shared energetic field between partners, culminating in cosmic union, expanded consciousness, and transcendence of ordinary physical limitations.

The Cosmic Laws and the Influence of Planets

Beyond the social conditions and external forms of human conditioning discussed above, the individual is presented as subject to additional influences beyond the family, the state, and social institutions: namely, planetary forces, which, in this system, take on a constraining character. Astrology thus constitutes an important esoteric component of the movement, functioning not as a tool for personality description or prediction but as part of a broader cosmological model that explains the forces shaping human existence.

According to the *Darshans*, planets are living forces governed by different levels of cosmic laws, and human beings remain under their influence until they develop awareness and can distance themselves from identification with thoughts, emotions, and external conditions. As the Sage explains, "until we achieve awareness, planets will continue to act on us according to our cosmogram, which was formed at birth" (*Darshan[s]* n.d., III, 305).

The hierarchy of influences corresponds to different cosmic levels: ordinary existence is governed by lower laws associated with social roles, false personalities, and repetitive patterns. Further development involves a transition toward stronger influences, including the laws of the planets, the Sun, the Galaxy, and ultimately higher cosmic orders (*Darshan[s]* n.d., III, 304–16). The author argues that followers of different groups are subject to different laws and levels of influence (*Darshan[s]* n.d., III, 307), suggesting that these factors also condition spiritual practice.

Egregores: Between Spiritual Realms and Everyday Life

One of the key concepts rooted in esotericism and appearing throughout Rudnev's teachings is the Egregore, discussed in all *Darshan* volumes except Volumes 1 and 11 (e.g., *Darshan[s]* n.d., II, 344; III, 57–60, 307, 383–84; IV, 406–37; VIII, 336–92) as well as in *Darshan Tantra* (Rudnev n.d.a, 91, 134, 139) and in *Life in the Egregore* (n.d.).

The Egregore is described as a collective energetic field that forms around a central idea and is sustained by the emotions, beliefs, and actions of those connected to it. Different religious traditions, social structures, and forms of collective identity are presented as expressions of Egregoric influence.

The teachings distinguish between lower Egregores, which reinforce limiting patterns and restrict development, and higher Egregores, which provide access to knowledge and support spiritual transformation (*Darshan[s]* n.d., IV, 406–37; VIII, 336–92). Because individuals cannot exist outside such influences, spiritual development requires recognizing the Egregores shaping one's life and consciously relating to them. In this way, categories from esoteric discourse extend into everyday experience, where ordinary relationships, social roles, and personal choices become part of broader spiritual dynamics.

Evolution and Its Levels

One of the most important themes in *Secrets of the Dead* is undoubtedly spiritual evolution. We follow it through the actions of several characters, not just the protagonist. The paths they follow depend on where they begin. Taken together, however, these characters provide a comprehensive picture of how humanity's evolution is understood. Indeed, it cannot be presented through a single character, which is why the novel explores different parallel paths.

Ian undoubtedly represents the lowest level of this spiritual development. Not only at the beginning of the book but also later, through retrospective accounts, we learn about much of what he experienced and the evil he committed. Moreover, suicide has been stigmatized in many cultures and religions, where it may be regarded as a serious transgression of moral or divine law.

It seems that a kind of "hell" awaits Ian, and indeed the protagonist experiences it (Rudnev n.d.c, 25–6). However, this state also stems from negative thoughts and the expectation that something bad will happen—a spiritual guide, discussed below, teaches the boy how to emerge from it. In the subtle worlds, thoughts and states of consciousness shape the surrounding environment. Ian passes through

various states, gains knowledge through his experiences, and eventually begins fighting to defend people in need on Earth. He becomes a Warrior of Light and, as a result, receives a special sword from Shambhala (Rudnev n.d.c, 98).

Ian's path represents the first stage in the evolution of someone whose life has been far removed from spirituality. An interesting addition to the book, and to this theme of Ian's development, is the illustrations, which in this context are partly rendered in a heroic fantasy aesthetic.

The second character is Sapphire—spiritually developed in the afterlife and Ian's partner there—who incarnates as a girl in a difficult family situation. Thanks to her inner development and the help of friends from the afterlife, however, she discovers spiritual teachings while still in her early teens and rebels against her abusive father, so that her life takes a different, spiritual course much earlier than Ian's (Rudnev n.d.c, 116–47). Here we encounter a reference to Rudnev's teaching that not only large social groups, such as the state, but also the smallest ones, namely families, are responsible for imposing incorrect thinking and programs through which individuals reproduce these structures and remain enslaved within them.

A very important character whose evolution we follow is Khadjur. His path suggests that the text is introductory, or at least functions as a kind of "prequel," since in other texts by Rudnev we encounter him in a higher form than the one we meet here. In this work, he is initially a priest in a temple in the astral world, where souls between incarnations reside at different stages of evolution (Rudnev n.d.c, 33). Most of them are awaiting reincarnation. Khadjur's calling, however, is different—we learn that he is destined to ascend to the world of the angels. Readers are introduced to the angelic world, the angels' characteristics, and the ceremony of Khadjur's ascension to this state (Rudnev n.d.c, 206–7). He explains that this is not the end of his development: after leaving his astral body, he will ascend to the world of angels and then to that of archangels, eventually reaching the level of God. He also describes the further stages of his development, explaining that only from the level of God will he return to reincarnation.

The book introduces the Master, a spiritual teacher living on Earth. Ian's girlfriend on Earth was a student of his teachings, and through her the Master remained in contact with Ian in the non-material realm. The Master's insight into spiritual matters went far beyond merely seeing the subtle worlds—he could navigate them. He rescues the protagonist from "hell" by instructing him to concentrate on his eyes (which may be understood in a quasi-hypnotic sense), thereby calming the boy's negative thoughts (Rudnev n.d.c, 25). He also gives him some guidance about the world in which he finds himself. After coming under

pressure from the authorities and being imprisoned, the Master experiences a series of samadhi states, which can be understood as successive stages of spiritual development. In the first, he begins to dissolve the boundary between himself and God and briefly experiences reality from God's perspective. The subsequent samadhi states lead him through increasingly comprehensive visions of Christ, the structure of the cosmos, the origin and nature of the Atman, destiny, and, finally, the relationship between God and the divine sparks carried by individuals (Rudnev n.d.c, 244–65).

As can be seen, the stories of these characters are complementary, in the sense that they present different stages of a progressive evolution of consciousness toward higher levels. They can be imagined as rays running from different points toward a single source. At the same time, this evolution takes place across multiple worlds and levels of reality, while the individual returns in successive incarnations. The Atman travels this path, with personality traits changing from one earthly incarnation to the next. The work also mentions that evolution proceeds through all levels of being, from the non-living, such as minerals, through the plant and animal worlds, and finally to humans. We learn from the stories of Khadjur and the Master what happens beyond.

Rudnev's Multiverse and Its Creative Structure

The main storyline, centered on Ian, should not mislead us into thinking the book is a simple narrative. The number and variety of themes it contains are enormous. I will mention only a few to sketch a map, although it is difficult to convey in a few words the hundreds of parallel universes, pasts, and futures (time is a separate issue altogether), as well as the places and states the characters find themselves in. Since movement in the astral world is practically unrestricted, Ian explores the universe, or more precisely, a great number of parallel worlds (Rudnev n.d.c, 127–33). They differ from ours not only spatially but also in the beings that inhabit them and how they function. One example is a species of spiritually highly developed, dog-sized insects that lead peaceful lives in pyramid-shaped houses (Rudnev n.d.c, 121).

Some figures are nevertheless familiar to the reader, although they find a new place within this complex puzzle. One example is the little green men, who absorb the energy of the stars with their entire bodies and travel in flying saucers likewise powered by stellar energy (Rudnev n.d.c, 121–23). The book says they built the pyramids on Earth and erected the megaliths, which remain active energy-generating devices (Rudnev n.d.c, 44).

Many of these themes will undoubtedly interest not only scholars of esotericism but also those working on "conspirituality" (cf. Asprem and Dyrendal 2015). In *Secrets of the Dead*, aliens gave the Maya their pyramids and calendar, while the calendar itself is a "time machine" (Rudnev n.d.c, 45). An infinite number of parallel worlds exist on the subtle plane. Ian and his friends visit the world of lucent spots, living points of light that communicate through music. They create faces specifically to communicate with human beings. In these worlds, the travelers also encounter a flying mushroom with a face that carries a human being in its roots; the spirit of the psychotropic mushroom transports him through successive worlds (Rudnev n.d.c, 239–40). This is also explicitly presented as a critique of the recreational use of psychoactive substances—the book is, after all, a kind of moral tale and repeatedly contains such admonitions.

An important element of this cosmology is the Parliament of the Planetary Coordinators, a cosmic council located in Shambhala and comprising Christ, Buddha, Krishna, Muhammad, Moses, Morya, Zarathustra, Mahavira, and other great souls. In Shambhala, we also meet its king, Rigden Djapo, who initiates the protagonists. The reader also encounters a kind of living astrology, in which the planets are personified powers influencing human destinies (cf. *Darshan[s]* n.d., III, 304–16). Greco-Roman gods also appear—in a scene set on Olympus, the gods and spirits of the "Helios system" gather for a cosmic council presided over by Jupiter. Among other things, they plan the spread of Christianity. The forces of Light are opposed by the Dark Forces, commanded by Gagtungr, a personification of evil known from Daniil Andreev's (1906–1959) *The Rose of the World* (Roza Mira), written in the 1950s, first published in Russian in 1991, and in English in 1997 (Andreev 1997).

We also encounter two masters well known from the Theosophical pantheon, El Morya and Koot Hoomi. The latter not only teaches the protagonists astral karate, a technique for overcoming the forces of darkness (cf. Introvigne and Vardé 2026, 9–11; Nemes 2026; Panin 2017), but also instructs them in Tantric matters. The book contains numerous references to Tantra—techniques for arousing sexual energy and using it for self-development and action in the astral world—which are generally very important in Rudnev's system (see Rudnev n.d.a). In this work, he also frequently employs the Shiva–Shakti opposition. A characteristic example is his collective designation of three women as a single man's Shakti ("Ian and his Shakti": Rudnev n.d.c, 100). Although Tantric traditions may involve groups of multiple participants, applying the term "Shakti" collectively to several women in relation to a single man departs from the classical binary model.

That said, one point deserves emphasis. Rudnev draws on an enormous number of themes familiar to readers interested in spiritual development. Yet their meanings, their places within the system, and their functions diverge from those they had in the constellations from which they derive. They must therefore be considered within this new system of meanings and relationships. This is an important methodological point, because to say that Tantra inspires Rudnev's text is, in itself, to say very little—and the same is true of shamanism. A tradition drawing on trance techniques would not necessarily be expected to criticize the use of psilocybin.

Shamanism offers an example. Rudnev presents it as a practice rooted in the specific social and spiritual conditions of a tribal community, where the shaman serves the tribe, its Egregore, and its spirit. He explicitly states that "there is no need for a shaman where civilization exists" (Rudnev n.d.c, 58). He thus distinguishes this traditional, community-oriented form of shamanism from contemporary forms, suggesting that the latter cannot simply reproduce the shamanic experience outside its original cultural and social context.

Such examples could easily be multiplied, but the point here is that elements of Rudnev's text lose their meaning when removed from their context. And there are many texts to consider, which leaves the historian of ideas with considerable homework before drawing any general conclusions, because this system has its own language of meanings.

The Keeper of the Knowledge and Other Masters

Rudnev's reworking of earlier traditions is visible even before one reads his books—what connects most of the volumes is their graphic design, which features an image of the Sage on the cover (and in the text), a reference to Rudnev. Of particular interest is his attire: a black robe with wide sleeves and a high-standing collar, a head covering resembling a klobuk, and the symbol of Nicholas Roerich's (1874–1947) "Banner of Peace" on his chest. Although this symbol is associated with the Roerich Pact (signed in 1935 as the "Treaty on the Protection of Artistic and Scientific Institutions and Historic Monuments"), it is also embedded in the broader ideas Roerich promoted. It is strongly associated with esotericism, particularly Theosophy.

Beyond other direct references, especially to George Ivanovich Gurdjieff (1866?–1949), Roerich holds a distinct place in Rudnev's framework, not only as an artist but also as a seeker who pursued knowledge through effort, discipline, and direct experience. This contrasts with contemporary spiritual information,

which is widely available yet often lacks proper understanding and practical application (*Darshan[s]* n.d., V, 80; IX, 682–84). The author frequently cites other figures, quotes passages from their teachings, and offers his own interpretations. He also explicitly names several individuals as Great Masters: Gurdjieff, Osho Rajneesh (1931–1990), and Carlos Castaneda (1925–1998) (*Darshan[s]* n.d., IV, 370).

Theosophical Imagination

Although neither Theosophy itself nor its principal theorists are mentioned explicitly in the *Darshan* corpus—that is, in the eleven volumes and the twelfth volume devoted to Tantra—Theosophical themes are nevertheless present and discernible throughout. Perhaps the most important inspiration in the earlier texts was Nicholas Roerich and, undoubtedly, the system of Agni Yoga recorded by his wife Helena Roerich (1879–1955; cf. Roerich 1924, 1925, 1929; Stasulane 2013). It is, in fact, a system co-created by the Roerichs (cf. Fosdick 2015).

What distinguishes *Secrets of the Dead* from the other works is not only its explicit invocation of Theosophy but also the multitude of themes that overlap with currents emerging from the Theosophical imagination, such as the teachings of the Summit Lighthouse (Abravanel 2013, 173–92), Alice Bailey (1880–1949; O'Callaghan 2013, 93–112), and—perhaps most importantly—the I AM Activity (see King 1934, 1935a, 1935b, 1937; cf. Rudbøg 2013, 151–72). It also shares the turn toward UFOs found in post-Theosophical currents (see Rothstein 2013, 217–36).

In this context, one can speak not only of the prominent role of the Mahatmas, particularly El Morya and Koot Hoomi, but also of a broader cluster of motifs firmly anchored in Theosophical traditions: the Masters of Wisdom and their hierarchical organization; the inclusion of figures such as Jesus and Buddha within a comparative framework of religious and spiritual teachers; karma and reincarnation; the existence of multiple planes of reality and the astral world; subtle bodies, auras, and chakras; spiritual evolution through successive stages and the kingdoms of nature; the correspondence between the human being and the wider cosmos; various forms of thought-energy; higher spiritual intelligences and angelic beings; Shambhala as a center of higher spiritual knowledge; the notion of a primordial or universal divine Spark, Fire, or Flame; the Great Central Sun; the idea that human development is guided by hidden spiritual hierarchies and transmitted esoteric knowledge; and, last but not least, the Ascended Masters. Taken individually, many of these elements are by no means uniquely

Theosophical; taken cumulatively, however, they contribute to a distinctly Theosophical imaginative framework.

It should be noted, however, that in "classical" Theosophy the dead remain between incarnations in the state of Devachan and, in most cases, cannot directly contact the living. Rather, their energy and love may transcend different states of existence and provide protection. In the Theosophical sources, Koot Hoomi certainly does not teach Tantric practices or, more generally, the use of sexual energy. Thus, as with the elements discussed earlier, even such a dense accumulation of references calls for caution in assessing how these elements function within Rudnev's system.

A Misunderstanding: The Way of the Fool

The scope of the sources is, I believe, already evident. I have discussed only a few esoteric topics within Rudnev's larger corpus of teachings. Yet, in the opponents' narrative, only one resource is repeatedly mentioned: *The Way of the Fool* (Путь дурака), published in two volumes (Petukhova and others n.d.). The main problem with this source is that its authorship is misattributed. Rudnev did not write it. This happens frequently in esoteric movements and would not be a problem if the text were not used against Rudnev in court cases. *The Way of the Fool* is wrongly presented as "the main scripture" of "Ashram Shambhala." Although it circulated among students, together with a myriad of other texts, it never had a special status, nor is it a systematic presentation of Rudnev's teachings.

The first part is a fictionalized narrative about Rudnev's life, in which he is portrayed as "Kot." This character becomes interested in spirituality at an early age and receives spiritual instruction, pursuing self-development as he grows up. His student, Polina Petukhova, wrote this spiritually inspired narrative about the teacher (Rudneva 2026). The second part consists of texts written by other students.

Some texts revisit themes that also appear in the *Darshans*, but in a significantly different form and tone. In contrast, Rudnev's writings maintain a highly consistent structure and style throughout more than a thousand pages. The texts in *The Way of the Fool* also lack clear theoretical coherence and fail to present the more nuanced esoteric themes explored elsewhere. The book was never intended as a guide for the students, certainly not for the advanced ones.

Although opponents and prosecutors exploited them maliciously, the misunderstandings about *The Way of the Fool* are interesting in themselves. It can be argued that the writings associated with Konstantin Rudnev are not only saturated with esoteric motifs, but that their reception and interpretation also reveal intriguing esoteric dimensions: limited access to source materials, narratives of concealment and prohibition, and instances of misattributed authorship.

Conclusion: Life Is for Practice

Rudnev's teachings have received little sustained scholarly attention so far. Media coverage has focused largely on the accusations against him, and when journalists mention his writings, they tend to dismiss them as convoluted or obscure. As this analysis has tried to show, however, the texts reward close reading: they form a complex system with its own internal logic and language of meaning, and their relationship to Theosophy, Tantra, and other currents of Western esotericism can only be assessed through careful study of the primary sources. The scholarly work undertaken so far (cf. Introvigne and Vardé 2026; Nemes 2026) suggests that such study yields a far more nuanced picture of Rudnev than the media offers.

The analysis of certain practices taught by Rudnev shows that they cannot be understood as isolated techniques detached from the broader system of ideas in which they are embedded. Meditation, astrology, and Tantric practices are presented within a comprehensive framework that includes specific understandings of knowledge, human development, and the forces shaping individual existence. The notion that knowledge is not equally accessible to everyone, the central role of the Teacher, and the distinction between higher and lower forms of influence provide the basis for interpreting these practices as instruments of transformation rather than merely as exercises or rituals.

At the same time, the practical dimension shows how broader elements of Rudnev's worldview integrate into both spiritual practices and everyday life. Concepts such as planetary influences, Egregores, Dark Powers, and the distinction between higher and lower forms of knowledge provide interpretive frameworks for understanding personal development, social relations, and ordinary experiences. In this sense, practices function not only as methods of transformation but also as ways to perceive and organize reality in accordance with Rudnev's cosmology.

As noted above, *Secrets of the Dead* reads like a novel, but from a practical perspective it is undoubtedly also a training manual. It contains so many different

practices, techniques, and principles that, if presented as a list to be learned, they would be difficult to master. Instead, Rudnev uses examples drawn from his characters' lives—lives that, within the book's logic, unfold across many different incarnations and even infinite parallel universes—to show how each practice applies to a concrete life situation. What should one do after an argument with an addicted husband? How should one behave when melancholy sets in? How does one meditate? How, and toward what, should one direct one's sexual energy?

The examples thus turn the teachings into something to be practiced rather than merely learned. Each experience becomes an illustration of how the system is supposed to work in everyday life. As a result, although the book is constructed and read as a narrative, its practical dimension makes it unmistakably a training manual. And this, ultimately, is the main lesson Ian learns from the afterlife—and the reason reincarnation exists in the first place: life is for practice.

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Reading Rudnev: Decoding Konstantin Rudnev's Manifestos in Light of His Esoteric Teachings

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Introduction

Konstantin Rudnev's spiritual system can only be understood in light of his upbringing and early exposure to a variety of religious and spiritual traditions. Inspired by a diverse range of faiths, spiritualities, and ways of inner cultivation—such as hatha yoga (हठ योग), asana (आसन), Siberian shamanism, various Tantric practices, "conspiritual" elements of UFO and extraterrestrial beliefs, and "magical" practices such as "astral karate," taught by Valery Averyanov (a.k.a. Guru Var Avera)—Rudnev articulated his metaphysical system, which he called "Sekoru Dharma." The movement that gathered around him holds that all religions contain partial truths, but only the enlightened can see the "full picture" (*Darshan[s]* n.d., I, 127–38).

Rudnev's Esoteric Teachings: The Darshans

Understanding Rudnev's teachings requires a deeper familiarity with key primary texts, including the eleven-volume *Darshans*. These texts are written in dialogical form (originally in Russian and later translated into English) and feature stories Rudnev tells in response to his students' questions, explaining fundamental holistic principles and guiding his followers in their inner development. Some questions are practical, such as the proper ways to meditate and the preferred forms of collective behavior. Others address more complex philosophical questions about existence, suffering, and the nature of the world.

The full corpus of the *Darshans* is extensive, totaling over 5,700 pages, not including supplementary materials. For this study, I focused on four volumes in the series: *Darshans* 1, 2, and 10, and a supplementary volume devoted to a specific theme, *Darshan Tantra*. These volumes provide rich information on several controversial subjects, including perspectives opposing controlling social systems and a distinctive understanding of the use and significance of sexual energies.

Cosmology and Metaphysical Framework

It is difficult to fully deconstruct the spiritual narrative of "Ashram Shambhala"—the name some students gave to Rudnev's community and school, although no organization by that name ever existed. Among the relevant points of reference are the use of the Gyud/Guida Method (particularly hypnosis), Sampo (Rudnev's version of astral karate), the Field of Love, Tantra and Maithuna (sometimes spelled "Maithkuna")—contextualized as engagement with divine sexual energies (Cusack and Prior 2016)—and Orphism (artistic means and expressions for creating spiritual resonance).

Rudnev also offers a distinctive understanding of death, interpreting it as a transformation of consciousness. At the same time, he sees life as a temporary experience (mostly framed by suffering) intended to help the soul gain an early understanding of existence before reincarnation. The ultimate goal in his worldview is to achieve an ideal form of awareness (referred to as the Warrior of Light) that can resist societal norms, commit fully to cultivation over several cycles of reincarnation, and elevate the innermost divine consciousness to the level of emptiness and objective observation by stripping away all residual elements of prior incarnations.

Rudnev's cosmology outlines four deities—symbolic rather than worshipped—each associated with a distinct concept of temporality. Tengri-khan embodies eternity and resides in the high heavens. Ulgen-khan represents the future and foresight. Umai embodies the ever-present. Erlik-khan is the symbolic manifestation of the past and the underworld. Inspired by what he calls "Siberian shamanism," his cosmology features both a vertical axis and a temporal dimension. In Rudnev's metaphysics, the soul has a similar fourfold differentiation, plus an overlapping fifth component. As Introvigne and Vardé have noted, according to this fivefold model:

> (…) a person is not a single, unified being but a composite of five souls, each responsible for different modes of perception or life force. Aiy connects the person to eternity; Bosy perceives the future; Tes perceives the past; Sur travels between worlds; and Kut energizes the body with life (Introvigne and Vardé 2026, 11).

Following a similar fourfold distinction, Rudnev's teachings also outline the levels of conscious existence (the "Tiers of Life": *Darshan[s]* n.d., I, 101–5). Spiritual practices are presented as the "keys" to moving up through these tiers, corresponding to a person's intellectual, emotional, and higher centers.

Complementing the concept of the fourfold soul, *Darshan* 1 also outlines a nuanced concept of the body, structured like matryoshka dolls, which links the body to its spiritual essence through seven layers (*Darshan[s]* n.d., I, 153–63). At the

innermost level, the "Nirvanic Body" separates the Atman (the particle of God) from God as a whole, creating the illusion of separateness, even though, in Rudnev's view, God is universal and indivisible. In this regard, his system shares several structural similarities with Hindu Vedanta, with additional articulations inspired by other neo-Tantric traditions (Introvigne 2022, 36–51). The second layer is the Causal Body, which wraps around the Atman and builds up over millions of lives, shaping an individual's unique experience and individuality. While it provides experience, it also creates limitations, as a person identifies with these accumulated experiences rather than with the essential divine consciousness beneath them. The third layer is the Mental Body, which forms during one's current life and accumulates a person's thoughts, ideas, and concepts. It is where a false personality, or self-image, is formed under the influence of others. However, its "higher parts" can develop through philosophical thought and by questioning one's identity. This layer is one of the main targets of the school's spiritual work. The Mental Body is surrounded by the Astral Body, where emotions—both sublime and negative, such as conscience, love, and compassion, as well as resentment and irritation—reside. According to Rudnev's teachings, cultivating positive emotions strengthens the Astral Body, whereas immersing oneself in negative emotions weakens it. The next layer is the Vital Body, associated with animal emotions, instinctive reactions, and lower desires such as fear, aggression, gluttony, and lust. It also serves as a reservoir of the energy necessary for life. A strong Vital Body, developed through leadership and social activity, provides the energy for assertiveness and growth, fostering a strong Yang (active, dominant) identity.

The three layers mentioned above (the Mental, Astral, and Vital Bodies) develop during an incarnation and contribute to the Causal Body after death. The Etheric Body is the sixth layer, where "biological energy" is stored. It supports biological processes such as energy production, cell division, and other physiological functions. It contains the energy channels and acupuncture points and supports the body's physical functions. A healthy lifestyle helps maintain a strong Etheric Body. The outermost shell is the Physical Body, made up of bones, muscles, the spine, and organs. It is described as limiting the soul and creating "blockages" that prevent subtle abilities from manifesting. Overcoming the influence of this body and its desires is a crucial step in the spiritual development Rudnev teaches.

"Incorrect Thinking" and Its Social Implications

As Rudnev notes, a major obstacle to spiritual growth is "incorrect thinking," which must be overcome through gradual immersion in the Teacher's lessons (*Darshan[s]* n.d., I, 112–13). Upbringing and societal conditioning—which Rudnev frequently reflects on in his Manifestos—may instill and reinforce "incorrect thinking." The first step in freeing oneself from it is to identify and challenge beliefs that can cause suffering, such as the belief that being offended in itself causes suffering. By replacing incorrect thoughts with correct ones, individuals gain self-control, loosen their identification with thoughts, and begin to see themselves as spiritual entities separate from their thinking, which is rooted in the layers of the soul accumulated over multiple incarnations. This process, described as a "universal exercise," is twofold: it addresses the "pain" caused by conventional guilt and by a higher sense of guilt before one's Higher ("Atmanic") Self. Rudnev notes—referring to himself as the Teacher, the Keeper of Knowledge, or the Sage—that repentance is the foundation for awakening conscience, which serves as an inner guide or "inner Guru" for every initiate.

Self-Knowledge and the Atman

Many of Rudnev's teachings present the Delphic maxim γνῶθι σεαυτόν (gnōthi seauton), or "Know thyself," one of the 147 maxims recorded by Stobaeus (fifth century CE), as a first step toward inner elevation. Rudnev's approach, however, differs in several respects: self-knowledge, in his view, begins by separating oneself from all thoughts and understanding "who is not me." This separation involves recognizing that anything one can observe—the body, emotions, thoughts—is "not me," consisting instead of external elements or remnants of past incarnations or experiences. Here, the "I" is identified as a detached observer, whose self-knowledge involves separating the "true self" from false personalities and external influences. The true self, the Atman within the body, is considered unchanging, perfect, and part of God. Rudnev also alludes to this incorruptible, perfect essence in many of his Manifestos, calling for the recognition of this divine seed in everyone, regardless of poorly chosen life paths and past missteps.

Social Implications

According to Rudnev, societal (im)morality suppresses naturally emerging positive emotions while instilling negativity, making it difficult to hear one's "inner Guru." Conditioning by parents, teachers, and the media enforces

materialistic behavior, which he calls the "golden calf," fed by egoism and negative emotions (*Darshan[s]* n.d., I, 7–11). Subjective beliefs ("rose-colored glasses": *Darshan[s]* n.d., I, 11–2), a "blackened" view of one's life (*Darshan[s]* n.d., I, 12–3), and false personalities all lead to the loss of one's true ("Atmanic") self (*Darshan[s]* n.d., I, 14–32). This inauthentic form of existence is also the state preferred by worldly powers, which seek to control individuals and prevent their spiritual awakening, as this would challenge their primacy and the value system they instill in everyone. Rudnev's views may be perceived as threatening to existing structures of power and social control because he challenges individuals to free themselves from systemic oppression. In Rudnev's Novosibirsk trial, such ideas were recast in legal terms as "extremism"—an utterly reductive misreading that interpreted the philosophical message of spiritual liberation and reconnection with one's innermost spirit as "anarchism."

Purpose of Life: Guided Cultivation with an Anchor

According to Rudnev's teachings, the purpose of life on Earth is refinement, a journey in which mistakes are seen as opportunities for growth. Amid these challenges, the role of the Teacher (Rudnev) is crucial in explaining the meaning of "truths" and guiding students toward spiritual advancement. The path to freedom involves recognizing the roles and influences society imposes and disentangling oneself from them, with the help of a Teacher and a global community of like-minded individuals (the initiates of Sekoru Dharma). Meditation and conscious practices are presented here as means of stopping internal dialogue and achieving a state of silence, allowing one to see reality objectively and to eliminate the disturbing or "noisemaking" elements of the outer layers of the soul, which react to the physical world or to the still-resonating remnants of prior incarnations.

Sublime States

The observation of objective reality is closely linked to Rudnev's concept of "sublime states," which parallels similar ideas described by George Ivanovich Gurdjieff (1866?–1949; Petsche 2014, 127–48). These are mostly positive inner experiences of purification and elevated consciousness. Through inner ("shamanic") journeys, initiates can also cleanse negative emotions and transform them into positive, sublime ones.

In this context, negative emotions experienced internally serve as "wake-up bells," signaling that something requires additional "Work," in Gurdjieff's terminology, or, in Rudnev's words, deeper self-reflection and correction. Without vigilance and an "anchor" in consciousness, incorrect "Work" (I am using Gurdjieff's term here to describe the basis of the activity) can destroy inner well-being (*Darshan[s]* n.d., I, 63–4). The *Darshans* illustrate this process with the image of a cart pulled by three horses (symbolizing the instinctive, emotional, and sexual centers) and driven by a drunken coachman (symbolizing the mind: *Darshan[s]* n.d., I, 37–8). All four agents must work together, under someone's coordination, for the traveler to reach his destination.

In connection with sublime states, the *Darshans* also describe anomalies that produce negative states of consciousness: these arise from malfunctions in the body's emotional, intellectual, motor, and sexual centers, when certain centers become dominant over others. In Rudnev's view, only self-observation can correct such anomalous states. These anomalies also stem from either malevolent societal conditioning or poorly processed experiences in one's current or prior incarnations, creating "blockages" (*Darshan[s]* n.d., I, 112–13).

Sexual Energy and Sacred Eroticism

In 2010, at the time of Rudnev's first arrest, the leading Russian anti-cultist Alexander Dvorkin gave an interview to *Pravda.ru* about "Ashram Shambhala," describing it as "one of the most notorious totalitarian cults" and portraying Rudnev as a sadistic "swindler" and "conman." He also offered elaborate—yet utterly misunderstood and, in several respects, factually incorrect—summaries of the spiritual practices of "Ashram Shambhala," claiming that members were emotionally and physically abused, humiliated, and forced to "participate in collective sexual orgies" (Gumanova 2010).

Although these claims were factually incorrect, the social stigma surrounding Rudnev's movement persisted, creating significant social pressure wherever Rudnev relocated after his release from prison in Russia. Such accusations are not unique: they have frequently targeted spiritual movements whose teachings include sacred eroticism, as discussed by Introvigne (2022; 2025, 50–62).

Rudnev's understanding of sexual energies is considerably richer than Dvorkin's account suggests. Sexual tension is regarded as a high-vibration energy, linked to creativity and the manifestation of the sublime emotions noted above. It can be channeled for higher spiritual development, but when misdirected, it can lead to negative emotions and destructive outcomes. As Rudnev notes, when

misused, it "no longer goes to creation, does not pass into the most exalted state, but goes down, destroys, reduces to the worm" (*Darshan[s]* n.d., II, 261).

Rudnev places sexual energies on a scale, with frigidity at the lowest level, indicating low or absent sexual energy and a life primarily dictated by societal programming. In contrast, excessive sexual energy, if uncontrolled, can push individuals toward undesirable situations such as prostitution or unhealthy fantasies (Rudnev n.d.a, 17–8). Relationship roles are also framed by a dichotomous typology of sexual energies, with Yang representing the active, dominant party and Yin symbolizing receptive, submissive traits. In Rudnev's system, these are not explicitly connected to either femininity or masculinity, which explains his views on how societal roles can produce both "masculine," assertive women and "feminine," submissive men.

Rudnev states that Tantric abstinence and total self-control are necessary to work effectively with sexual energy. This involves accumulating a significant amount of (sexual) energy, as working with small amounts is considered ineffective. Abstinence is not only a bodily act here but also an intellectual and spiritual struggle, which means controlling one's imagination (i.e., avoiding stray thoughts) to prevent sexual fantasies that can lead to discharges and loss of energy during sleep.

Sans-Connections

Another key concept regarding sexual energies is the creation of "sans-connections," which allow energy and information to flow between partners. The *Darshans* emphasize choosing suitable partners, as negative connections can drain a person's energy and well-being rather than enrich them. This is described as "energetic vampirism" (*Darshan[s]* n.d., X, 1178). Those who participate while ill or in negative emotional states may transfer negative energy to their partners.

Increasing divorce rates are presented as a positive sign that people are becoming more self-aware and refusing to endure unsuitable relationships—an indicator of "selectivity" and understanding in choosing partners. The proper functioning of the three levels of the Sexual Center (Svadhisthana Chakra)—the mechanical, emotional, and intellectual—shifts "being in love" toward the emotional rather than the physical. At the same time, this selectivity is a further step, prioritizing energetic compatibility over emotional compatibility.

The holistic-integrative attitude of the teachings becomes evident when they are contrasted with those of ISKCON and other neo-Vedic movements, which are criticized for focusing on a single chakra rather than on a holistic self. This syncretic bricolage also appears in references to and reflections on Qigong, and in the parallels drawn between the lower Dantian (one of the three energy centers for the flow of qi) and the position of the Svadhisthana Chakra in the lower abdomen (Rudnev n.d.a, 67–8).

Rudnev's spiritual narrative also reflects on sexual minorities, whom it explains, within this framework, as the result of discrepancies between the hormonal system of the physical body and the subtle energies with which it interacts. Rudnev criticizes and rejects the condemnation of these groups, seeing such condemnation as another result of aggressive, totalistic social control (Rudnev n.d.a, 44–7). Interestingly, his critique of the exclusivist approach to family and marriage can also be understood from this anti-control perspective: exclusive relationships are interpreted as aligned with totalitarian state ideology and designed to make people dependent and controllable. He contrasts this with today's liberated individuality, which often emerges among young people thanks to their strong sexual energy and to their not being tied down and controlled by systemic governing powers.

Sexual Consciousness

Rudnev also challenges the notion that human reproduction always benefits nature, arguing that overpopulation is a contemporary concern that leads to resource depletion and environmental pollution. He contends that state powers encourage population growth because it provides cheap labor and soldiers, not because it meaningfully improves people's lives. Advocating policies that limit reproduction, Rudnev presents ecological arguments, noting negative effects such as cramped living conditions and increased waste (Rudnev n.d.a, 52). He also notes that although some developed countries implement birth restrictions, high birth rates persist in regions marked by strong religious fanaticism and state control, including countries in the Middle East. In this context, he criticizes the social conditioning that pressures women to marry and have children, often leading to relationships that cause suffering for both parties. Female infertility is also reframed in his system as a "blessing from God" rather than a tragedy (Rudnev n.d.a, 58–9). He states that social indoctrination reinforces negative beliefs about infertility, whereas in reality infertility offers the ideal setting for exploring higher states of consciousness and elevating one's spiritual existence in the current cycle of incarnation. At the same time, Rudnev praises the merits of

in vitro fertilization (IVF), clarifying that children conceived through this method do have souls, and criticizes mainline religions that oppose both scientific advances and the notion that such children also have a spiritual essence (i.e., souls).

Tantra vs. Sex

Rudnev distinguishes between instinctive, quick sex aimed at reproduction and conscious, prolonged sexual activity specific to Tantric practice. In his view, the latter is not driven by an instinctive fear of predators (i.e., an animal instinct for DNA transfer). The physiological purpose of orgasm in women is interpreted as a signal for male ejaculation, underscoring the importance of women's co-leading energy in the ritual process. According to the *Darshans*, harnessing this energy and consciously directing it toward creativity, spiritual growth, and higher states of consciousness prevents it from being wasted on mere reproduction, which is viewed as an animal, instinctual form of interaction.

In conscious Tantric acts, the three levels of the Sexual Center interact through lust, pleasure, and energy conservation. At the same time, the Intellectual Center attunes the other centers to the experience of exalted states through prayer, contemplation of icons, listening to divine music, and other exercises. These activities are "organized" by the Intellectual Center so that all the other centers may attune themselves to these exalted emotions.

Rudnev presents Tantra as "the art of life," "true knowledge," and a solution to real-life challenges—a comprehensive approach to harmonious living and spiritual development that encompasses everything from eating and breathing, living and dying, to practicing yoga and sexual intercourse. Rudnev sharply distinguishes between sex as discussed in Tantric contexts and sex in conventional social discourse, where religious teachings suppress and often misrepresent it. Rudnev also asserts that these Tantric rituals are not "orgies"—as Dvorkin and many others have interpreted them—but ascetic practices that require fully conscious, affirmative participation and control over energy by both parties, aimed at serving divine energy rather than personal desires. In these contexts, true Maithuna is not merely a means of satisfaction but also a path to meditation and a way to achieve total control over the mind, body, and emotions, complemented by the elevation of Kundalini energy. The ultimate goal is not even Maithuna itself but an "orgasm with the Universe," or "Shri Mahamudra," which signifies holistic unity with the entire world and the elevation of practitioners' conscious existence. In this state, they awaken and reconnect with their inner Atman (Rudnev n.d.a, 137).

Reading Rudnev's First Manifestos: Esoteric Lessons Hidden Behind Parables of Holistic Humanism

During his incarceration in Argentina, Rudnev wrote several parables and short poems that allegorically allude to these profound teachings. He first published a set of short writings, the Manifestos of Humanity, of Love, of Truth, and from the Heart (Rudnev n.d.d, n.d.f, n.d.g, n.d.c), while in the detention center or shortly after his brief release. Together, they offered a sharp critique of modern societal structures and advocated the defense of intrinsic (one could say "Atmanic") values. Throughout these Manifestos, several themes familiar from the *Darshans* re-emerge: the suppression of truth and individuality, the destructive nature of totalistic state institutions, the paramount importance of love and unity, and the enduring power of humanity, as well as the inner light of the spiritual warrior against what he calls "manufactured truth."

In my opinion, these Manifestos should not be considered intentional art but rather Rudnev's efforts to "write out all" he has suffered over several decades, to process these experiences in an artistic-aesthetic form, to find closure, and ultimately to integrate them into his spiritual framework. The parables guide the reader through this form of process art, letting them experience the convolution of thoughts and the final crystallization of several powerful spiritual realizations. Together, these short pieces reflect on freedom, nature, and the body's role in the soul's well-being, while critiquing systems that deprive individuals of fundamental elements of life. They probe questions of freedom and captivity, truth and misinformation, and empathy and apathy, and are deeply imbued with the mystical language of "Ashram Shambhala." However, such esoteric elements remain hidden from readers who have not devoted significant time to reading the Russian spiritual teacher's voluminous writings. The following sections reveal some of these teachings.

The Suppression of Truth and Individuality

A central theme in Rudnev's writings is a critique of the deliberate suppression of truth and the systematic targeting of individuals who dare to stand out or challenge established norms. In the "Manifesto from the Heart," Rudnev laments that society often prioritizes external narratives over personal experience, stating, "We don't trust our own eyes, but rather the headlines. We don't trust our hearts, but rather the words of others" (Rudnev n.d.c). He describes being condemned by

the written word, feeling like a "monster" created by media portrayals rather than his authentic self. Seeing his distorted, unfamiliar image in these articles leaves him both enraged and saddened. Such sentiments are also echoed and expanded in the "Manifesto of Truth," where Rudnev introduces the parable of the devilish gardener who advises a king to "nip in the bud immediately" anyone who "stands out from the crowd" (Rudnev n.d.g). In this metaphor, he draws a parallel between historical and contemporary efforts to silence those who bring light or challenge authority, aligning himself with initially misunderstood and persecuted visionaries such as Socrates (ca. 470–399 BCE), Giordano Bruno (1548–1600), and Galileo (1564–1642). Rudnev describes the media's suppressive force as the "shears of the diabolical gardener that cut down the most beautiful flowers," keeping people ignorant and under control. The correspondence between Rudnev's personal experience of being judged and condemned and his deep disillusionment with systems that prioritize control and conformity over genuine expression and enlightenment holds up a distorted mirror to the reader, revealing a bitter reality born of state-enforced uniformity of thought.

The Destructive Nature of Prisons

Rudnev's prison experience underpins most of his critiques, as is particularly evident in both the "Manifesto from the Heart" and the "Manifesto of Humanity" (Rudnev n.d.c, n.d.d). He argues that prisons, originally intended to curb evil, have become sources of evil by locking up "those who get in the way" of totalistic powers. At the same time, he notes, truly dangerous individuals easily walk out of these carceral institutions. He describes prison as a "school of despair"—the antithesis of his school of enlightenment—where innocence is scarred, humanity is stripped away, and people are reduced to numbers in a systematic, almost mechanical way.

Such dehumanization extends beyond the incarcerated. As Rudnev notes, "prison punishes everyone," including the loved ones left behind, generating a harmful karmic wave that spreads beyond the prison walls. In the "Manifesto of Humanity," he elaborates further on this point, stressing the psychological and spiritual destruction caused by incarceration. He particularly emphasizes the deprivation of sunlight, nature, and human connection—something he had experienced shortly before the Manifesto was published. Here, he questions the efficacy and morality of such systems, asking, "Does man really improve through further humiliation?" (Rudnev n.d.d). Unlike mistakes and karmic backlash, from which, in his view, one may learn, the carceral system is seen as a framework that reinforces and accumulates unwanted suffering instead of offering a path to

learning and self-improvement. In these parables, his sorrow and anger converge on a framework that not only fails to rehabilitate inmates but also actively destroys the human spirit, effectively preventing spiritual elevation and improvement. Condemning such institutions, he advocates "healing spaces" instead of "stone traps." Most importantly, he notes that those who actively maintain such systems—whether prison guards, judges, or other personnel—are also contaminated by the suffering they radiate, causing a cascading karmic effect that carries harm from a deliberately sealed-off punitive system back into the supposedly safe spheres of society.

Love, Unity, and the Esoteric Figure of the Warrior of Light

Counterbalancing the critiques of oppression, Rudnev finds solace in Sekoru Dharma's spiritual teaching on the transformative power of love and unity. The "Manifesto of Love" is entirely dedicated to these themes, using the parable of the ember to illustrate that human light and the soul "only exist in unity." From behind bars, Rudnev sees the "outside world" waging "all-out war on unity," with states, systems, prisons, borders, and the media working to create separation. This external war mirrors an internal struggle—which Rudnev also shares—in which fear keeps individuals from embracing vulnerability and connection. Under these conditions, he calls for a "revolution for all of us," urging humanity to "tear down all the walls within us" and become "one people of the Earth." His vision culminates in "the United States of Love," a utopian world where compassion transcends manufactured divisions (Rudnev n.d.f). Rudnev's conviction that love is the ultimate antidote to societal ills is also situated within the broader mythical framework of "Ashram Shambhala," where the enlightened may become "Warriors of Light" and transcend the barriers imposed by mundane forces.

The Enduring Power and the Inner Light

Despite the bleak reality and horrific conditions he describes, Rudnev maintains an optimistic belief in the inherent goodness and resilience of the human spirit. In the "Manifesto from the Heart," he concludes that "kindness is stronger than fear" and that people are innately capable of independent thought (Rudnev n.d.c). He believes in seeing people as "Beings of Light," even when imprisoned.

The esoteric concept of "Inner Light" recurs as a motif, particularly in the "Manifesto of Truth" (as well as in several of Rudnev's *Darshans*), where he vows never to stop "reaching toward God, toward the Sun, toward the Light." He encourages others to "bloom—even in the desert, even in prison, even under the scissors," thereby returning to his metaphor of flowers (Rudnev n.d.g). In the "Manifesto of Humanity," he observes that even in the most deprived circumstances, people continue to share and support one another, demonstrating that "light cannot be destroyed" (Rudnev n.d.d). This sentiment embodies defiant hope, emphasizing that true humanity lies in compassion and in seeing and nurturing the light in others, even when systems attempt to extinguish it. His poetic message is further enriched by the spiritual teachings of "Ashram Shambhala," in which the phrase "Inner Light" denotes the individual's authentic ("Atmanic") soul, inherently incorruptible and benevolent.

On Control and Oppression

Rudnev consistently draws connections between external forces of oppression and the internal human struggle. In his parables, the media's distorting power and the carceral system's dehumanization are presented as manifestations of the same power that seeks to control and suppress individuality and unity at all costs. In the "Manifesto of Truth," he defines this power as the "devil's power" (Rudnev n.d.g) and directly links it to the metaphor of the "well-oiled machine of separation" used in the "Manifesto of Love" (Rudnev n.d.f). His message against such a system is a powerful wake-up call for humanity to realize its true potential. He challenges readers to look beyond superficial narratives and societal divisions, urging them to trust their hearts and embrace love, unity, and compassion.

The Manifestos, therefore, are not just critiques; they are, at heart, invitations to a personal and collective revolution of mind and spirit, culminating in a choice for humanity over all systems of control. His lament over the current state of affairs is contrasted here with an unshakable faith in human goodness and the possibility of a better future. He repeatedly emphasizes the healing power of nature—once again, an element that can be decoded through shamanic perspectives and the "amans naturae" (lover of nature) attitude of the "Ashram Shambhala" worldview.

Rudnev's Remarks on Control and Agency

Rudnev argues that the deprivation of fundamental human rights, such as sunlight and freedom, inflicted upon individuals by carceral systems mirrors the internal suffering of those disconnected from their true selves. He posits that true freedom emerges not from isolation but from embracing resilience and vulnerability and from turning toward collective love and unity. Rudnev's personal account of suffering is also immediately universalized in his parables when he writes, "I'm not speaking just for myself. I speak on behalf of thousands of people who have been living for years in similar conditions in places of confinement" (Rudnev n.d.d).

By extending his pain to the collective, Rudnev establishes a shared foundation that underscores the urgency of his call for unity and reform. His works also explore the interplay between freedom and control. He argues that controlling others inevitably leads to the loss of one's own freedom, as illustrated in "The Parable of the Caged Bird," where the one truly deprived of freedom is the one who holds the keys. Such a system, he asserts, isolates individuals "from existence itself. From nature. From the light. Of love. Of God" (Rudnev n.d.d).

In the "Manifesto of Truth," Rudnev also expands on this theme by introducing the "main law of power": "Destroy anyone who dares to be above average. Don't let others take them as an example. Make everyone equal, and then you will become the greatest ruler" (Rudnev n.d.g). Rudnev also opposes the internal "war within man," in which individuals choose safety and isolation over vulnerability and love, becoming "dead inside, but 'independent.'" This internal control, driven by fear, mirrors external systems, creating a self-replicating cycle of isolation. He challenges this model by advocating a choice to "courageously throw ourselves back into the common fire" and "tear down all the walls within us," thereby reclaiming true freedom through unity (Rudnev n.d.f).

Understanding Truth and Control in the Framework of "Ashram Shambhala"

Rudnev's Manifestos consistently present "truth" as an intrinsic, divine light within every individual, a fundamental aspect of human existence that is only suppressed by the individual (unconsciously, by choosing comfort and an inauthentic existence) or by external forces seeking "control." He argues that true freedom and spiritual growth come from aligning with one's "inner truth," an inherently connected existence rooted in nature and a transcendental form of consciousness. He hints at this in the "Manifesto of Humanity," where he states,

"I believe that there is light within every person from the very beginning" (Rudnev n.d.d). In his poetry, this inherent light represents the individual's truest self, while society and oppressive systems seek to cut off its connection to nature, love, and God. "Truth" also carries two divergent meanings in his writings. For Rudnev, it is a liberating force, a path to spiritual freedom. However, he notes that when others impose it as an external narrative, "truth" becomes a malleable construct, a "penal truth" that serves systemic power and control, often at the expense of individual rights and justice. As a vehicle for this malleable truth, Rudnev defines "control" as the antithesis of one's inherent truth. He sees the systems that isolate individuals as the front lines of psychological and spiritual assaults designed to render people "dead inside" and therefore more compliant. He explicitly criticizes the state for seeking to turn people into fools and cowards—not in the sense of his own playful fool (*homo ludens*), but to make them easier to control as subjects (cf. Rudnev n.d.g). This articulation of individual agency and active involvement is once again deeply intertwined with New Age concepts, translated in the mythology of "Ashram Shambhala" into the figure of the Warrior of Light, who makes the courageous choice to embrace this inner truth and openly resist external control.

Agency and Power

A careful analysis of the parables also reveals a fundamental divergence in how individual agency and systemic power are understood. Rudnev's Manifestos champion an intrinsic, spiritual agency that can transcend physical and psychological oppression and is rooted in an unshakeable truth—one that is genuine, benevolent, and inherent to every human being. In contrast, he views systemic power as inherently corrupt and designed to suppress this agency through fear and misinformation. Here, the version of the truth held by one individual (or by a few) is imposed on others, disregarding dialogue and prioritizing obedience above all.

Nevertheless, this dichotomy does not make Rudnev an idealist-anarchist or even anti-institutional; rather, it shows that he places greater emphasis on individual responsibility and agency within a collective form of existence, something he advocates in other contexts. In his parables, he displays not only the marks of his most recent incarceration in Argentina but also the harassment he suffered in Montenegro and the experiences of his early life in the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation, all of which he interprets as the misuse of collective power and the excessive exercise of state power over citizens. The pieces are oriented in two directions. Their inner orientation is toward processing his own

trauma and contextualizing the suffering of others he has seen and shared. Their external orientation, meanwhile, is observational and critiques the system that sustains itself through isolation, suffering, and uniformity.

Four New Manifestos on Life, Suffering, and Resilience

The first four Manifestos offer a rich tapestry of visions of personal agency grounded in an inherent divine truth, and of the importance of constantly resisting systemic forces that seek to overreach and suppress one's light. His parables challenge external narratives of power that construct malleable "truths" by exploiting legal channels and distorting media images, slowly diminishing individual agency through imposed labels and stories. He frames these matters in a mystical, esoteric language about the battle between light and darkness, unity and division, and the human spirit's enduring choice of love and truth. Beneath the artistic imagery, one can discern spiritual narratives specific to the "Ashram Shambhala" way of thinking.

After his release from detention, while still under house arrest, Rudnev continued writing and published a second set of Manifestos. In these new writings, he reflects on Gratitude, Responsibility, Knowledge, and Education (Rudnev n.d.h, n.d.i, n.d.e, n.d.b). Compared with his earlier works of the same kind, which directly critiqued modern social structures and advocated a more passionate, humanistic set of values, these new writings draw more deeply on personal recollections and connect them to spiritual teachings. Rather than only advocating grand ideals, Rudnev adopts a new position: he retreats into his own memories and builds his declarations from this inner dimension. His artistic style remains that of the parable, but the informed reader can more easily spot moments when his usual rhetorical distance narrows, as he shares his own experiences to illustrate specific points and contextualize distinct elements of Sekoru Dharma's framework.

The Transformative Power of Environment

In certain respects, the new Manifestos echo messages already present in the first set. His philosophical message still emphasizes individual spiritual growth grounded in agency, a holistic understanding of transformative environments, and the merits gained through adversity while resisting systemic conformity. The novelty lies in deeper personal reflections and additional esoteric hints within each theme. Taken together, the new writings argue that the "crisis of humanity"

is, in fact, a crisis of maturity, whose solution lies in education and in taking responsibility.

Upbringing and the Role of Environments

Across all the Manifestos, Rudnev insists that an individual's development is closely linked to their socialization. Whether discussing children's upbringing, the suppression of spiritual figures, or the acquisition of knowledge, he stresses that the intellectual soil in which a person's thoughts are planted determines their future path. In this context, he also warns that placing children in criminal environments—whether justly or unjustly—inevitably produces suffering and opens the way to a life of crime. He further states that society nurtures these intellectual seeds: by creating spaces for culture, spirituality, and wisdom, he argues, humanity can leave fear and negative emotions behind—both of which are fragmentary remnants of previous lives embedded in the soul's outer layers. He returns to this subject in his reflections on education, where he elaborates on an educational system he considers ideal.

These ideas also connect to his earlier statements on truth, where he notes that individuals deprived of positive role models or intellectual freedom create and recreate environments defined by violence and ignorance, which stunt their spiritual potential and distort their future. He also recalls the lives of several esoteric teachers, such as Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895–1986), to illustrate how an optimal environment with "wise, moral, and highly cultured mentors" can fundamentally improve a person's life path (Rudnev n.d.b). These statements also carry a subtext, emphasizing the importance of the Teacher (himself) in the framework of "Ashram Shambhala."

Inner Freedom and the Most Important Spiritual Quest

The central pillar of his reasoning in both series of parables is that true human value lies in the soul's pursuit of truth—a struggle that must remain independent of any external authority or social dogma. Rudnev frames this spiritual quest as a dangerous but essential act of defiance against dominant systems that prefer obedient, faceless flocks. In the "Manifesto of Knowledge," he recounts the risks he took to share his spiritual insights during the Soviet era, emphasizing that the knowledge he imparted then was a lived experience passed from heart to heart, much more than secret information (Rudnev n.d.e).

His thoughts return to those years in the "Statement of Gratitude," where he argues that even in the face of imprisonment or persecution, one (himself included) must hold on to one's innermost ("Atmanic") soul (Rudnev n.d.h). He maintains that the ultimate goal of human life is to awaken this consciousness, a process that requires the courage to question established norms and the resilience to remain inwardly free despite external pressures or physical confinement.

The Foundation of a Mature Society

Rudnev places great emphasis on responsibility and on being the active architect of one's destiny. He stresses that individual maturity is best defined by the transition from a "victim mentality" to a "creator mentality" (Rudnev n.d.i). Each archetype has a deeper esoteric reference in the teachings of his school. The passage between the two states is divided into several smaller phases, each leading to a clear distinction between "guilt"—a socially conditioned way of looking backward and seeking punishment—and "responsibility"—an attitude of looking toward the future and continuously improving oneself.

In each new parable, Rudnev also consistently rejects what he calls the "blame game." Whether discussing the ruined garden, a child in prison, or his own persecution, he insists that the locus of control must remain with the individual. He also argues that society's health depends on the individual's willingness to remain responsible and accountable. Responsibility, he states, brings rationality and mindful communication, as one becomes aware of the consequences of one's words. The allegory of the ruined garden, in which a man refuses to acknowledge his role in its decay, shows that as long as people look for someone to blame, they remain victims of their circumstances, trapped in an inauthentic way of life. Rudnev then goes a step further, suggesting that refusing to accept responsibility is the root cause of global crises, including wars, social divisions, and the postmodern loss of personal purpose.

Spiritual Maturity and the "Expansion of the Soul"

Rudnev also argues that true "spiritual power"—which reveals one's real agency—lies in reclaiming control from external circumstances. His reflections present this as the foundation on which individuals stop hoping for "saviors" and start acting as authors of their own lives. Instead of surrendering their power or blaming others, they take responsibility and move from the role of "bystander" to that of "author." He critiques the social tendency to blame external factors—the

government, the past, or fate—for personal or collective misfortunes, tracing this habit back to childhood, when adults often taught children to blame inanimate objects for their accidents, conditioning them to avoid accountability throughout their lives. He then envisions a movement away from seeking "ideal leaders" or feeling like "victims," toward a situation in which millions of individuals become the authors of their lives and choose to take responsibility for their immediate environment—their families, cities, and countries.

Rudnev sees responsibility as a direct spiritual practice, much more than a duty, suggesting that a "narrow consciousness" focuses only on the self, while a "holy consciousness" feels holistically responsible for everyone. Using Christ as an example, he argues that taking responsibility for others—even those who cause pain—is the ultimate expression of love and the defining trait of a spiritually mature person.

The Alchemy of Suffering and Gratitude

In the "Statement of Gratitude," Rudnev hides perhaps his most "advanced" esoteric teaching. He unlocks it for the reader through his own recollections of "betrayal, injustice, and imprisonment" and a philosophical insistence on gratitude (Rudnev n.d.h). He does not deny the reality of pain; instead, he recontextualizes these experiences as necessary to spiritual development. In doing so, he presents suffering as a vital catalyst for wisdom and strength, refusing to regard it as a senseless burden. He uses the metaphor of stones to illustrate two paths: one can carry grudges as a heavy, destructive load, or place them underfoot to build a path. This theme of transformative gratitude permeates the "Statement of Gratitude." He expresses thanks for his own hardships—including bullying and imprisonment—because these trials forced him to develop patience, resilience, and a deeper understanding of human nature. He also jokes about this theme, describing the bullies and harsh environments of his childhood as his "first Shaolin teachers." By choosing to be grateful for every lesson, he argues, individuals can regain power over their lives, turning the past into a foundation for growth rather than a prison of bitterness. This perspective also shifts the focus from victimhood to agency, enabling healing and meaning-making amid difficulty.

Rudnev also stresses that every adversity has an "alchemical" property if one shifts one's focus correctly, thus transforming suffering into wisdom through gratitude. In this way, he believes, hardships can be transmuted from obstacles into the building blocks of one's "path." Such inner alchemy is a key

theme in the spiritual scriptures of "Ashram Shambhala," which once again confirms my impression that these parables are much more than simple holistic-humanistic declarations.

Education as Liberation

Rudnev defines education as a tripartite process—also aligned with the Mental, Astral, and Vital Bodies—that goes well beyond academic achievement and includes social (how to live), cultural (how to appreciate beauty), and religious (how to understand the soul) aspects. He sees education as a way of preventing what he calls the "incomplete person"—someone who knows how to use a computer but does not know how to control anger and other strong emotions (Rudnev n.d.b). Across all the Manifestos, a recurring message concerns the role of the "Master" or "Teacher." In the "Manifesto of Knowledge," Rudnev recounts his early days as a nineteen-year-old teacher and the "moment of recognition" he saw in his students' eyes (Rudnev n.d.e).

This is mirrored in "The Education Manifesto," which calls for mentors who can provide a "living example" of humanity (Rudnev n.d.b). His narrative suggests that knowledge, more than information, is a "chain reaction" passed from heart to heart, just as he passed it on long ago. Another related theme, through which Rudnev lets the reader come closer than usual to his life experiences, is "loneliness," which he frames as a necessary condition for every seeker on the journey to find "like-minded people" who can sustain a chosen spiritual path. He connects this to his early days in the Soviet Union, when he felt utterly alone, isolated both from people who shared his fascination and from sources of knowledge, which the totalitarian state kept under lock and key.

Conclusion: Striving for Active Transcendence

Read together, these Manifestos reveal a deeper philosophical stance best described as Active Transcendence. Rudnev argues that while one cannot always control the "soil" in which one is planted, one is entirely responsible for how one grows from there. By integrating the lessons of the past (gratitude), the requirements of the present (responsibility), and the vision for the future (holistic education), the path Rudnev outlines in these new parables resembles a secret treasure map, guiding the "bystander" to become the "transcendent author" of their own existence.

This narrative, along with many other spiritual narratives, lies deeply embedded in these Manifestos. Unearthing and understanding them requires a

specific familiarity with the spiritual scriptures of "Ashram Shambhala," the *Darshans*, as well as a deeper knowledge of Rudnev's life, which he often uses to hide such narratives in plain sight. Beyond these, however, one can also read the Manifestos as process art, where the pieces are arranged into bouquets of inner contemplation. In them, Rudnev gradually comes to terms with his life, reflects on past experiences, and envisions a future in which spiritual praxis, inner enlightenment, and higher consciousness are possible without fear for one's life at the hands of repressive powers.

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The Dawn of Inliranga: A Journey Through Energy, Memory, and the Search for the True Self

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Introduction

Recent studies have enabled a more precise discussion of Konstantin Rudnev's teachings. One of the authors (Introvigne 2026) reconstructed a system centered on "incorrect thinking," acquired personality, self-observation, and cultivating attention. Nemes (2026) described a broader religious bricolage oriented toward self-improvement and elevating consciousness. Kotkowska (2026) showed how bodily practice, sexuality, social conditioning, planetary influence, and esoteric relations of power are integrated within the *Darshan* corpus.

Rudnev's *The Dawn of Inliranga* is especially revealing when read against this background because it does not merely state these ideas. It places them in a sequence of encounters through which characters repeatedly discover that what they experience as their own thoughts, desires, emotions, and identities may be shaped by forces whose operation remains largely unnoticed.

The narrative form is therefore analytically significant. The main character, Arthur, encounters the weakness of his attention before he acquires a language for mechanical existence. Social roles become perceptible through performance before the book offers a more explicit account of the observing self. Memory first appears as an ordinary failure and eventually becomes a condition for preserving spiritual transformation. Concepts that cannot be reconstructed separately from Rudnev's wider corpus are thus made mutually intelligible through a temporal pedagogy of experience, interruption, and recollection. The argument developed here is that *Inliranga* organizes its diverse materials around an anthropology of influence in which spiritual work consists in rendering those influences perceptible without allowing them to exhaust the meaning of personhood.

Rudnev's system emerged within a broader late-Soviet and early post-Soviet environment in which relatively fluid networks of spiritual seekers moved across practices and vocabularies that formal institutions would ordinarily separate. Meditation, yoga, healing, psychotechnical experimentation, paranormal research, and the exploration of altered states could converge around projects of

self-transformation and latent human potential. These circles were often connected with the educated urban and technical intelligentsia and retained important continuities across the collapse of the Soviet system (Menzel 2012; Panchenko 2011; Falikov 2012). This context helps explain the availability of Rudnev's heterogeneous vocabulary without reducing his system to a reflection of its environment. *Inliranga* is distinctive precisely in the architecture it gives to these materials through a theory of personhood, influence, and transformation.

Attention, Influence, and the True Self

The story begins with Arthur and his friend Ruslan, who introduces him to the Tantric school of Lyria, a disciple of the Indian priests of Khajuraho. She explains that Tantra is not about "exotic sex" but is an "art of living" and presents love and sexuality as dimensions of spiritual energy (Rudnev n.d., 4–5). Sexuality, movement, relationships, and perception become opportunities to observe how attention and energy are used.

Lyria explains that the Khajuraho statues show that "in the past sex was treated like a prayer; sexual partners worshiped each other and truly embodied the images of Gods and Goddesses" (4). Later, however, these teachings were suppressed and persecuted, although relics of them remain in India.

Arthur learns that relationships can be shaped by an ideal partner perceived in the subtle world, called Onome. At Lyria's lecture, Arthur meets and falls in love with Alice. Their connection grows through practices that cultivate sensitivity, emotional openness, and spiritual aspiration, and Arthur feels that his inner life awakens as he discovers new layers of affection and perception.

A journey into nature turns this principle into an exercise. A mysterious sighting in the sky, identified as a UFO, adds wonder to the experience. Alice tells Arthur that she had been "abducted by aliens when she was a child" (12), an experience that left her with the ability to see auras.

Guided by Lyria, the group tries to sustain awareness through movement and silence, discovering how quickly attention disperses. Arthur realizes that he remembers remarkably little of his life because he is constantly "asleep," while the "Stop" exercise abruptly interrupts activity and exposes the automatic quality of ordinary behavior (Rudnev n.d., 8–10). The episode establishes a relation that the book will elaborate much later: weak attention produces not only mechanical action but impoverished memory. Experience that passes without presence scarcely becomes available to the person who lived it.

Erotic practice develops the same problem in embodied form. Arthur's first attempt at Maithuna (orgasm without ejaculation) fails because he cannot control his movements; the lesson he receives is that Tantric practice requires repeated discipline rather than immediate mastery (Rudnev n.d., 12–4). Kotkowska's

analysis of *Darshan Tantra* helps place this episode within a broader conception in which erotic energy exceeds the sexual act and may be dissipated or deliberately redirected (Kotkowska 2026). *Inliranga* therefore uses sexuality as an early test of whether impulse will proceed automatically or become available to conscious intervention. The later episodes involving media influence, social programming, and imposed suggestion enlarge the same question from bodily habit to the social production of thought.

The accident involving Arthur and Alice intensifies this logic. Experiments with fly agaric mushrooms open a reflection on media influence. Arthur perceives television and the Internet as mechanisms that drain vitality and shape thought, and his public warnings provoke censorship and pressure from authorities. This confrontation introduces the theme of social resistance to alternative views. On their way in a cab to a rap concert, Arthur and Alice have a terrible accident. Arthur recovers, but he is taken to a psychiatric hospital where he is made into a "real zombie" by doctors and agents who want to stop his campaign promoting dissident views. Alice is left with paralyzed legs. She is visited by Lyria, who tells her that her injury does not come from karma but from the Devil, who, however, only works with the permission of God:

> God allows suffering so that we may reflect on life, learn to see things correctly, and become wiser. Because if there were no Evil, we would always stay in a careless, meaningless state, not even thinking about the meaning of life, not striving to change ourselves and develop (Rudnev n.d., 21).

Ruslan brings Arthur to Naya, who uses Gyud, a hypnotic method presented in *Inliranga* as a means of working on suggestion, memory, and habitual responses, to remove specific suggestions and restore memories and dispositions altered during hospitalization (Rudnev n.d., 21–8). The episode dramatizes in extreme form a process that Kotkowska identifies throughout Rudnev's teaching: evaluations and reactions acquired through family, education, institutions, and culture may become incorporated into personality as though they were self-generated (Kotkowska 2026). The use of Gyud follows from this conception of the person as permeable to suggestion: the same susceptibility through which conditioning becomes embedded can, under deliberate guidance, be turned toward its modification.

The book then shifts from social to cosmological influence. While Alice waits for them in her wheelchair, Arthur and Ruslan travel to remote caves, where Prajna speaks of hidden powers, subtle rulers, and ancient techniques such as Pratyahara and Kundalini activation. Prajna gives Arthur and Ruslan a short course on a "conspiritual" view of history:

> The Earth is ruled by a small group of black magicians—they are also called the Devil's servants. And they operate through the secret services. And different presidents and ministers are just pawns in their hands. Today they act through mass media, and earlier they acted through religions. As people fanatically believed in the ministers of cults, they put their priests in charge, and they perverted the essence of religions, turning

> them into formal rituals, saying that one should just go to church on Sundays, put candles, read prayers in the evenings, and it is enough for spiritual development. They removed from religion the most important things that allow the development of the human soul. This perversion led to the emergence of jihad, crusades, inquisition, destruction of dissenters. But still there are people who keep the True Knowledge. I see that you are Light souls and it is possible for you to reach the True Understanding (Rudnev n.d., 30).

The details are fictional, but their pedagogical function continues the earlier chapters: detachment remains the condition for navigating appearances without becoming absorbed by them. When Arthur later meditates on body, mind, emotions, habits, and personality as objects that can be observed, these dimensions appear as a mechanical construction shaped by external influences. In contrast, the capacity that observes them is identified as the True Self (Rudnev n.d., 43–5).

Nemes's account of Atman provides the metaphysical horizon for this scene. In the *Darshans*, Atman is described as a perfect and immutable divine component of the person within a multilayered spiritual model (Nemes 2026, 66–8). *Inliranga* does not simply define the True Self and Atman as interchangeable terms; their relation is better understood through the narrative's movement. The True Self first appears experientially as the witnessing position disclosed when acquired contents become objects of observation. At the same time, Atman supplies the clearest metaphysical account of why that witness can be treated as more fundamental than the personality it observes. The passage from self-observation to a divine core therefore turns a psychological exercise of disidentification into a soteriological claim about what the person most deeply is.

At this point the comparison with George Ivanovich Gurdjieff (1866?–1949) becomes especially revealing. *Inliranga* names Gurdjieff explicitly and elsewhere invokes the three forces and the Law of Octaves (Rudnev n.d., 51, 64–5). Its treatment of sleep, mechanical behavior, self-observation, and the Stop exercise closely parallels practices associated with the Fourth Way (Azize and Sutcliffe 2024). Rudnev knew Gurdjieff's work and acknowledged affinities while maintaining that his own system developed independently (Introvigne 2026, 18–20). The comparison is therefore strongest at the level of spiritual technique. Its limits appear in the account of the self.

As Cusack (2020) emphasizes, Gurdjieff's "real I" is bound to a process of integration and to the development of higher being-bodies. In Rudnev's system, Atman is already divine and immutable, although obscured by acquired identifications (Nemes 2026, 66). *Inliranga* thus brings together a recognizable repertoire of interruption, attention, and self-observation while relocating it within a soteriology in which the witnessing self opens onto an already-present divine principle. Gurdjieff clarifies an important strand of Rudnev's method, whose significance changes within the larger Rudnevian synthesis.

Energy, Relations, and Collective Fields

Collective life becomes more prominent once the narrative has established the possibility of distinguishing acquired personality from the observing self. Guided by Prajna, Arthur and Ruslan experience expanded consciousness, clairvoyance, and encounters with Prajna's spiritual master, Bhagavan, learning that detachment is essential for navigating these realms. Arthur sees the black magicians busy creating new viruses. He also sees Alice, and Bhagavan radiating pure love. Prajna gives detailed instructions for healing Alice.

When they return home, they organize a collective prayer to support Alice's healing. The group creates a shared field of intention, and Alice experiences moments of improvement. Her recovery progresses, and she eventually walks again, affirming that the body is a temporary vessel that does not define the soul. Arthur feels exaltation as he realizes that many people live unaware of their deeper nature, and Lyria helps him integrate this awakening.

The sequence surrounding Arthur and Alice's spiritual wedding and the rituals that follow shifts the question of influence from self-formation to the conditions under which shared practice can direct or protect spiritual energy. Their union is presented as a continuation of Tantric work, where sexuality becomes a channel for devotion, responsibility, and shared purpose. A woman named Mira takes them to a Place of Power, an ancient dolmen-like megalith, where they perform the wedding ritual.

The sacralization of dolmens and other Places of Power became a recognizable feature of post-Soviet New Age and esoteric spirituality, in which archaeological remains and natural landscapes could be invested with transformative efficacy or associated with ancestral knowledge (Senina 2021; Tiukhtiaev 2021). *Inliranga*, however, gives these motifs a specific role within its own system: sacred space becomes an environment in which ordinary identity can be interrupted and rendered visible. Within this setting, the dolmen is more than a source of sacred authority: it provides the spatial conditions for a deliberate suspension of ordinary identity. Rudnev thereby joins a recognizable post-Soviet sacralization of landscape to the book's central concern with disidentification, giving the Place of Power a precise function within the sequence of spiritual training.

At the same location, Ruslan undergoes a symbolic death ritual. After reciting a prayer whose origins are in ancient Atlantis, he has a vision of mysterious dwarves, who introduce themselves as the priests of the dolmen. They teach him to shed social identities and confront the layers of the self through intense observation, as if from the outside, and inner work (again reminiscent of Gurdjieff). The scene thus recasts the discovery of the True Self in explicitly social terms: relations become internalized as roles and reactions that may be mistaken for identity.

Seasonal rituals follow, aimed at releasing negative habits and inviting the conception of a great soul. The group learns that cosmic timing and collective intention influence spiritual goals. This is the reason they celebrate "Ivan Kupala" night, the Slavic name of the summer feast of Saint John, on June 22 rather than on the traditional Orthodox date of July 7. A tutor explains that popular teachings about desire fulfillment are incomplete, and that strong emotions, repeated rituals, divine connection, and astrological cycles are essential for manifestation. They discuss the popular New Age film *The Secret*, based on the book by the same title by Rhonda Byrne (2006), and conclude it presents only "one slice" of truth; their school's method and rituals are much more effective (Rudnev n.d., 60).

A practical episode emerges when the friends plan to market a secret remedy they received from Prajna, which would cure cancer, AIDS, and all diseases. They encounter challenges related to business, suppression, and marketing, discovering that integrity is necessary for any project involving healing or spiritual knowledge. An initiate called Diana warns them that what they learned in college is not enough for such a venture. She adds that "what may seem particularly strange to you, it is necessary to take into account astrology, favorable and unfavorable moments for the case" (Rudnev n.d., 67).

Naya teaches the Gyud method as a broader tool for self-programming, relaxation, and psychic development. It becomes a resource for parenting, psychological balance, and personal growth.

She also offers further advice about religion:

> In any religion there are all these things about correct suggestion, psychology, revealing abilities, harmonious relationships in the family… But it is a pity that modern priests do not know it—they learn six dead languages, conduct services in a language not understandable to modern people and are far from what they do. Hence the spiritlessness of modern society, and the abundance of so-called 'sects' [the English translation uses 'sect' for the Russian 'секта' but it should rather be translated as 'cult'] that these priests fight against. But how can sects not arise? After all, they carry the knowledge that should be carried by the ministers of the cult. And people are hungry for True Knowledge. And instead of the priests themselves learning esotericism, they act by political methods: simply seeking to ban everything, vilify and intimidate the people (Rudnev n.d., 70).

Arthur later speaks at a rap festival, criticizing outdated education systems. His message resonates with the audience, although security removes him, and authorities begin planning a campaign to discredit dissenters and spiritual communities. Some within the secret services want to put Arthur in jail for a long time. Still, others conclude it would be "premature": "First we need to discredit him in the eyes of the public, to fabricate dirt against him and against those with whom he is associated" (Rudnev n.d., 75)—an allusion to how the persecution of Rudnev in Russia unfolded.

Lyria gathers those who have children or plan to have children. She encourages creating a collective Field of Love to protect children from harmful influences.

The community experiences healing through this shared practice, even as media attacks intensify. They are called a "sex cult" led by a "crazy debauchee" guru (Rudnev n.d., 79)—a reference to the media attacks that prepared Rudnev's arrest in Russia and continue to this day. Testimonies from participants, however, resist negative propaganda and affirm that the Field of Love brings positive change and strengthens their resolve.

Lyria thus continues exploring themes of love, passion, and emotional authenticity, guiding students toward relationships free from ego and social conditioning. Sexual energy is described as a force that can elevate or confuse, depending on the clarity of intention and the maturity of the practitioner. Prajna promises that, if not immediately, at least in maturity, a man and a woman who deeply loved each other will meet again in their next reincarnation. She also warns against jealousy and (in one of the passages critics will use to criticize Rudnev's views as subversive of traditional family values) seems to promote an open vision of the couple:

> Love is not subject to social patterns, which can change over time and be different from one nation to another. For example, in the East, polygamy is the order of the day, and a man can love several of his women equally. A man can be very temperamental and prone to casual liaisons, but that doesn't mean he can't love. Often, seriously, he treats only one woman, and with others just spends time, and you should not make him scandals, remake him to please the templates of society. You can just accept his nature, if he suits you in every way and shows the stability of his love for you. Rarely, but sometimes such things happen in women. Therefore, it is necessary to remember that true love is not connected with sex, that it is the prerogative of the emotional center. And scandals, quarrels, desires that everything should be according to the pattern, only destroy love (Rudnev n.d., 85).

The language of energy allows the book to connect practices that otherwise belong to different domains. Sexuality, prayer, astrological timing, sacred geography, healing, and collective intention are treated as variations on how force is accumulated, dispersed, redirected, or intensified. Kotkowska's discussion of planetary influences and Egregores shows that comparable assumptions about supra-individual forces recur elsewhere in Rudnev's corpus (Kotkowska 2026). Within the novel, the Field of Love provides its clearest collective formulation: participants deliberately cultivate a shared field intended to protect children and produce healing, while hostile media representations present their experiments as debauchery. The contrast places collective life in an ambivalent position. Groups may impose identities and circulate stigmatizing representations, but they may also be imagined as environments that sustain attention, emotional transformation, and benevolent influence.

This ambivalence also structures the treatment of love. Lyria's discussions of jealousy, reincarnation, polygamy, and casual sexual relations subordinate inherited social forms to the quality of the emotional and spiritual bond; "true love" belongs to the emotional center and is not reducible to sexual exclusivity

(Rudnev n.d., 82–7). Relational authenticity is judged through the state of consciousness in which a relation is lived, just as spiritual authenticity elsewhere depends on whether a belief or role has become an automatic identification.

Shamanic Repertoires, Sampo, and Social Templates

A shamaness named Atynsa introduces ancient rites involving communication with ancestors, explaining how psychic energies and ritual offerings support spiritual assistance. She brings ancestors and the dead into the same economy of influence. Prajna and Naya teach methods for recognizing and releasing societal patterns through self-observation, humor, and theatrical exercises inspired by the "Sampo" system.

Nemes (2026, 65) describes Sampo as Rudnev's version of astral karate, and Rudnev experimented with the techniques of Valery Averyanov, the late-Soviet teacher associated with that current. Panin's study of Averyanov's astral karate is useful here as historical context: it documents a psychospiritual discipline that combined martial practice with yoga, subtle-body models, Egregores, and psychic capacities (Panin 2017). *Inliranga* gives Sampo a distinctive practical emphasis. Naya asks participants to exaggerate the roles they have identified with. A man called Andreich performs the authority and self-importance of a director until she interrupts him with "Stop," while Alice magnifies the fear and stiffness she experiences before authority. Laughter exposes these gestures as acquired performances and makes them available to observation (Rudnev n.d., 107–16).

Sampo's importance in *Inliranga* lies in the dramaturgy of de-identification. Deliberately performing a role creates distance between the person and the behavior through which that person is ordinarily recognized. Humor intensifies this distance by making the naturalized gesture strange. At the same time, the group functions as a distributed apparatus of attention, reminding participants when they have again become absorbed in a pattern. Collective life thus acquires a double capacity: it produces many of the identities from which the practitioner seeks freedom, yet it can also furnish the social conditions under which those identities become observable.

These practices help reclaim individuality and reduce the influence of imposed roles. Ruslan's girlfriend Angela's grandfather, Ivanich, participates in shamanic rejuvenation rituals connected to sexual energy and cosmic forces, and discussions arise about adolescence, maturity, and the need to channel energy constructively. Ivanich believes he is a successful man, but he realizes he is unhappy because something is missing from his life, and he wonders what he has really spent his life for.

Nemes identifies Siberian shamanic elements within Rudnev's cosmology (Nemes 2026, 64–5). Rudnev also read Castaneda (Introvigne 2026, 16).

Rudnev's use of these motifs belongs to a post-Soviet field in which shamanic practices were being reformulated across indigenous revitalization, urban spiritual experimentation, and transnational neo-shamanic exchange. Sundström (2012) cautions against treating "Siberian shamanism" as a single continuous tradition and documents exchange between Siberian revivals and Western neo-shamanism. Zhukovskaia (2012) shows how experiential forms entered urban intellectual and professional settings, while Ivashchenko and Ivanov (2023) trace later combinations with parapsychology, business consulting, and the arts. Against this background, Atynsa's movement from ancestral communication to healing and assistance belongs to a wider circulation of shamanic idioms. Within *Inliranga*, however, the book's account of influence extends beyond the living. Ancestors become agents in an energetic field whose effects can enter practical action alongside social relations, collective formations, and other subtle forces.

Prajna critiques modern culture for promoting negativity and contrasts it with ancient traditions that cultivated sublime emotions and spirituality. A prayer is introduced, calling for awakening and service to God. Naya explains how conformity erodes individuality and encourages laughter and role-playing to restore the true self. Andreich asks why he was happy as a child but is not now that he is old and rich. Naya tells him this happens because of the pressure from the "template of a sick society" (Rudnev n.d., 107).

Arthur asks whether alternative spiritual movements are not the way to escape the template. Naya answers that

> there are such movements, which the proponents of the system have now labeled as sects [cults] and are actively fighting against them. Of course, not every spiritual movement teaches real vision. Most of them have long forgotten about it and teach their own tradition, that is, a slightly different pattern, not very different from the generally accepted one (Rudnev n.d., 108).

Significantly, she does not exempt alternative spiritual movements from criticism: a community stigmatized as a "cult" may preserve forms of knowledge, but it may equally become another pattern when its tradition is transmitted mechanically (Rudnev n.d., 107–8). The distinction is epistemological rather than institutional. For Rudnev, heterodoxy has no intrinsic liberating value unless it changes the quality of seeing.

The friends later travel to Atlantis through the Gyud technique. Arthur communicates with his great-grandmother through hypnotic vision, discovers the creative power of imagination, and learns about a hidden treasure intended to support community projects.

The difficult chapter concerning Veronica applies the same principles to trauma. Lyria assists Veronica, a friend of Alice who was raped by her uncle when she was ten, in healing from trauma through visualization of an ideal inner partner and forgiveness, helping her rebuild trust and intimacy.

Lyria's comment to Veronica is an example of a passage that critics may easily misunderstand and use against Rudnev:

> This problem of rape is exaggerated in society… it is given an unhealthy meaning, and thus creates phobias and complexes in girls like you. In fact, rape is no more than ordinary violence, when, say, a person is beaten. And even in principle it is not such a terrible action in comparison with when a person is beaten—he can be crippled, left ugly for life. But no one makes it a psychological problem if someone is beaten badly… But when the issue is sex, people do more harm than the rapist with their hypertrophied attitudes (Rudnev n.d., 122).

When one reads the passage in context, it becomes clear that Lyria is not condoning rape. In fact, she states that Veronica's uncle, willingly or unwillingly, acted as a tool of the "evil forces and demons" (Rudnev n.d., 123). Her point is that the evil forces succeeded twice: first, in making the uncle commit an evil act, and second, in keeping Veronica a prisoner for years of her hatred, which extended from the guilty uncle to all men, including those who never wronged her. Only prayer and forgiveness can solve her problem. The chapter is analytically important because it carries the broader logic of liberation from past influence into a domain where its ethical implications become especially visible.

Lyria also advises Arthur, Ruslan, Andreich, and a female student called Oksana on complex life and relationship choices, describing the need to harmonize different aspects of the self and select roles that support happiness. She explains that life unfolds through seasons, each requiring renewed effort to maintain growth.

Diana takes the students on a bus tour to Kazakhstan. She discusses wish fulfillment, explaining that spiritual energy and altruistic intentions, supported by group practice and divine connection, are necessary for true manifestation. She warns that intoxicants and selfish desires lead away from genuine happiness.

Diana wants to lead students to a lake with a cave where a saint lived in Noah's times. But Kazakhstan's president, who is rumored to derive his power from his special relationship with the saint, is there, and police have closed the road. Then the president flies away, and the students are allowed to enter the cave, where Arthur and Alice experience a special call to transform their lives and devote themselves to promoting happiness on Earth.

Back at the school, another tutor appears, Shakti Mudra, explaining that Naya has gone to the Himalayas to seek ancient Places of Power, and she will replace her. Shakti Mudra guides students in Gyud sessions to recover forgotten spiritual experiences, strengthening mindfulness and motivation for further development.

Memory and Narrative as Spiritual Practice

Near the end of the book, Lyria presents a pentagram composed of consciousness, will, attention, memory, and mind. Consciousness occupies the apex as the person who observes internal and external processes; will should govern attention; memory depends on the quality of attention; and mind must be distinguished from associative fantasy (Rudnev n.d., 133–36). The schema makes explicit what the narrative has been teaching by other means. Observation depends on attention, attention can be trained, and memory records experience in proportion to the presence with which it was lived.

The final Gyud episodes return to this relation from the opposite direction. Ivanich asks for her help to recover the money he buried in the forest after learning that corrupt police officers were about to raid his country house, where he kept a significant amount of cash. Now that the police problem has been resolved, he cannot remember where he buried the money. Shakti Mudra guides Ivanich to identify the location through a Gyud session. Still, she also teaches him a lesson about the fragility of memory and the dangers of trusting material wealth.

Finally, Ivanich realizes

> how much I had lost by chasing prestige and worldly values, how my life had become a meaningless routine, and a deep repentance was born in me for judging and not accepting spiritual people who wanted to help me. A vision emerged in me that only the spiritual path has meaning, and everything else is just a way to live in meaningless suffering (Rudnev n.d., 144).

The chapters on Ivanich and Andreich extend the book's main argument across biography. Conventional success is presented as compatible with a profound sense of having failed to live. At the same time, Naya's "template of a sick society" names the process through which inherited expectations can organize an entire life without ever becoming objects of reflection (Rudnev n.d., 94–108).

Gyud first recovers practical memory and then restores spiritual experiences whose factual content remained while their affective intensity faded. Ruslan relives a mountain experience in which he perceived God in everything, Alice returns to a Place of Power, and others revisit states that had ceased to influence their lives (Rudnev n.d., 140–44). Memory now becomes more than storage. It is the capacity through which a transformative state can retain efficacy after the event itself has passed.

The ending completes a movement inaugurated in the first pages. Arthur initially discovers that weak attention leaves his past strangely empty; Ivanich finally understands that an entire life may be filled with events and achievements while losing the states through which those experiences could acquire spiritual meaning. Memory becomes the temporal dimension of awakening, protecting transformation from its recurrent dissolution into habit.

This gives particular significance to the notice at the beginning of *Inliranga* stating that repeated reading will accelerate the solution of the reader's problems (Rudnev n.d., 2). Kotkowska identifies an analogous injunction in the *Darshans*, where rereading participates in the transformative function attributed to the texts (Kotkowska 2026, 76–7). *Inliranga* therefore implicates its own narrative form in the spiritual economy it describes. The book repeatedly stages a teaching, allows it to be forgotten or displaced, and returns to it under altered circumstances; the reader, like the characters, encounters the same conceptual problem from a changed position.

French philosopher and historian of philosophy Pierre Hadot (1922–2010) offers a useful methodological analogy in his account of ancient philosophical writing. For Hadot, the composition of a philosophical work could itself serve a formative purpose: the exposition is organized to guide its addressee through an itinerary of spiritual progress, so that doctrinal communication participates in the cultivation of a way of life (Hadot 1990).

A different line of inquiry, developed in contemporary empirical literary studies by Olivia Fialho, adds an important qualification. Her research on literary reception shows that narrative engagement can alter perceptions of self and others through affective involvement, identification, and iterative reinterpretation, but that such effects depend on the mode of engagement and cannot be inferred from textual form alone (Fialho 2019, 6–8). Applied to *Inliranga*, these perspectives clarify the book's ambition without presuming its success: repetition, identification, affect, and recollection are deliberately arranged as possible instruments of spiritual formation.

Conclusion

The variety of *The Dawn of Inliranga* can easily make the work appear more miscellaneous than it is. Its Tantra, hypnosis, collective fields, sacred landscapes, shamanic figures, astral techniques, social criticism, and devotional language are drawn from different religious and esoteric repertoires. Still, the narrative repeatedly subjects them to a common question: how does a person distinguish her deeper self from the forces that act over consciousness, emotion, body, and social identity? Attention and self-observation create the distance in which this question becomes possible; the True Self gives that distance an ontological direction; energy describes the efficacy through which relations and practices act upon the person; and memory determines whether moments of awakening can survive their immediate occurrence.

The late- and post-Soviet environment helps make this synthesis historically comprehensible, but it does not provide a full explanation. *Inliranga* deserves attention because it reorganizes available materials through a particular

system and, equally importantly, because it renders that system narrative. Teachings acquire meaning by recurring in altered situations: attention reappears as memory, social conditioning as role-play, collective influence as both stigmatization and spiritual support, and the observing witness as a divine dimension of personhood. Narrative sequence is therefore more than a convenient vehicle for doctrine. It is one of the means through which the system imagines transformation itself.

The book's final concern is consequently not the achievement of a single extraordinary state but its durability. Awakening remains vulnerable to habit, roles can once again become identities, and experiences once felt as revelatory can survive only as abstract recollections. *Inliranga* answers this fragility through practices of interruption, observation, repetition, and remembrance, while inviting the reader to participate in the same movement through rereading. Its most distinctive contribution to Rudnev's corpus lies in this conjunction of anthropology and pedagogy: a heterogeneous esoteric vocabulary is made to serve a sustained inquiry into how consciousness may become aware of the influences that shape it, loosen their hold, and preserve another relation to experience over time.

A final observation concerns the gap between Rudnev's public image and the content of his writings. In the media, he is routinely portrayed as a fraud, a "monster," and an enemy of the family. These portrayals seldom engage with his texts (and still less with his films, animations, and music, which make up a substantial part of his output). *Inliranga* offers a more complex picture. Rudnev places considerable emphasis on forming families properly and on caring for and supporting children. The questions raised by the prosecution—or persecution—of Rudnev in Russia and Argentina lie outside the scope of this article and have been discussed by the authors elsewhere. This article has demonstrated that a reading of the primary sources does suggest that his teachings cannot be reduced to the image circulating in the media, and that any serious assessment of them should begin with what he actually wrote.

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Reading Konstantin Rudnev's *Siberian Shamanism*

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Introduction: Three Categories of Spiritual Seekers

Konstantin Rudnev's teachings are easily misunderstood, and the criminal case opened against him in Argentina in 2025 shows how quickly misunderstanding can turn into misrepresentation. His books use a dense symbolic language that blends Siberian ethnography, Slavic mythology, Eastern philosophy, modern esotericism, and narrative fiction. Investigators and journalists unfamiliar with these traditions tend to read them as operating manuals. A ritual sacrifice then looks like cruelty, a dream marriage with a spirit looks like a sexual program, and an invitation to detach from family and possessions looks like a technique of manipulation.

Isolated from the system that gives them meaning, passages from Rudnev's books can be made to say almost anything. The remedy is the ordinary method of religious studies: reading a text as a whole, identifying its genre and sources, and asking what its author wanted it to do for its readers. This article applies that method to one of Rudnev's early works, *Siberian Shamanism*, a book that has received much less attention than his later writings. However, it contains, according to those closest to him, the foundations of his teaching.

Tamara Rudneva, Rudnev's wife, helped clarify the book's purpose in a series of conversations in October 2026 (Rudneva 2026). She suggested that Rudnev's work cannot be understood without a typology of seekers he uses informally, which also explains why his books look so different from one another.

According to this typology, people who approach spiritual schools and seminars fall into three groups. The largest, about 60–70 percent, consists of those Rudnev calls in Russian "bytoviki," which Rudneva translates as "practical seekers." They come with concrete problems concerning health, relationships, money, career, or finding a partner, and hope that spiritual knowledge will solve them. Rudnev takes these concerns seriously and speaks to such people in a language they understand, showing how knowledge of the "subtle plane," of the inner centers, and of self-observation may help them. Most of them, however, leave once their problem is solved, and Rudneva compares them to occasional Christian churchgoers who appear only when they need something (Rudneva 2026).

The second group, about 20–25 percent, are the "fokusniki" or "dukhovnye turisty," "wonder seekers" or "spiritual tourists." They are fascinated by UFOs, extraterrestrials, the yeti, hypnosis, the opening of the third eye, and all sorts of paranormal powers, and they move from one teaching to the next in search of new marvels. Rudneva compares Rudnev's attitude toward them with that of George Gurdjieff (1866?–1949) toward Piotr D. Ouspensky (1878–1947), as described in *In Search of the Miraculous* (Ouspensky 1949). Ouspensky was drawn to the miraculous, while Gurdjieff kept turning his attention back to observing his own consciousness and behavior. Rudnev, she argues, deliberately uses images of aliens, mysterious beings, and extraordinary abilities to capture the interest of this public, and then tries to redirect it toward the question "Who am I, really?" (Rudneva 2026).

The third group, 5–10 percent or fewer, are the "dukhovniki," or "genuine spiritual seekers." They want self-knowledge and inner transformation, and they are willing to observe their thoughts, feelings, and habits and change them. For Rudneva, the center of Rudnev's activity lies in moving people from the first two groups into the third. The variety of subjects in his books would thus correspond to a variety of audiences, while the goal remains the same. In her words, "the form may vary dramatically because it is intended for different audiences" (Rudneva 2026).

This typology accounts for the distance between *Siberian Shamanism* and later books such as *Secrets of the Dead* (Kotkowska, this book) and *The Dawn of Inliranga* (Introvigne and Vardé, this book), written while Rudnev was imprisoned in Russia. The later works address all three groups at once, which is why they mix practical advice with fantastic narratives and sometimes grotesque imagery. *Siberian Shamanism*, written relatively early, is according to Rudneva "primarily intended for readers belonging to the third category." It makes no effort to entertain or offer quick solutions, and its density of terms, symbols, and mythological relationships demands slow, systematic study. She adds that without such study "it is difficult to gain a truly comprehensive understanding of the foundations of Rudnev's teaching" (Rudneva 2026). The pages that follow try to take this suggestion seriously.

The Architecture of Siberian Shamanism

Siberian Shamanism is organized as a sequence of short chapters, most of them dialogues between a young disciple, Saosh Yant, and his master, an old shaman called the Northern Kam, the Great Shaman, or simply Old Kam. Saosh Yant is

a city dweller who moves to the Altai mountains, where he discovers how the taiga, hunting, skiing, and long walks restore an energy he lost "living in easy conditions" (Rudnev n.d., 1). The master answers his questions while preparing tea with mountain herbs, playing the jew's harp, or tending the hearth, and the teaching unfolds through visions, rituals, and stories.

The name of the disciple deserves attention. It recalls the Saoshyant, the savior figure of Zoroastrian eschatology, and the choice fits a character told in a vision of the World Tree that he is "destined to become a Shaman of the whole world" (Rudnev n.d., 35). The structure of the book, with an urban apprentice initiated into an indigenous tradition by a stern and ironic master, will remind many readers of Carlos Castaneda's (1925–1998) books on Don Juan (Castaneda 1968), which Rudnev did read with interest (Palmer, this book). The Northern Kam's insistence that a shaman must learn to "remember in their dreams that they are asleep" belongs to the same family of ideas about lucid dreaming (Rudnev n.d., 10).

The literary form is important for interpretation. *Siberian Shamanism* is an initiatory narrative and a didactic dialogue, written in the manner of a fairy tale and repeatedly commenting on fairy tales. Its characters include talking cuckoos, a deer that asks to be sacrificed so that it may be reborn as a human, a dead uncle living among broken plates in the land of the dead, and a tourist punished by the spirits for desecrating a shaman's grave. Reading such episodes as factual claims or as instructions to be executed literally would be as misleading as using John Bunyan's (1628–1688) *The Pilgrim's Progress* as a travel guide.

Rudnev's cosmos rests on four gods, each presiding over a portion of time. Eternity is the realm of Tengri-khan, source of all things and keeper of cosmic harmony. The future is entrusted to the creative Ulgen-khan, the present to Umai, who protects material existence, and the past and the underworld to Erlik-khan. The materials Rudnev works with come from several regions and periods. The pantheon of Tengri, Ulgen, Erlik, and Umai belongs to the Altai and to the wider Turkic and Mongolic world. Other terms come from the Sakha (Yakut) of northeastern Siberia: the "Yhyakh" summer festival with its consecration of kumis (fermented mare's milk, a mildly alcoholic, slightly sour and fizzy drink), the "arankas" platforms on which shamans were laid to rest, the evil spirits "abaasy," and the souls Kut and Syur. According to Rudnev, the human person is made up of five souls, and each has its own task, whether perceiving reality or sustaining life. Aiy links the individual with eternity. The future is grasped by Bos (also spelled Bosi) and the past by Tyos (also spelled Tes), while

Syur (also spelled Sur) journeys from one world to another. Kut supplies the body with its vital force.

The image of the shaman's soul raised in a nest on a cosmic tree, nursed by a "Mother-Animal," with the most powerful shamans placed in the highest nests, echoes Sakha accounts collected in the 1920s by Gavriil Ksenofontov (1888–1938) and made famous internationally by Mircea Eliade (1907–1986; Eliade 1964). So does the initiatory dismemberment in which spirits devour the candidate and count his bones, finding in Saosh Yant's case "one extra bone," the sign of a future shaman (Rudnev n.d., 41).

The word "Ayami," used for the spirit wife who chooses and protects the shaman, comes from the Nanai (Goldi) of the Amur region, described by the ethnographer Lev Shternberg (1861–1927) in a classic study of "divine election" (Shternberg 1925). Several chapters move into Slavic mythology, with Svarog, Rod, Veles, Perun, Makosh, and the triad of Prav, Yav, and Nav, a vocabulary popularized in post-Soviet Russia by the Rodnoverie or Slavic Native Faith movement (Shnirelman 2002). Belovodye, the hidden land of white waters that Saosh Yant reaches through a cave, is a tradition of the Russian Old Believers. In the twentieth century, Nicholas Roerich (1874–1947) and other esoteric authors placed it in the Altai mountains (Znamenski 2011). The book also mentions Hinduism, Sufism, the Tibetan "Bardo," the Christ—and figures such as Albert Einstein (1879–1955), Alexander Pushkin (1799–1837), and others as models of future giants of thought being prepared in the "world of eternity."

Rudnev is thus doing something different from ethnography, and the book never claims to describe the beliefs of a specific Siberian people. He builds an original synthesis, using Siberian materials as a language to express a philosophy of consciousness, time, and liberation. Scholars of contemporary religion would place it in the broad field of neo-shamanism and of post-Soviet Russian esotericism. Evaluating it as an ethnographic description of Sakha or Altai religion would miss its purpose entirely.

Rudnev's Shamanic Cosmology

The system's cosmology appears in the chapter "Creation of the Shamanic World." At the origin, Tengri creates the universe "seemingly without reason," and "to create it, he divided himself into a man and a woman," Tengri himself and his wife Umai (Rudnev n.d., 20). Umai gives birth to two sons, Erlik and Ulgen. Each deity receives a domain that is both a region of the cosmos and a dimension of time. As mentioned earlier, Tengri remains in "the world of sleep

(without dreams)," which is eternity. Ulgen, the younger son, rules the future and keeps creating new forms in the world of dreams. Umai governs the present and the physical world, called "the dense world of heavy dreams," where she protects what has been created. Erlik, the elder son, rules the past and the underworld, and destroys and reclaims what Ulgen creates "so that the physical world wouldn't become oversaturated with creations, leaving room for Ulgen to continue creating" (Rudnev n.d., 20–1).

This may well be the book's most original esoteric idea. Erlik, lord of the dead in Altai tradition, appears as a necessary function in a cosmic economy. He is severe, and the Northern Kam calls him "the chief spirit" and "the first shaman," yet his destruction is what makes renewal possible (Rudnev n.d., 15). The master explains that there are "only four main forces that drive the whole world": a supreme ruling power (Tengri), a creating power (Ulgen), a preserving power (Umai), and a destructive power (Erlik) (Rudnev n.d., 17).

Readers familiar with Hinduism will recognize an analogy with the Trimurti of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva, and the book itself makes the comparison, observing that the sons and daughters of the four gods make shamanism as rich in deities as Hinduism or Greek religion. In the chapter on Slavic cosmology, Rudnev adds that "all this polytheism is nothing but a manifestation of the one true God, Dyy, in different forms" (Rudnev n.d., 75). The many gods are facets of a single principle, a position with evident affinities to Advaita Vedanta.

Cosmology Mirrored in Anthropology

The anthropology mirrors the cosmology. Each god gives the human being a soul, and "a person possesses five souls, each of which evolves during their life" (Rudnev n.d., 21). Tengri gives Aiy, the contemplative soul linked to eternity. Ulgen gives Bos, the soul that seeks new experiences, knowledge, and discoveries. Erlik gives Tyos, the soul of memory and of attachment to the past. Umai gives Kut, the vital force, whose essence "is the desire to possess something, to have something." The fifth soul, Syur, is the double that travels in dreams, and it also carries a person's destiny, since it is given by one of the four gods and determines which of them the person will serve (Rudnev n.d., 24).

Destiny manifests itself in temperaments and occupations. People of Erlik live in the past and leave a lasting memory; soldiers, weapons makers, and undertakers belong to him. People of Ulgen are inventors, scientists, artists, and fortune tellers. People of Umai are farmers, merchants, chefs, hairdressers, and others who produce, accumulate, and serve. People of Tengri are mystics, priests, and

contemplatives, "uninterested in accumulation" and "aspiring only to the eternal, loving contemplation" (Rudnev n.d., 60). Each group has its "Mother-Beast," and Saosh Yant asks whether this can be called "an egregore or energy field," a term borrowed from Western esotericism (Kotkowska 2026, 84) that the Northern Kam graciously accepts (Rudnev n.d., 17). The typology serves as an instrument of self-knowledge, helping readers recognize the orientation of their own lives.

The World Tree arranges these elements in space. It connects the Upper World of the gods, the Middle World of humans, and the Underworld, home of the "evil spirits of illness, damage, failure, and loss" (Rudnev n.d., 2). On its branches, souls mature in nests oriented toward the four directions: east for Tengri, south for Ulgen, west for Umai, north for Erlik. The height of the nest measures the scope of a destiny, so that a shaman serving a single district is raised near the roots and one destined for the whole world near the top. The Mother-Beast appears three times in a person's life: in the nest, during the initiatory dismemberment, and at death, when it returns the Syur to the god who gave it.

After death, the five souls separate and return to their sources. In the main account, Kut passes to the strongest among the deceased's relatives; Bos goes to Ulgen; Tyos to the world of the dead; Syur to the god who sent it; and Aiy to Tengri, from where the cycle of rebirth resumes. The rare beings who grasp "the futility of wandering through the river of time" choose never to be reborn and "forever remain in the world of Tengri, becoming Tengri themselves" (Rudnev n.d., 22). Hell exists as a temporary state, and the Northern Kam insists that Tengri "would never allow a person to suffer in hell forever, as some religions claim" (Rudnev n.d., 64). The accounts vary in their details. One chapter places the final break with the Earth at forty days, and another at forty-nine, and the names of the souls appear as Syur and Sur, Aiy and Aiyy, Kut and Koot. These variations suggest a text composed over time and translated by more than one hand—and perhaps they warn against treating any single passage as a definitive doctrinal statement.

The book's philosophical heart lies in the chapters on Belovodye and the world of dreams. Here the taiga becomes a metaphor for the human imagination. Every person enters this forest of dreams and is shown ready-made paths by parents and educators: "One path may be Christianity, another Marxism" (Rudnev n.d., 26), and others may be science, Buddhism, or the commonsense outlook of ordinary people. By imagining a path thousands of times, people program their own reactions, deciding in advance where they will be angry, jealous, afraid, or happy. Some paths lead to a swamp of self-pity, apathy, and fanaticism, others to a healing spring of strength and joy. The Northern Kam

concludes that "materialists and idealists, scientists and believers are equally bound by the path of their dream," and that happiness "lies in not depending on any particular path, no matter how alluring it may be" (Rudnev n.d., 26).

Coming from an author who grew up in the Soviet Union, the inclusion of communism among the paths that promise happiness and deliver conditioning has an autobiographical and political resonance. The teaching also has a psychological dimension. The exercises that train the Syur, such as mentally walking through one's own apartment in the past, present, and future, or along a familiar road without losing concentration, resemble guided-imagery techniques. The advice given to someone whose parents instilled a weak Tyos is to recall past humiliations and reassess them, telling oneself, "It's all trivial, it won't break me, I can endure much worse" (Rudnev n.d., 28). The principle behind it, "What we remember is what begins to guide us, create or destroy us," is close to the cognitive reappraisal used in contemporary psychotherapy (Rudnev n.d., 28).

A passage that could be superficially read as hostile to family life belongs to this context. The Northern Kam says that "to become a Shaman, one must not only be strong but also lack earthly attachments to children, family, money, and not fear death" (Rudnev n.d., 9). Elsewhere, he advises the would-be shaman to "consider your past as if it happened to someone else, and then imagine yourself burying the old you" (Rudnev n.d., 59). A prosecutor looking for evidence of a "cult" might take these lines as a method for cutting followers, or at least those who want to become shamans, off from their relatives. Within the book, however, they describe an interior discipline, the release of attachments and rigid memories that weigh down the soul. Renunciation of this kind has parallels in Christian monasticism, Buddhism, and Hindu asceticism, and few readers would interpret the Gospel's call to "hate" father and mother (Luke 14:26) as a program for destroying families.

Soteriology and Rituals

The chapter on the "golden egg," framed in Slavic terms, summarizes the book's soteriology. Each person is a miniature cosmos, an egg laid by the primordial god Dyy, with a spirit inside that must break three shells: imagination, emotional attachments, and the body with its habits and fear of death. Regarding the body, the master specifies that what must be overcome is "EXCESSIVE attachment to it, such as the fear of death, laziness, hunger, and discomfort" (Rudnev n.d., 76, capitals in the original). The surprising point is the order of the work. Most religions, Saosh Yant observes, focus on conquering the passions of

the flesh. At the same time, the Northern Kam insists that "the first thing needed is liberation from Krivda," falsehood, because "it's imagination that makes attachments, dependencies, and desires excessive, unnatural, and unreasonable" (Rudnev n.d., 77). What remains after the shells are broken is a pure (Gurdjieffian) observer: "It observes but cannot be seen" (Rudnev n.d., 75).

The rituals narrated in the book put these ideas into practice. In the healing of Obia, a woman who has lost all interest in life, the spirits reveal that her Syur has wandered north toward the swamps near the underworld. Saosh Yant, impersonating his helper spirit, the bear, clears a windfall blocking her path. The narrator explains that the fallen trees "personified the disruption that occurred when Obia's son died, and she grieved deeply, losing the purpose of her life" (Rudnev n.d., 49). The whole village takes part in the preparations, because the shaman "simply directs the power of these people towards achieving the goal" (Rudnev n.d., 46–7). The ritual is a collective, symbolic intervention in grief, and Saosh Yant defines shamanic ritual more generally as "a magical act of correcting the bad paths in the dream world that people had taken" (Rudnev n.d., 52).

Animal sacrifice appears several times, as it does throughout the ethnography of Siberia. The book distinguishes three types: a substitute sacrifice that transfers an illness from a person to an animal, a consecration that restores the balance between a person's Kut and the "macro-body" of their possessions, and an offering whose soul carries a request to the gods (Rudnev n.d., 52). The second type involves no killing. A horse dedicated to Ulgen keeps living with the herd, and nobody may ride, harness, or slaughter it. In the chapter on exorcism, the villagers protest that the evil spirit has already taken too many cattle, and the spirits' solution is a white cow consecrated to Tengri: "A bloodless offering to Tengri, we shall present" (Rudnev n.d., 51). Readers looking for a glorification of bloodshed will not find it here.

The most easily sensationalized passages concern Ayami. Saosh Yant first meets her as the spirit of a rock in the ocean, and they unite in a dance of love in the form of an eagle and a white bird. Later she visits his dreams, where they make love as humans, as deer, and as birds. The book explains that "Ayami was his Shamanic wife in the world of dreams," that every shaman has one, and even that one shaman had a male Ayami who appeared in women's clothing (Rudnev n.d., 47). These scenes closely follow the "divine election" described by Shternberg among the Nanai, in which a spirit wife chooses the future shaman, visits him in dreams, and becomes his protector (Shternberg 1925, as summarized in Eliade 1964, 71–5). They take place in the dream body, in a world where gender and species are fluid, and nothing in them refers to sexual relations between

human beings. Treating them as evidence of sexual practices within a group would confuse a classic theme of Siberian religion with a rule of behavior.

The story "Revenge of the Spirits" teaches respect for sacred places. A tourist named Sergei mocks a shaman's burial, dances on the arankas, and steals the dead man's costume and drum. He gets lost, falls into a crevice, and is visited in a vision by the offended shaman, who tells him he will find no rest until he puts everything back. Rescued by the Northern Kam and Saosh Yant, he returns the objects, asks forgiveness, and is blessed. The moral concerns humility and reparation, and the spirits respond, Saosh Yant explains, as soon as the young man stops boasting and sincerely wants to right his wrong (Rudnev n.d., 65–71).

The final chapter, "Chichipkan," contains a sentence a critic might misread and quote against Rudnev: "They take medicine, yet no one realizes that all illness and suffering come from evil spirits feeding on their bodies" (Rudnev n.d., 82). The statement is spoken by a shaman explaining the worldview of his tradition, and its target is the neglect of spiritual purification in modern life. Nowhere does the book tell readers to stop medical treatment. Spirit etiologies of illness are standard in the anthropology of shamanism, and scholars routinely distinguish between a tradition's explanatory model and a prescription to abandon medicine.

The book also contains statements about other religions. Spirits, the narrator says, founded a primordial civilization whose knowledge reached humans through shamans and later, "in a distorted form, served as the foundation for the creation of various religions" (Rudnev n.d., 58). After a vision of the source of life, Saosh Yant learns that Christ "was also one of us" (Rudnev n.d., 46). Such claims belong to the perennialist current of modern esotericism, which regards all religions as expressions of a single primordial truth.

Conclusion

Read as a whole, *Siberian Shamanism* emerges as an ambitious attempt to build a complete system from Siberian, Slavic, and esoteric materials. The four gods correspond to dimensions of time and to human orientations, the five souls offer a map of the person, and the World Tree with its rivers of time charts the journey from birth to liberation. Its goal is the one Rudneva identifies behind all of Rudnev's work, the passage from external interests to the question of who one really is (Rudneva 2026). The book proposes an ethics of effort, since "to go up requires enormous effort," of detachment from false images of oneself, and of respect for nature and the sacred (Rudnev n.d., 2).

Whatever one thinks of its metaphysics, the book deserves careful study by anyone interested in Rudnev's ideas. It also deserves to be protected from a fate common to the writings of new religious movements in court, being reduced to a handful of quotations wrenched from the symbolic universe in which they were written.

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Konstantin Rudnev and Shamanism

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This study explores the shamanic elements in the life and teachings of a Russian mystic who founded and led the Siberian spiritual community that came to be known as "Ashram Shambhala" from 1993 to 2010.

Konstantin Rudnev (b. 1967) was a prominent spiritual teacher in Russia, initially a yoga instructor who became an inspirational lecturer, then the charismatic leader of an international new religious movement. He incorporated elements of Christianity, Tibetan Buddhism, New Age ideas, and shamanism into his teachings (Introvigne and Vardé 2026). Rudnev was a practicing neo-shaman who occasionally wore the dress of a Siberian shaman. His former students or "tutors" (who carry on his work today) recall attending workshops in shamanic techniques and witnessing incidents of magical healings at "Ashram Shambhala" (Palmer 2026).

Rudnev's teachings on shamanism blend two seemingly incongruous traditions: i) the ancient, indigenous shamanism of the Altai people of Siberia; and ii) the Yaqui/Toltec "way of knowledge," as presented in twelve books by Carlos Castaneda (1925–1998), published between 1968 and 1998.

In this exploration of Rudnev's career as a shaman and teacher of shamanic knowledge and practices, I will begin by describing the social and historical context of this niche area of religious studies: i) Siberian shamanism as a Russian field of study; ii) Mircea Eliade's (1907–1986) seminal study of shamanism; iii) Konstantin Rudnev's own account of his training and experiences as a Siberian shaman's apprentice and his own interpretation and application of Castaneda's writings.

Methodology

This study draws on a single-session interview with Konstantin Rudnev, who is currently living in Argentina. He is recovering from surgery and speaks only Russian. Therefore, I composed a list of questions and sent them to Rudnev's wife, Tamara Rudneva, through an intermediary. She relayed my questions to her husband and translated his answers into English, then emailed them to me.

Rudnev uses the term "shamanist" and explains the distinction between "shamans" and "shamanists":

> A shaman is like a priest who has developed the ability to communicate with the gods and with spirits. Shamanists are people who share the worldview of shamans but do not possess such abilities.
>
> Shamanists might, to some extent, communicate with the spirit of a river, the spirit of the hearth fire, Choktal, or the spirits of the taiga and the mountains. They may establish communication with such earthly spirits. But they cannot contact the gods and greater spirits because they lack the ability. Shamanists are simply people who share the shamanic vision of the world, but are not, so to speak, priests who communicate with the gods and perform certain complex rituals.

Siberian Shamanism as a Field of Study

The term "shaman" originates from *šaman*, a word of the Evenki (formerly called Tungus), a Tungusic people of Siberia. It means "one who knows," referring to a magician, sorcerer, or medicine man. Russian scholars first observed this magical/religious phenomenon in Siberia (Znamenski 2003). British archaeologist Paul G. Bahn characterizes Siberia as "the heartland of true shamanism" (Bahn 2001, 59) and argues that the word *šaman* should be restricted to its cultural region of origin.

Some of the earliest studies of Siberian tribes were by Russian folklorists, ethnographers, and anthropologists writing in German, such as Wilhelm Radloff (1837–1918), author of *Aus Sibirien* (Radloff 1884). Soviet ethnographer Leonid Pavlovich Potapov (1905–2000) notes that under Soviet anti-religious repression in the 1930s, shamanic rituals were forbidden and ritual paraphernalia such as drums and costumes were expropriated by the authorities (Potapov 1991). Many of these early studies include photographs of shamans in bear costume holding drums, or riding reindeer.

Rudnev's interest in shamanism was sparked by studies of Siberian shamanism available in Russian libraries, despite the Communist regime's suppression of religion. He explains in our remote interview how this interest developed:

> I had been interested in Siberian shamanism for a long time, since childhood. Fragmentary information had always been passed down. Scholars collected folklore and fragments of information about shamanism from different people who often were not even shamans themselves but knew something about the tradition. In Soviet times, pre-revolutionary authors wrote scholarly books exploring Siberia before the Revolution, where they found shamans and studied their folklore and shamanic traditions. I read a book called *Chosen by the Spirits* by Vladimir Nikolaevich Basilov [1937–1998; Basilov 1984]. Surprisingly, it was an actual book [as opposed to a *samizdat* "black market" book]. It was essentially the first accessible book on shamanism at the time, which is surprising because shamanism was considered a kind of

religion, and religion was considered evil, "the opium of the people." In practice, books about religion were hard to obtain. I began searching through libraries for the scholarly works of [Andrei Viktorovich] Anokhin [1869–1931] and [Leonid Pavlovich] Potapov on Siberian shamanism.

Shamanism in our country was extremely rare. It existed only in Altai, Tuva, Buryatia, or somewhere else in the more remote regions of Siberia… Since I lived in the city of Novosibirsk and no one knew anything about it, I only encountered shamanists (people who follow shamanic traditions); when I arrived in Altai, I found a genuine shaman. I also encountered shamans from Tuva. Since Tuva became part of Russia during the war, it partially escaped that brutal period in the 1930s when shamans were being exterminated, because at that time it had not yet become part of Russia. Elements of shamanism were also preserved in the Far North, in Yakutia. And it was still possible to encounter shamans there as well. But all genuine shamans mainly live in nature, that is, in the taiga or tundra, and it is relatively easy to encounter urban shamans, who just play at shamanism. But the spirits leave the cities and are mainly found in wild places with no people. Genuine shamans settle in these places to contact powerful spirits.

Mircea Eliade's Typology of Shamanism

Mircea Eliade was born in Romania. He was a prolific writer who spoke six languages and became a leading scholar in twentieth-century religious studies. He moved to the United States in 1956 and helped found the Chicago School of the phenomenology of religion.

Ethnographies by Russian and German researchers of shamans in specific tribes had been published since the eighteenth century, but Eliade wrote the first analytical and comparative study of this ancient and universal type of religion. His book, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (Eliade 1964), was originally published in 1951 in French as *Le Chamanisme et les techniques archaïques de l'extase* by Librairie Payot in Paris and translated into English in 1964.

The book's subtitle sums up his main thesis: that "shamanism" involves the mastery of techniques to induce trance states and ecstatic or out-of-body experiences—what we today would call "altered states of consciousness." While in an *ecstatic state*, the shaman is empowered to perform magical acts and travel to other realms of the cosmos. The word *ecstasy*, from Ancient Greek ἔκστασις (ékstasis), means "standing outside of the self."

Eliade's study offers vivid examples of this ancient, universal religion among hunter-gatherer tribes still living in "Stone Age" cultures close to nature.

He outlines the basic elements of shamanism: the shaman's role in their tribe or community; the powers of a shaman (flight to the spirit world, healing the sick, helping the hunters, magical sight); and the shaman's vocation, training, and initiation. Since Eliade's book appeared, "shaman" has become a generic term (Hoppál 1994, 2005; Mandelstam Balzer 1997).

Rudnev's Investigation into Siberian Shamanism

Rudnev notes that "after studying the subject in some detail," he received a vision: "The Spirit of Siberia appeared to me and said that I would become a shaman and that I had to restore the shamanic teaching, because there was no clearly defined shamanic teaching in any book."

Rudnev, who was in his early twenties at that point, decided to travel to Altai where authentic shamans could still be found living in the taiga:

> I reached the village of Tyungur; beyond it, there are no more settlements, and the foothills of Belukha begin. There I wandered through the taiga. It was as though something was guiding me, some power. I came to Altai, and the Spirit led me to a shaman. That is how I met the Altai Kam and began studying under him. I later described my further training with him in my books, where I reconstructed Siberian shamanism as it was and how to practice it. It can be said that the spirits chose me and brought me to the Altai Kam for training. He also received a sign from the spirits and, having the ability to see a person, to see who they are objectively, he saw that I was capable of absorbing the teachings, of becoming a shaman.

Rudnev describes his apprenticeship with the Altai Kam as follows:

> He was a calm, wise, and benevolent elder, but also strict. He did not allow violations of shamanic traditions, and he did not allow anything that would unnecessarily disturb the spirits. For example, it was forbidden to burn garbage in the fire or throw it into water, because this desecrated these elements and displeased the spirits. He strictly made sure nothing like this happened and that all shamanic traditions were observed. I tried to study diligently, remember everything, and practice spiritually. He gave me instructions and assignments on how best to do things; on which gods exist, which worlds exist, which spirits there are, and the paths of disease in the shamanic world and the world of dreams—I learned all of this from him.

Rudnev's Encounter with Carlos Castaneda's Books

After Rudnev managed to escape from both the hospital and the army in the 1980s (having feigned mental illness), he began teaching yoga, and by 1993 he established an intentional community in the forest near Novosibirsk, Siberia, later known as "Ashram Shambhala" (Introvigne and Vardé 2026). Rudnev's developing spiritual worldview was eclectic, combining Hindu Vedanta

with Siberian shamanism, Tibetan Buddhism, Tantra, and the concepts of karma and reincarnation. He recalls coming across Carlos Castaneda's first book (1968), *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge*, which purports to describe the teachings of a Yaqui sorcerer from Sonora, Mexico. In later books, Castaneda connected this tradition with the pre-Columbian Mesoamerican Toltec civilization that flourished between the 10th and 12th centuries CE (Castaneda 1968; Wallace 2003).

> I learned about the teachings of Don Juan when I was about twenty years old, and I came across a *samizdat* book [an unofficially circulated book that was retyped or copied]. At that time, Castaneda's books were available only in *samizdat*. I was impressed by Castaneda's experiences and his interactions with Don Juan. I began trying many of the spiritual practices Castaneda describes, and I achieved certain results. I began to realize that this was a kind of Toltec shamanism. In his first book, Castaneda calls Don Juan a "sorcerer." However, in his later works, he calls him a "shaman" [in the Toltec tradition], which involves direct communication with spirits, specific relationships with nature, and tuning oneself to the perception of the subtle world rather than the physical world we are accustomed to perceiving.

Rudnev spoke of similarities and differences between these two shamanic traditions:

> Toltec shamanism complements Siberian shamanism but also differs from it. One similarity is that Castaneda, like a Siberian shaman, was taught to feel with his body, to feel with his being, with his cocoon, to feel the world around him, to see it differently, to see it not simply as the physical reality that we see, but to see it as fields of energy, as a field of energy, as the interaction of certain powers.

Rudnev learned from Castaneda unique practices that are absent from Siberian shamanism, for example, the Toltec practice of "stalking":

> Stalking is when a person adapts to the surrounding environment, to the society around them, and behaves in such a way as to play the necessary role that will help them achieve a certain goal—to remain unnoticed or to create a [lesson] for their student, or to create some unusual situation for other people. [Castaneda] described his stalking experiences in a particularly amusing way, such as the episode where Don Julian taught Don Juan by frightening him with allies, and Don Juan dressed in women's clothing to try to escape them. He felt like a woman and realized how difficult it was to be a woman, as men began making advances toward him.

Rudnev explained the purpose of "stalking" and how he applied it in his own life:

> Stalking was practiced [when interacting] with a petty tyrant [when] it was necessary to play certain roles; a pious role [with] priests or the owners of the estate. [In other roles he would] tease the petty tyrant, driving him into a frenzy through his impeccability; Don Juan could deal with this petty tyrant.
>
> For Siberian shamans, these stalking practices do not exist because they live far away from people, in the remote taiga, and interact very little with people, except with members of their own tribe. Practically speaking, they had nowhere to use stalking,

> whereas the Toltecs lived in a more developed society, especially during the Spaniards' conquest. So, they had to practice stalking to survive among these conquerors. Thus, stalking proved very useful and developed to a fairly high level.
>
> I also, during the Communist period, had to practice stalking so that I would not be put in a mental hospital or in prison. I had to pretend to be cunning. For me personally, since I was living in a Communist country at the time… I also had to play the role of someone who sympathized with the Communist Party and its ideology, pretending to share it. Of course, it was nonsense, an absurdity being imposed on people. I had to practice a peculiar kind of stalking very intensively in those years because they wanted to put me in a mental hospital. People were put in mental hospitals and repeatedly injected with drugs. They tried [this] on me to turn me into a vegetable, but it did not work. And then they wanted to perform a lobotomy on me so that I would become completely stupid and stop disturbing people with my ideas. But I managed to escape from the mental hospital at that time, and then Perestroika began, and later the Communist regime ended.

One striking difference between the shamanism Eliade describes and Toltec shamanism, as depicted in Castaneda's books, is the shaman's role in the tribe. Don Juan Matus is a solitary magician whose role in the Yaqui community is a mystery. His mission seems to be pursuing occult knowledge, spiritual power, and longevity. In *A Separate Reality* (1971), *Journey to Ixtlan* (1972), The Eagle*'s Gift* (1981), and other books, Castaneda writes about a camaraderie of apprentices who support each other on their spiritual journeys. As Rudnev noted:

> Castaneda's Toltecs concealed who they were and kept contact only with a small group, led by a "Nagual." Only the people in this tiny group knew one another, interacting for the sole purpose of [self] development.

In our interview, Rudnev pointed out that Siberian shamans use their magical powers to serve their community, whereas it seems that the Yaqui/Toltec shamans perform no useful role for their tribe:

> Siberian shamans constantly turn to the Spirits with requests to help the inhabitants of their settlement; their tribe lived in the forest, communicated with spirits, and sometimes residents turned to them with various problems and illnesses. When a person was lost in the taiga, a shaman could determine whether they were still alive and where they were. The shamans also treated mental illnesses—the so-called return of the soul from the lower world. Sometimes, they practiced divination for hunters: which part of the taiga to go to for successful game hunting. They also predicted the weather because, in the wilderness, a blizzard and low temperatures can make you lose your way and lose the trail, as a kind of snowy haze can continue for hours. All the tracks disappear, and you can easily die in such conditions. The shamans can predict favorable weather for hunters in the taiga.
>
> Castaneda barely describes any interaction with these powers, spirits, or gods. Don Juan [doesn't ask] the spirits or gods for help in healing certain people or for some other purposes. Such descriptions are absent, except for talking to the spirit of Datura or Peyote, or to allies to frighten a disciple, or for something else like that.

Rudnev summed up his comparison as follows:

> The Toltecs distanced themselves from people and simply practiced stalking, meaning they concealed their identity. They did not provide practical help to the people around them, whereas a [Siberian] shaman lives to help people. His spirits specifically make him a shaman so that, first and foremost, he can help his tribe and… perhaps some other people whom he encounters. This is a major difference.

Trance States and the Use of Psychedelics and Intoxicants

In his third (1972) book, *Journey to Ixtlan*, Castaneda learns from Don Juan and his companion, Don Genaro, that psychotropic drugs like peyote and datura are useful only for opening the first windows into alternate realities. However, through shamanic training, it is possible to establish a deeper, more reliable permanent connection to unseen worlds. Rudnev compared the use of psychedelic substances by Siberian and Yaqui shamans.

> In Siberia, shamans consumed vodka or fly agaric mushrooms. They traditionally used fly agaric mushrooms because they grew in the taiga. Vodka became known later, when Russians came to Siberia.

Rudnev made the point that fly agaric mushrooms were mainly used by "very weak" shamans, and vodka was used mainly by urban shamans who do not know how to establish contact with spirits. He explained that weak shamans become dependent on these substances, and so they can get lost or simply waste time and fail to accomplish the required task.

> A weak shaman cannot enter a state of trance and enter the subtle plane, the world of dreams, as it is also called, or the world of the higher heavens, or the underworld. Or they can do so only with difficulty. Vodka and drugs switch off the rational part of the mind (which is what prevents a person from entering the subtle world). When it is switched off, it becomes easier to do so. It is not without reason that drunkards suffering from *delirium tremens* see devils, or that drug addicts also see various visions. For a weak shaman, all these things—ayahuasca, mushrooms, peyote, LSD—well, yes, they help one see the world differently, see another reality, but a person has no control over it. He is like a helpless infant carried off somewhere, and he does not know where he is being carried. He wanted to reach Ulgen but ended up with Erlik instead. He wanted to reach Erlik but met Ayami. At the same time, a shaman knows what he wants to see. For example, he needs to see where a lost hunter is. He cannot simply eat a lot of fly agaric mushrooms and wait to be carried off somewhere. He needs to see where the lost hunter is. That is, he has a clear goal. He knows what he needs to see, how to see it, where he needs to fly, what he needs to understand, or where and whom he needs to ask for help.

Rudnev explained why Castaneda needed to ingest psychotropic plants as part of his training:

> Well, as Don Juan said, only weak shamans use peyote, mushrooms, or ayahuasca… And he used these substances with Castaneda only because Castaneda was very strongly

> rooted in the rational part of himself… Castaneda, even when he saw allies, did not believe that he had seen them, because they did not exist in his rational picture of the world. He constantly thought that he had imagined something, that he had seen things. That is, he did not want to believe he was seeing, for example, spirits, the subtle world, or the world of energy. He did not want to believe it and tried every possible way to explain it rationally—that he had imagined it, or seen things, to preserve his rational perception, his rational picture of the world.
>
> If it had been an ordinary Indian living somewhere in nature, not particularly attached to rationality, he would have seen all of this more quickly and believed it more quickly because he was already inclined toward it; he had such a shamanic worldview. Don Juan would not have needed to spend as much time with him as he did with Castaneda to finally shake his perception and teach him to see this invisible world, the subtle plane.

Rudnev described the traditional methods used by Siberian shamans to enter a state of trance:

> Through music, people enter religious ecstasy or go on shamanic journeys. Music immediately affects the emotional part of our nature, and all of this helps one enter a trance. Siberian shamans use the rhythm of the drum, and there is *vorgovanie* [a shamanic throat-singing practice]. It is not a repeating mantra; it is simply some spontaneous sound. The aerophone [a bullroarer] is a kind of stick attached to a rope; you spin it around, and it produces a buzzing sound. Rattles are also used. The *khomus* (jaw harp, or *guimbarde*) is another instrument. For Europeans, it is not clear what a *khomus* is, or why this rather rare instrument is used so often by Siberian shamans. The *khomus* is held with the teeth. When the *khomus*' tongue vibrates, the whole head begins to vibrate, producing a guttural sound that intensifies the vibration; because of this, the whole head sort of hums. If played correctly, the *khomus* helps one enter this kind of trance state.

Encountering Spirit Helpers or Allies

Rudnev spoke of how he first met his spirit helper during his first *kamlanie* (a special shamanic ritual of communicating with spirits):

> I can describe my first encounter, when I met a spirit helper in my shamanic drum, made from deer hide. During my first *kamlanie*, I saw this deer. It would seem the deer had died long ago, since its hide was being used. But I saw the deer's soul on the subtle plane, and we began to communicate. This deer carried me during the *kamlanie* through different worlds, through different places; it began to carry me. And I began to move around on it. That was how I first encountered a spirit helper.
>
> Before that I had encountered spirits, that is, not a helper, just spirits of the locality, Ayami. That is, you come to a place that feels alive, for example, in the taiga. It may be a river or a mountain, or simply a forest. Suddenly, you feel that someone is nearby. You look, and no one is there; it is an uninhabited area, but it feels as though someone is present. It is this persistent impression. And when you begin to go deeper into yourself, deeper into these inner sensations, Ayami begins to appear on the inner screen, the face of Ayami. And there is this kind of silent conversation, if you can call it that. Ayami, so to speak, conveys a certain attitude toward me through her feelings and energies. Well, for example, she welcomes the fact that I have come to this territory. And I

welcome her as well. Well, this kind of welcoming attitude was only because I treated nature, the river, the mountain, the forest, with great reverence, and so I received a corresponding response.

Encountering Animals

Rudnev also spoke of the shaman's relationship with wild animals in nature:

It is difficult to establish contact with wild animals because they are very wary and afraid of people. Animals have this fear—the instinct of self-preservation—and it is difficult to communicate with them. But if you tune yourself to the vibration of love, to such sublime states, then animals sense it easily, unlike people.

And animals came to the Altai Kam for healing. A bear came, and it had a large splinter in its paw. At first, I was frightened and thought, "What's the bear doing here?" The bear came right up to the yurt. I thought, "What is happening? Why did the bear come here?" But the Altai Kam was sitting calmly: "The bear has come for help," he said.

The bear gave him its paw. He removed the splinter from its paw, and it ran off into the forest. That is, animals sense they can get help here, and that people treat them kindly. They sense these emotional vibrations and respond. If an animal senses fear, it may attack. If it is a predatory animal, its instinct to attack may be triggered. Therefore, you need to control your emotions to maintain certain relationships with animals.

Rudnev on Shamanic Healing

After hearing accounts of Rudnev's magical healing powers from former students who lived in his ashram (Palmer 2026), I asked whether he used shamanic techniques to heal and how the process worked.

He explained that he often entered a trance state where the subtle body left the physical body and entered the subtle plane where new powers and abilities are accessed, such as the ability to heal:

The shaman uses different techniques, depending on the person's illness. Some people do not have enough Kut (life energy) for the organism to cope with the disease. The shaman must transmit this Kut into the person's immune system.

If a person is, for example, old, ill, or leads an unhealthy lifestyle, his immune system often lacks the energy to recover. Therefore, this life energy must be transmitted from outside—from other people, or by connecting, say, to Ayami or the spirits of the place—into his immune system or into the diseased organ.

But some illnesses belong to the psychic sphere—the so-called "theft of the soul." For example, a mother grieves over the loss of her son, and her soul, Tes, is carried away into the world of Erlik, into the world of the past; thus, she develops a mental disorder. Then the shaman, in a trance, must fly to the world of Erlik, into the past where her soul has become entangled and stuck. Tes (her soul) is retrieved and returned to the woman, and psychic recovery follows.

> Another psychic illness is paranoia. This happens when a person crosses into the world of the future, Ulgen, and gets stuck. The boundary between the real and the unreal disappears, and hallucination becomes reality. In these cases, the soul Bos becomes entangled in the future. Then the shaman must fly to Ulgen to return the soul Bos to the physical world. In this way, the person is healed from a paranoid state and returns to a sober state.
>
> Schizophrenia arises when the soul leaves, goes into the lower world, goes into the past. Then the person becomes completely apathetic and loses interest in the life around him. In other illnesses, for example, in depression, the same thing may arise. That is, the person ceases to perceive the physical world because his soul has gone.
>
> Depression is also Erlik. The soul has become entangled there. Everything becomes uninteresting to the person. He finds no meaning in the physical world, as if he does not perceive it.
>
> Sometimes an evil spirit enters a person; what we call "possession" includes alcoholism, drugs, or gambling addiction. Evil spirits can enter a person and possess him with an idea, such as communism and so on. The person is so possessed that he no longer understands the unreality of these ideas, and evil spirits feed on his energy and on his negative emotions. Then the evil spirit must be placed into another object and expelled, carried away to a swamp, and so on, so that, confined inside that object, the evil spirit remains far from the person and cannot return to harm him again. There is a method to expel evil spirits. In the modern world, this is called "exorcism."

I asked Rudnev, "What sensations arise when you conduct a healing session? How does it feel inside?"

> Sometimes, you feel the energy—from nature, from the Higher—pass through you and heal the person. In more complex situations, the healer takes on some of the bad energy himself, so he begins to feel the illness. Then the shaman must access new energies or purification systems to remove this negative energy from himself. Many healers do not know purification methods, and then bad things happen: the healer takes the negative energy from the patient onto himself, so the patient feels better. But then, when the healer treats his next patient, he transmits the negative energy from his last patient to the new one. Such a reshuffling arises.

A Comparison of Two Shamanic Eschatologies

Rudnev compared Castaneda's Yaqui way of knowledge with the path of the Siberian shaman and stated they were similar in many ways. Both interact with nature, animals, and the spirit world. But he identified profound differences in their gods and view of the afterlife.

> The Yaqui path does not go deeply into the world of the gods, whereas Siberian shamanism goes directly into the depths of the unseen universe. Moreover, their gods differ. While Siberian shamans believe the gods are allies who will help them if they relate properly and behave correctly, in Toltec magic the shaman must fly past the Eagle to avoid becoming its food. This Eagle, depicted in Castaneda's books, is very similar to Erlik, the god of death in Siberian shamanism (who also feeds on people's memories and impressions received during their lives).

> In some ways, the two gods are similar, but Siberian shamanism shows a more reverent attitude toward the gods. Many shamans or shamanists turn to the gods for help, whereas the Eagle of the Toltecs is regarded as a kind of monster, the mighty tyrant who forces people to live and then feeds on them after death.

In *Journey to Ixtlan,* Castaneda suggests that death is not at the end of life, but constantly at arm's length: "Death is our eternal companion … It is always to our left, at an arm's length" (Castaneda 1972, 28). In *The Eagle's Gift*, Castaneda explains as follows:

> The Eagle…has granted a gift to each of those beings…any one of them…has the power to keep the flame of awareness, the power to disobey the summons to die and be consumed. Every living thing has been granted the power, if it so desires, to seek an opening to freedom and to go through it (Castaneda 1981, 57).

Rudnev compared this goal to that of the "ancient seers," who wanted to preserve themselves not physically but in an etheric state. Once they left the physical world, they could move to the etheric plane and exist there like ghosts or spirits. They aimed to preserve their individuality.

> But for Don Juan's party, the Naguals, their goal was to fly past the Eagle, to break free from this reality and not to remain there as a spirit or something else, but to become the whole of infinity, that is, this entire Eagle. Yes, we are placed in the physical body to gain a certain experience of physical existence and, as in a gym, to work on certain qualities here, but nothing more. As soon as we have worked on certain qualities and acquired the necessary experience, we must go to the subtle plane, because that is our home, so to speak. And here we are like guests, as though we were in some gym, training ground, or reality show, going through various trials, difficulties, and so on, various ordeals, to gain experience and train ourselves. In my book, *Secrets of the Dead,* I describe in detail the entire subtle plane, what it is like, what happens there, and why we live here, what for… After reading this book, all of this becomes very clear.

Rudnev described life on earth as a life lesson, a "gym":

> We receive certain lessons here. Many things that we experience in the physical world do not exist in the subtle world—pain, hunger, cold, limitations of perception, perceiving everything through the physical body. So, we train. We learn to be conscious, to exercise our will, to exercise self-control, because on the subtle plane everything comes too easily, and it is very difficult to train anything there. Whereas here everything comes with difficulty. If we use life's difficulties for development, development proceeds quickly.
>
> You can compare it to a gym, right, where people train. In the gym, it is difficult for you; you run, you jump, you use some exercise machines, but your muscles become strong, and you become a strong, active person.
>
> That is the comparison. We cannot develop lying on the beach. Unless, of course, we do some sports there. But in the gym, although it is difficult for us, we develop, improve ourselves, and become better.

Rudnev's Response to the Controversy Surrounding Castaneda's Works

Examining Rudnev's teachings on shamanism raises an interesting enigma worth exploring.

Castaneda's books became highly controversial after their initial (best-selling) success. Castaneda's first (1968) book was his published MA thesis, submitted to the UCLA Anthropology department. His third (1972) book, *Journey to Ixtlan*, was his (retitled) Ph.D. dissertation, "Sorcery: A Description of the World" (1973). Allegations have circulated since the 1970s that Castaneda faked his research and that Don Juan, the Mexican Yaqui sorcerer, never actually existed (Noel 1976; de Mille 1978; Fikes 1993, 2021; Doherty 2007).

One of Castaneda's colleagues, who read the passage about Castaneda's meetings with Don Juan in Arizona in *The Teachings of Don Juan*, checked his calendar and realized he had seen Castaneda in the UCLA library on that very date. When he reported this to the Department of Anthropology, they started an investigation and found "all kinds of discrepancies" (Chavers 2011). Richard de Mille (1922–2009), a psychologist and writer, checked the library records for "Castaneda" and found that when Castaneda claimed to have been in a peyote ceremony in the Sonoran Desert of Mexico, he was actually sitting in the UCLA library reading a published account of one. De Mille pointed to the absence of Yaqui words in the books, despite Castaneda's claim that he spent months with Don Juan. Dean Chavers writes, "Castaneda was awarded a doctorate from the Department of Anthropology at UCLA. But once they learned about the fraud, they took the doctorate back—the only case I know of where this has happened" (Chavers 2011). Chavers is, however, mistaken: UCLA never revoked Castaneda's doctorate.

The distinguished American anthropologist Weston La Barre (1911–1996) panned Castaneda's book, *A Separate Reality* (1971), calling it "pseudo-profound, deeply vulgar pseudo-ethnography" (de Mille 1990, 105, quoting a review that La Barre submitted to *The New York Times*, which rejected it). In 1973, a *Time* magazine cover story revealed that Castaneda had misrepresented his own biography (*Time* 1973; Noel 1976; Chavers 2011).

After Castaneda died in 1998, his books continued to be bought and cherished. Still, heated debates over how to categorize them continue: Are they authentic records of anthropological research, or should they be classified as novels, or as imaginative nonfiction? Are these books to be interpreted as inspired philosophical treatises or as sacred texts? And who was Carlos Castaneda? Was he an intrepid

anthropologist, or just a brash hoaxer who made fools of academia and illustrious publishing houses?

When I asked Konstantin Rudnev these questions, this was his response:

> Well, I can see that Castaneda really did see the subtle plane and its structure. He really did encounter Don Juan, a genuine shaman, and Castaneda studied shamanism because he described things there that were later confirmed both in my personal experience and in the experience of other shamans. Much of what he described is indeed true; it is indeed reality. Since seeing the subtle plane is so extraordinary, many people with a rational worldview naturally cannot understand it. To them, it seems like some beautiful fairy tale.

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