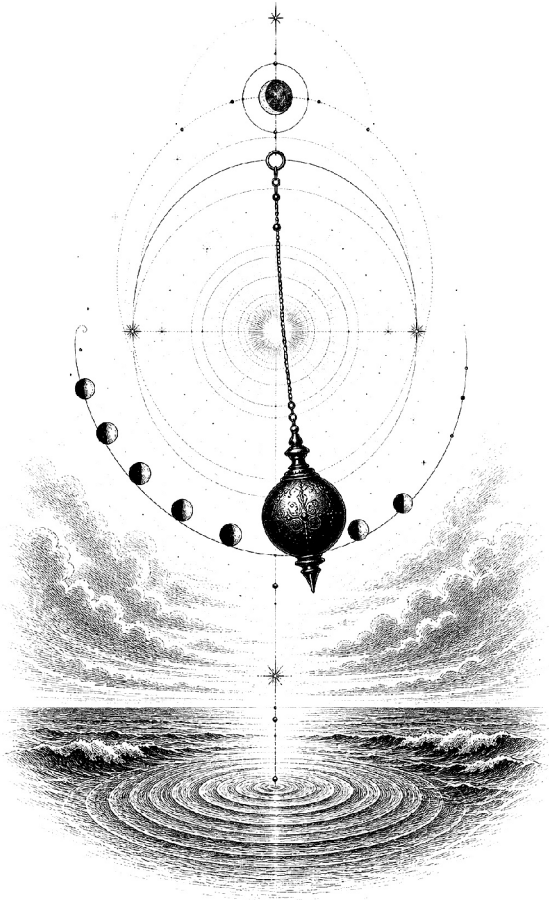


CHAPTER V

A TIME OF THE PENDULUM

THE PRINCIPLE OF RHYTHM



Everything flows, out and in; everything has its tides; all things rise and fall; the pendulum-swing manifests in everything; the measure of the swing to the right is the measure of the swing to the left; rhythm compensates.

– *The Kybalion*

The orchard has two times of its own, alternating from year to year. There is the time of apple trees and the time of pear trees. [...]

In an apple-tree year, the trees draw up the potent waters of underground rivers, waters with the power of movement and change. These waters contain an urge to push forward, to grow, to spread.

In a pear-tree year, everything is different. The time of pears means drawing sweet juices from minerals and slowly, gently combining them with sunlight in the leaves. The trees stop growing and savor the sweetness of life. No movement, no development. The orchard seems unchanging. [...]

– Olga Tokarczuk, *Prawiek i inne czasy* (*Primeval and Other Times*). Shortened working translation of the supplied Polish excerpt, with omissions marked; not the published English translation. Final wording and source review pending.¹

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The fourth principle, Polarity, presents a world of apparent opposites, paradoxes, struggles, and unexpected turns. The fifth adds movement through time to this picture. A Time of the Pendulum therefore brings us to Rhythm:

Everything flows, out and in; everything has its tides; all things rise and fall; the pendulum-swing manifests in everything; the measure of the swing to the right is the measure of the swing to the left; rhythm compensates.

The principle invites us to look for recurring patterns in change. Flowers open and wither; mountains rise and erode; stars, planets, organisms, and societies have histories of formation and dissolution. Tides and sleep cycles offer measurable rhythms. The emergence of species, the fortunes of empires, and our successes and failures are more complicated: they do not necessarily recur regularly or compensate in equal measure. The pendulum is a lens through which to examine them, not a substitute for their particular causes.

To explore this rhythmic vision of existence, we must attend to movement itself. We began doing so in *A Time of Contrasts*, following the interplay of opposites and imagining ourselves on the cosmic carousel. Now we will listen for the pulse of life within us and examine the patterns we discern around us. Some belong to biology or physics; others to the stories through which we understand our lives.

PLAYING MANY DRUMS

Movement and rhythm accompany us from the beginning: heartbeat, inhalation and exhalation, waking and sleep, sound and silence. Joy and sorrow, health and illness also shape our lives, though they are not governed by an evenly swinging clock. Biological rhythms arise through interacting systems, influenced by our bodies and surroundings. In the language of this book, Rhythm connects the Realm of Music with A

Time of Contrasts: vibration with polarity. It is the dance of changing relationships, heard on many drums at once.

Existence is a process; life is a process. *Panta rhei*—everything flows—is the familiar later summary of a theme associated with Heraclitus, rather than a securely preserved verbatim sentence of his. The universe does not merely remain: it happens, changes, becomes. We, too, belong to those processes. A journey through *A Time of the Pendulum* asks us to recognize patterns within and around ourselves and locate our present situation within them. Hermetic practitioners have understood this as learning to participate consciously in the rhythms of a greater whole.

Things do not remain forever as they are. Their changes unfold on different timescales and with different degrees of regularity. In our symbolic vocabulary, this is the breath of the Absolute. We will seek its images in cosmic and cultural cycles, physical processes, the body, the psyche, and ordinary life. The phrase “pulse of the universe” gathers these images together without asserting that a single measurable oscillator drives them all.

MONSIEUR FOUCAULT’S COSMIC PENDULUM

Hermetic writings and modern science sometimes offer images that resemble one another, though resemblance is not scientific anticipation.² We have listened to cosmic harmony and considered quantum descriptions, hypothetical strings, dark matter and dark energy, galaxies, and stellar lives. We have also watched the mind seek order in what first appears chaotic. Now our route turns toward fear, dreams, and imagination: the shifting places where thoughts, associations, memories, and images appear and vanish. Their

elusiveness may remind us of popular images of quantum physics, but it does not establish a quantum explanation of the psyche.

We are streams of awareness within a stream of events, living in time as well as space. Heraclitus's river image gives memorable form to the relationship between continuity and change.³ Einstein's relativity, in a different field, replaces a single universal clock with times measured along particular paths through spacetime. Imagine concentric circles representing timescales, from rapid microscopic events to cosmic ages, with human hours and years somewhere between. It is a diagram of scale, not a relativistic mechanism.⁴

Each circle marks a different window through which to watch change.

Within our bodies, molecular processes coexist with heartbeat and breath; beyond them lie planetary and galactic movements. A much more modest and beautiful device demonstrates a rotation we can verify: Foucault's pendulum. In 1851, French physicist Léon Foucault showed how a freely swinging pendulum reveals Earth's rotation through the changing orientation of its swing relative to the ground. Monsieur Foucault will be our symbolic guide. His apparatus does not prove a cosmic rhythm governing culture, but it gives us an image with which to think.⁵⁶