

UPG is Controversial: A Conversation about Books

Many people are wary of UPG

- Reconstructionists and even carriers of living Traditions may feel invalidated by UPG, seeing it as an undermining of their research and time. The books are there so we can cite sources.
- UPG can be used as a device to manipulate people (my gods told me to do x, which means you have to go along with me). Disregarding books can be an excuse to disregard people.
- UPG can be used as an excuse to ignore tradition entirely, or to make claims of special status within a Tradition that one has not earned. Disregarding books means disregarding tradition.

There are reasons to be open to UPG

- UPG and PG in general allows for tradition to change. Some scholars of religion argue that UPG (or, rather, the equivalent terms they use for it) is the basis of all religion. We didn't always have books.
- UPG might happen in order to fill in gaps in a reconstructed Tradition, or in order to address a problem that the established version of a tradition doesn't have a current answer for. Most of us do things that aren't in the books. It's normal and practical.
- Some Traditions, and specific sub-traditions within larger Traditions are dependent upon direct experience. This includes many newer traditions and many indigenous traditions. Some traditions just don't center books.

(These traditions have ways of interpreting UPG that could be learned from)

Notes:



Unverified Personal Gnosis in your personal life and the Pagan ecosystem

-Stefan Sanchez-

Why talk about UPG?

Unverified Personal Gnosis or UPG is, broadly speaking, the a direct experience of some sort of spiritual entity, force, or reality which has no readily identifiable historical source upon which to fact check it. **It's that thing you experienced that isn't in the books.** This concept is both controversial and deeply important to the Contemporary Pagan ecosystem and the overall ecosystem of alternative spiritualities. Further, these concepts may be used to think about how religious and spiritual systems work in general. Along with some definitions, this workshop will attempt to address the following broad overarching points:

- **UPG is controversial in many circles, some people like it, and some people don't. Most people have a take on it (or things that are like it)**
- **There are helpful and unhelpful ways to go about processing information, including UPG**
- **UPG opens up questions about history and practice that can make people uncomfortable, but these questions are important**

Unverified Personal Gnosis (UPG) In-context

Gnosis (γνώσις, *gnosis*) is the common Greek term for 'knowledge' and is seen in Greek-derived terms relating to knowledge such as *diagnosis*, *diagnostic*, *prognosis*, *prognostication*. In the context of occult, New-Age, and Contemporary Pagan traditions it refers to direct spiritual experience or knowledge, usually of a deity, but often of other forces or information as well. For the purposes of this workshop, we will be taking the broader interpretation.

Personal Gnosis is then *gnosis* is a bit redundant because *gnosis* is, historically, definitionally personal, however the vocabulary of personal *gnosis* has become important in conversations of spiritual experience in Contemporary Pagan communities in particular.

Unverified Personal Gnosis (UPG) stands in contrast to **Verified Personal Gnosis (VPG)** and **Shared Personal Gnosis (SPG)** and so it is helpful to understand UPG in relation to these ideas.

For any particular deity or concept:

VPG would be a direct spiritual experience (a vision, dream, trance, etc) where one encounters a deity** and then is later able to fit whatever is learned or experienced into the established body of knowledge in a tradition (folklore, myth etc)

SPG would be a direct spiritual experience where one encounters a deity, and the information or experience gleaned is seen to be experienced by multiple people independently.

UPG would be a direct spiritual experience where one encounters a deity, and the information or experience gleaned is not found anywhere else, or is perhaps meant for the specific person. UPG may be thought of as a form of extraordinary experience, an experience which defies standard schemes of experience.

***substitute here any force or other such thing. This may also applied to experiences of aspects of the cosmos.*

Helpful and Unhelpful Ways to Process UPG

Helpful

- First thing's first, check to see if there is any precedent for such direct experience in the practices you follow. Are there stories of visions, of direct communication with gods? How are those handled? Are there methods in your T/tradition for dealing with such experiences? If not, or even if so, WRITE EVERYTHING DOWN.
- Ask yourself the basics of your UPG? What is your UPG about, and what does that mean for you? Was that UPG for you, and you alone, or is it something you think you should be somewhat open about? How does that information link up with the rest of your practice, or even other T/traditions?
- Ask yourself some harder, but more important questions. What can you *actually do* with your UPG? How does it affect your life, what does it teach you about the world?*** What assumptions are you bringing to your interpretation (humans are flawed, and misinterpret direct speech from each other and their own observations all the time, this isn't different)***

Unhelpful

- Do not assume that there is no more to know because you've had a direct experience or a special feeling or something like that. UPG does not mean complete understanding. Analogy: just because you listened to me tell you about UPG doesn't mean you know everything about UPG. There's always more to learn.
- Do not assume you heard everything correctly. Everyone has biases, and everyone is capable of misinterpreting things. As stated previously, humans are flawed. Work to understand your UPG and do your absolute best to understand what you experienced. You need to study your own experience.
- Do not use UPG or any other form of extraordinary experience as an excuse to act entitled. Direct spiritual experiences are actually quite common, even if people downplay them. Nobody likes a self-appointed chosen one.

***This applies to all practices wherein the sensing of information is involved. Otherworldly communications, divination, extra-sensory/energetic information, "vibes," all of it.

Uncomfortable but important questions of history and practice raised by UPG

- **Where does tradition come from?**
- **Should traditions change and how?**
- **If the gods/spirits/whatever don't talk to anyone, CAN'T talk to anyone, what do we make of stories where they do? What do we make of constant reports that they do throughout history?**
- **If gods/spirits/whatever do and can talk to folks, who do they talk to and why do they talk?**
- **What do we do about non-textual traditions?**
- **Did traditions ever stay static?**
- **How can/should humans interpret UPG?**
- **What can we do to be responsible with UPG, given that it happens (to us, to other people?)**