

1 The Spheres of Influence

In a book called *Flatland*, written by Edwin A. Abbott in 1884, the author describes a 2-dimensional world inhabited by 2-dimensional shapes, such as lines, squares, hexagons. As a teacher of geometry in the 1960's, I was intrigued by this concept, because I thought it showed students how our vision of the world is limited by our experience. If we attempt to see the world as Flatlanders do, to imagine how their philosophy is shaped by their environment, we can see how their vision is limited because we have the advantage of understanding our own 3-dimensional reality.

I think this is a useful exercise of the imagination since it may help us see beyond

our own limitations to the vastness within us and beyond us. I present my version of Flatland here as a help to all who are trying to look beyond the 3-dimensional reality to our spiritual reality.

Flatland is completely flat. It is a cross-section of the 3-dimensional world of spheres and a plane. Its inhabitants, the Flatlanders, believe themselves to be living in the cross-section, unaware that they are really spheres who are unable to see their true shapes. They see only their cross-section within the plane.

In former times they lived happily in the 3-dimensional realm as perfect spheres of light with unlimited ability to love each other in harmony. They were all the same size, living in individualized unity with their Creator. They were exquisite creators themselves, always using their imaginations to create loving manifestations. They loved to create and explore new domains.

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One day some of these spheres started to imagine how they would look to each other if they lived in two dimensions, instead of the usual three. They simply imagined a plane, intersecting with a sphere, like a bas-

ketball intersecting with a wall. They imagined themselves in the plane, looking at spheres as they first touched the plane. When a sphere just barely touched the plane, they imagined that the intersection would be a very small point, but then they supposed that the sphere could pass through the plane, and what they saw as they looked out from "inside" the plane was a point that would grow into a line that would increase or decrease in length, depending on how far the sphere was pushed through the plane. They knew that the line they saw from their vision within the plane was really a circle, when viewed from outside the plane.

The spheres were having a lot of fun because they identified with an imaginary flat creation that they understood better than they would if they actually lived in the plane. In order to more fully identify with this imaginary Flatland, they decided to agree that when they imagined themselves in Flatland, they would not be able to remember the 3-dimensional creation. Thus, they could create a new, interesting dimension to explore, and afterwards come back to the 3-dimensional creation.

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Some of the spheres found their experiences so absorbing creating Flatland that they allowed their minds to stay in Flatland more and more. But one day something dramatic happened in this world of their imagination.

Many spheres were playing together at once. Of course, each sphere was still mostly in the 3-dimensional creation, with only that part of it that intersected the plane actually staying in Flatland. Because so many of them were thoroughly immersed in the game, they reached a sort of "critical mass" of thought. Their collective thoughts in the dream took on so much vitality, that they were transformed into a core of concentrated energy. The force was so concentrated in Flatland that it prevented those spheres outside the game that day from pulling the others out as they had done before. The game had gone too far. A portion of the collective energy of the spheres became trapped in the game.

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Those in the game soon forgot that they were trapped. Oh, they had some vague recollections of something vast beyond their flat world, but eventually only an occasional

Flatlander talked about such ideas. At first they remembered that each was a circle, though from Flatland each circle looked like a line with fading ends as it curved around. They knew also that their circles were of different sizes, as they judged by the varying lengths of the lines. What they failed to remember, of course, was that these differences in size were merely a function of how far their individual spheres had passed into the plane. Failing to realize that size was arbitrary, they imagined that size signified important differences between them.

The Flatlanders continued to experiment with their shapes. They re-formed their circular shapes into squares, triangles, octagons, pentagons, etc. They had not lost their ability to create with their minds, although their new creations were limited to their existence in Flatland. As these revisions began to flourish, fewer and fewer circles were left.

The Flatlanders developed many rules to determine which shapes were most acceptable. They developed senses that could tell whether they were looking at a pentagon or a circle. They could actually see the corners of the pentagon as they looked at it from the

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side. They could not see what a pentagon looked like from the 3-dimensional viewpoint, so they imagined acceptable images. They were resourceful and creative. With practice, they learned to distinguish between all of the myriad shapes they created.

They also established many rules to govern their world. They called these rules the "laws of nature." Those spheres watching the game from outside Flatland knew, of course, that these "laws of nature" were not the true laws of the universe, because the true laws still relied on wholeness and love as the basis for creation. Flatland could have been extended to coincide with the true universe, if the game-players had been able to remember who they were. But since they had agreed not to remember while they played, their True Selves no longer guided them; nor could the other spheres help them keep their world as pure and loving as it originally was at the beginning of the game.

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The few circles left in Flatland seemed to have a deeper wisdom than other shapes. They seemed to be able to cope well with all the problems that developed. They sensed that something existed beyond Flatland which

other shapes could only wonder about. Soon other shapes aspired to become circles, which is, of course, what they had been before they diversified. But by now they had seen themselves as different shapes for so long that they had lost the ability to imagine themselves as circles and then become circles. They could still restore themselves, but most of them had lost faith in that ability. So they made another rule which stated that the offspring of each shape will always have one more side than the parents. Thus, each new generation would look more and more like a circle, and an individual shape could come back to life in the plane again and again, ever-evolving. A shape could even add a side during a generation by being especially helpful to others.

Things did not go well for Flatlanders over the next few thousand years. Despite their aspirations to become perfect circles, they often concentrated on the differences between shapes rather than on an ideal shape. They became fearful as they worried whether, as individuals, they would be "good enough" to evolve into perfect circles. Flatland became a game of comparison and competition, winning and losing. There were wars of all sorts.

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The situation got so bad that some of the spheres who remained outside the game decided to try in a new way to help their fellow spheres come out of the game. They couldn't simply jump into the game and stop it because that would violate the free will of those spheres who were caught in the game. Those in the game may not have believed they had any free will left, since they had developed so many rules, but in fact they were free to change the game any way they wished. They freely created their experiences in the game all the time.

The spheres who were still outside the game had to try to change the game from inside. Only by getting inside the consciousness of the Flatlanders could they hope to uplift that consciousness. Some of them volunteered to enter the game and try to awaken their friends. But of course, these perfect spheres appeared as perfect circles to the Flatlanders when they intersected the plane of Flatland. Because no one had seen many perfect circles in recent years, these new ones were worshipped as gods. These perfect circles could not convince the Flatlanders that everyone had been a perfect circle at the be-

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ginning of the game, and furthermore, that everyone was still a perfect sphere of light. This was just too much for the Flatlanders to grasp. They couldn't accept the idea that each one of them was a perfect circle, and even a perfect sphere too!

Sometimes the spheres who were still free of the game appeared for a few moments to communicate information about the 3-dimensional creation to the Flatlanders. This was miraculous because a perfect circle would suddenly appear out of nowhere, then disappear. This confused and frightened the Flatlanders, even though it was logical to the spheres outside the game. It simply required moving over until one's sphere intersected the plane of Flatland. Whatever the spheres did to try to communicate the truth to the Flatlanders was misinterpreted as coming from a dimension beyond all comprehension. Little progress was made over the years, with only a few Flatlanders ever understanding who they really were. While religions were established with wonderful rules calling for love and obedience and worship, the Flatlanders failed to realize that they were like the gods they were worshipping.

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Love energy from the spheres, and from the universe at large, was always available if the Flatlanders could just focus their minds toward that energy within themselves. Since few were able to do so the spheres decided that something more dramatic was necessary to help the Flatlanders overcome their historically-developed conceptions of reality. It was time to take more drastic action, before the Flatlanders' consciousness separated even more from their roots. It was decided by the spheres, by the Creator, and by the Flatlanders' own individual spheres of which they were unaware, their True Selves, that a plan of action was needed.

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They planned to flood Flatland with so much creative energy that the inhabitants would understand that their own thoughts and words were actually creating their world. This is exactly what happened over the next twenty years. At first, most Flatlanders were not aware that they had more creative energy available to them. After all, most did not realize that they created their own experiences in Flatland, so they could not recognize they could use the new energy. Soon, however, some of them noticed that when

they were angry, a pain immediately developed in their own bodies. Or, if they thought they could never accomplish a certain task, the whole task fell apart before their eyes. On the other hand, if they imagined themselves as perfect and loving, they behaved that way for at least awhile. And if they imagined love bubbling forth from within a colleague who was angry, the anger melted away.

During the next twenty years, as more and more creative energy was sent to Flatland, the inhabitants created new realities within the game as never before imagined. But they had to decide, one by one, whether to use the creative energy to continue the game as usual, or to change it to be more fair and loving to all of life on Flatland, and even to Flatland itself. Those who decided to focus on creating a new game of fairness to all, began to realize that their source of strength and creation came from a magnificent and unlimited place within themselves. As incredible as this seemed to them at first, they began to believe that they were spheres. They began to remember their Truth, and they began to rely more and more on this spiritual

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aspect of themselves for support, rather than on the materiality of Flatland. They began to know the spiritual as the reality beyond the material.

Those who continued to think of the material plane as the only reality, and as their sole basis of security, felt that the rug was being pulled out from under them. There seemed to be more natural disasters, for example, which forced a new appreciation of the fragility of the material world. There were political upheavals as well. In country after country, leaders who acted as dictators lost their authority. Throughout Flatland, citizens were offered more chances to govern themselves. In some countries, the results were harmonious and peaceful. In others, historical rivalries and animosities erupted into violence that tore the countries apart. In every phase of living, citizens of Flatland were again and again presented with more and more dramatic choices—would they choose the harmonious and fair way, or the separating and insensitive way?

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Nothing in the material plane of Flatland remained secure. Many inhabitants were

distressed as their world seemed to fall apart. Many chose to dissolve and come back in another lifetime. The hope of the plan which the spheres had developed was that during this twenty years of increased energy, the Flatlanders would search inside themselves for their True Selves—their whole, perfect, loving, creative spheres of light.

Those who searched inside, while lovingly accepting the help of creative energy, created wonderful new realities in Flatland, despite the confusion others were seeing all around them. Those who consciously looked for support through their True Selves found it. They found the true spheres within themselves, within their fellow Flatlanders, and even within the actual plane of their world—the game board they called “nature.” They also found spiritual support from a host of angelic helpers. They realized that their True Selves, their spheres remaining outside the game, had agreed to this plan for transforming the game by flooding Flatland with creative energy. They knew that no god was causing the disruptions of the material plane. They were not in anguish, rather, they re-

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joiced that so much investment in their future was being made.

By the end of the twenty years, the only shapes left in Flatland were those who knew that they were spheres, and worked from that basis. These remaining millions set about to bring Flatland, and the collective consciousness that resided there, back to oneness with all spheres, and with the universe. That is, they saw that their role was to restore Flatland to the pure manifestation of creative energy that it had been at the start of the game. Over the next several centuries, the Flatlanders created a new existence that approached the loving purity of reality. The collective consciousness of the Flatlanders started to turn into a critical mass of love that reunited their trapped core of consciousness with that of the spheres outside Flatland.

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Finally it happened! In one instant, with an extra burst of loving energy from the Creator of all dimensions, all the Flatlanders remembered that they were spheres, and that Flatland was simply a wonderful manifestation of love. Those who still lived in Flatland, and those who had left during the twenty

years of the "energy boost," remembered their true identity. Because they shared their collective consciousness with each other, even if at a subconscious level, those who had not "seen the light" during the twenty years regained their full memory. No sphere remained stuck in the false Flatland consciousness of separation and limitation. All were released from negativity, and were once again able to lovingly explore and create thought forms such as the original love-filled Flatland. They were able to move in and out of Flatland to create the most loving forms and thoughts imaginable. Flatland once again became heavenly. With joy, all of the spheres resumed their role as creators and expanders of love throughout creation. For what could be more joyous than to be your true Light Sphere, in conscious unity with your Source?