

Carlos Castaneda

Series of books widely available

I first came across Castaneda's books in the 1970s and was immediately hooked, except for the first one in the series, which I have never liked. For me the series starts with *A Separate Reality*. I have gained immeasurably from these books and every time I pick them up I see something new. If I had to say what has benefited me most it would have to be the ideal of the impeccable warrior, not someone who wars against others, but someone who wars against his/her dark side. This idea enchanted me when I was young and I have tried to live by it ever since.

The books of course have been ridiculed and debunked by the mainstream, which is what you would expect. One criticism was that they could not be true because things just don't happen that way in real life. Of course Castaneda will not have written of things exactly as they happened, because that would include the inelegant, boring and repetitive aspects of any sort of training. His style is sparse and elegant and he condenses his material. To me that does not detract from its truth. It is like polishing and cutting a gemstone to reveal its true nature.

When I pick up any of the Castaneda books I am instantly there, in the Sonoran Desert with the sorcerer Juan Matus and his pupil Carlos. Or maybe in a dusty little Mexican town at sunset watching some drama unfold. Very few books can produce this unflinching sense of immediacy in an adult reader, and I think maybe a touch of sorcery may have gone into the writing. Some years ago I was driving in the semi desert hills near Malibu when the person I was with, who was a Mexican Christian, suddenly said that there was witchcraft going on nearby. I too had felt it: it felt exactly the same as the Castaneda books.

I love the freedom, the excitement of the books, which are packed with information. But there are also, in my view, certain things wrong with these sorcery teachings. The Native Americans of North America, I am told, have grave doubts about Castaneda. I mention this because as well as being a Castaneda fan I am a follower of North American native teachings and have the greatest respect for them. The North Americans think Castaneda misrepresented their teachings. I have not heard of any sorcery tradition among the North Americans, and as far as I know their shamans are concerned with the welfare of the tribes rather than the personal development of a few, as is the case with the sorcery teachings of don Juan. I also don't know whether the native teachings are mostly the same in North

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as in Central and South America.

So I can't comment on that, but for me there are two, possibly more things wrong with the books. Firstly, the sorcerers sometimes use force where they could use love. The apprentice sorcerer at some stage is required to capture an ally or allies to work for him. Maybe these allies, which are found in the desert, are some sort of nature spirit. Spirits will cooperate with humans if they are approached with love and respect. The fact that love and respect are not extended to the allies is strange, because elsewhere it is demonstrated that a loving attitude works. For instance, in an early book don Juan tells Castaneda that if he wants information about plants, the plants will tell him what he wants to know if he asks politely. Maybe the allies are demonic rather than natural. In which case, why would you want demons to work for you?

Secondly, it is taught throughout the books that there is no life after death, except for those few sorcerers who manage to reach a very high level of attainment. This is clearly nonsense. The entire human race has life after death whether they want it or not and anyone who looks for it with an open mind will find abundant evidence that death is an illusion. Someone as advanced as Castaneda must have known this, so it is a mystery to me why he disfigured his books with a blatant lie. What did he hope to achieve?

Over the years many different sources have told us that we are living in the end times, and because of this we are facing our last chance, for a while at least. Those who are ready will transcend and go on to a new phase of evolution. The majority who are not ready will have to go through the changes and start again, a few perhaps as survivors on this planet, but most will reincarnate in another place which has been prepared for them. Another view is that they will sleep for a few thousand years while their slate is washed clean and it is time to start again, which could take as long as 250,000 years. Others say that civilisations follow the precession of the equinoxes, a cycle of around 26,000 years, and we are at the end of a cycle. So it could be another 26,000 years before civilisation is back to where it is now - that is, if we want this kind of civilisation again.

The existing arrangements for the afterlife are rarely mentioned in these prophecies. The writer Palden Jenkins once observed that if 6 billion people suddenly left this world and had to be accommodated in the next, the workers on the other side would be overwhelmed and unable to cope with such numbers. It is true that there are spirit helpers in the afterlife who help people and teach them, and in the case of the hell worlds there are prison guards. There would have to be special arrangements for a mass extinction.

Castaneda was writing for people who are capable of transcending the normal human condition and entering other worlds of their choice. In the normal

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course of events he would have kept the sorcery teachings secret and passed them on to his successor in the lineage. But don Juan disbanded the lineage and his group of sorcerers left for other worlds. As heir to don Juan, it was Castaneda's task to pass the teachings on to a wider audience. In other words, the old days are gone and the old ways must adapt to a new scenario. It is yet another sign of massive changes ahead.

It could be that Castaneda wanted to galvanise people into making a quantum leap into spiritual development, by telling them it was the only way to escape death. I personally don't think it was necessary to tell a lie, given that those who don't make it this time will get another chance eventually. Of course, in that case they may never make it, as the tendency is for people to keep doing the same thing.