IMAGINATION IN LIMINALITY

Rite of Passage Transformation through

Myth-ritual, Indigenous Knowledge Systems, and Eidetic Imagery

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**Abstract**

My research explores deep states of imagination in the potent liminality of transformation of the rite of passage process. A synthesis of three theories addresses our modern society's collective imagination problem that creates barriers to change (first order), transformation (second order), and/or transcendence (third order). A compassionate, empathetic womb of support provides a safe container where 1) myth-ritual theory, 2) local indigenous knowledge systems, and 3) eidetic imagery come together in a complementary, flexible application for those impacted by grief, loss, change, and transition. Myth and ritual, which modern culture has in large part separated, come back together in their innate dynamic relationship to support the necessary destruction and creation for transformation. Verb-based language, a relational worldview, and the nonlinear time of indigenous knowledge systems encourage and sustain the flow, flux, and presence of liminal states for those in the midst of difficult transitions. The holographic and fractal qualities of eidetic images provide the ritual action within the liminal state where new edges, resources, and potentials are discovered. The curriculum design provides a three-pronged approach: education and training for professionals, rite of passage work for grievers, and transition support for loved ones during the birth/death processes.

*Keywords: liminal, liminality, transition, rites of passage, myth, ritual, transcendence, change, paradigm, imaginal, imagination, four-fold vision, image, eidetic.*
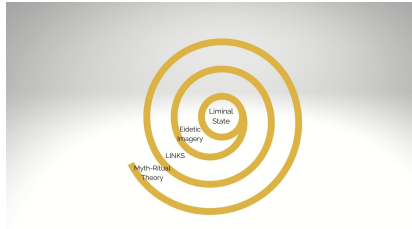
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INTRODUCTION



*The Chaos*

*The rejection starts from Man's historical memory, not from his soul. As the conflict starts, the original Being of peace is separated from the person, and between the person and the Being emerges Chaos. Unless Man re-enters this Chaos through a creative dissolution of historical structures, he cannot make contact with unity again. Unable to reunite with his own self, he remains only half a person in the end. This notion explains all other manifestations in various mythologies around the globe and gives us a safe point of access to initiate them. The place where all these events take place is the Chaos around the Zero Ground, the Emptiness, the Historical Chaos and the Creative Chaos. The last one adds Primordial Heat to the Historical Heat. This place is Heat upon Heat. This place is also Image upon Image. (Ahsen, 1995, n.p.)*

**Personal Investment In Transformative Imaginal States**

My research and investment in imaginal states that occur in liminality are personal and professional in nature. The work I do in the area of grief, loss, change and transition with individuals and organizations is my purpose and passion. My career that began in the homeless youth population has evolved and likely emerged from my early experiences of trauma and lostness.

When I was nearly four years old, living deeply in the imaginal world, and in emulation

of a favorite character from a book, I told my mother, "Today, I am Katy, and I am wearing my

shiny metal roller-skates to the mall." In my mother's version of reality, she was seven months

pregnant and I was Jennifer dressed in a yellow floral print knee-length dress and red

double-buckle t-strap Mary Jane's. However, in my commitment to the imaginal realm of

possibility, I refused to answer her unless she referred to me as Katy, as I skated (in imaginary

skates) around the clothing racks in the department store. Talking intently with friends visible

only to me, I looked up to suddenly realize my mother was gone. Yanked from the joy of

pretending, I was in the frightening in-between darkness of being lost and disconnected without a

resource to find my way.

Memory does not store the in-between. The only recall is the before--by the clothing

rack--and the after--of being found in another area of the mall by a female security officer in a

navy skirt suit who took me to an upstairs office and gave me crayons, paper, and an orange

lollipop. When my mother finally came to collect me, she knelt down before me asking why I

told the woman my name was Katy, the name being called out over the mall intercom along with

the description of my yellow dress and red shoes. These threads of imagination and trauma of

being lost weave through the paradoxes of shadow and light hovering over thresholds that mark

the stories of transitions and transformations in my lifetime.

Life intermittently echoed the early trauma constellation in various contexts of

circumstances and relationships. The original event of being lost became separated from the

associated traumatic feelings out of necessity and practicality. It was only later that the

fragmentation became expressed in the series of gradually escalating symptoms plaguing much

of my adulthood during triggering events. Leaving home for college to move into the dorms at

Louisiana State University was one of these early triggering events. This act of leaving home provoked the onset of mysterious symptoms that took me years to connect to my experience of being lost as a little girl.

The trauma event of being lost has been part of my awareness within the history of my development. It was a family story of me being mischievous while on an outing with my mother. Hidden in the story was a known source of trauma that I finally connected to the symptoms that arose during transitions of leaving home as an adult. Being disconnected from the mythology of moving through the world freely left me in various states of physical and emotional pain. Physically, when I left 'home' it was as if my limbs were being ripped from my body, and I was emotionally shaken to the core, sobbing in waves, like labor pains, beyond my control. When away from home, as the sun set and darkness fell upon the landscape, feelings of being disconnected increased and my body responses intensified over the years until they were unbearable. Other times, feeling lost in the ambiguity of the trauma, the front of my body would go numb, dizziness and nausea followed. Without imagination or possibility, I literally felt as if I wanted to die or might die under the darkness, pain, terror, and discomfort of the disconnection in liminality.

Dying to this wounded experience meant stepping into the liminal territory with the light of my imagination and a circle of support, a womb of presence. With large time gaps in our work together, Dr. Katy Swafford has been my therapist and mentor for the last 25 years. I initially chose her from a long list of names in a phone book in 1993 because of my childhood connection to the name Katy. In the sea of the liminal abyss, the name Katy was perhaps the tiniest fragment to cling to as I tried to stay afloat, to heal. Dr. Swafford has taught me to use my imagination to enter my body for safe passage through the liminal space of transition. With her support and my

imagination, I was able to stand in my own bifurcation of the trauma of being lost while being

held in a womb of supportive companionship. I was able to be there in the darkness of the

liminal space without being re-traumatized and without abandoning my body.

From embodied imagination, using eidetic imagery, I make contact with the mythological

realm, reclaiming internal resources, and healing the gap in my development. Upon entering an

image presented by my therapist, I feel the front of my body go numb, nausea and dizziness

arrive as I step into the disconnection. In co-consciousness with my therapist, I find presence in

my own body, touching the chair where I sit as I enter this liminal space of pure destruction. As

the image continues, my four-year-old self stands in a dark desolate landscape on the side of a

deserted dirt road without a desire to cross over to the empty ice cream shop on the other side. As

my therapist introduces image maneuvers loosening the trauma's hold and directing me to the

periphery, the image spontaneously progresses. Suddenly, my grandfather is holding my right

hand, firmly, gently, as he had so many times throughout my childhood. The landscape shifts

from dark and empty to light and people-filled. We cross the road together, bounding up the steps

and through the door of the buzzing ice cream shop. I stand on a stool so I can peer into the

freezer case filled with colorful treats to pick the one I most desire. As the stool begins to

wobble, my grandfather steadies me by supporting me under my arms. I turn to him, put my feet

on top of his shoes, and we dance side to side making our way across the ice cream parlor, like

we had done often in his house.

Akhter Ahsen, the father of eidetic imagery, describes this kind of imagery as a vivid

hologram of the psyche that is seen in the mind and creates a shift in consciousness (Ahsen,

1977). Eidetic images are experiences that can be accessed over time and offer the seer new

perspectives (Ahsen, 1977). Being in eidetic images moves me both into my consciousness and

sensual body, into the holographic representation of the wound. My body first responds to the developmental gap of the trauma with nausea and dizziness. Then, with co-consciousness and compassionate support, a series of spontaneous images emerges that reconnects me to a precious resource of holding my grandfather's hand and dancing with my feet on top of his. The back and forth and front to back motion of the dance with my grandfather's support instantly relieves me of the dizziness and nausea. Through the ritual act of eidetic practice, I reconnect to this vital but lost mythic resource of dancing with my grandfather as a young child. This dynamic dance both with my grandfather and between image and myth propel me through the liminal state toward healing, releasing me from the symptoms, transforming my story, and providing me more freedom in the world.

While eidetic imagery provided me the ultimate portal to my own transformation, many other threads, including spiritual practices, lived experiences, and intimate relationships, have woven together conspiring on my behalf to help me arrive at this place. Accordingly, because each of us has a unique path toward transformation that is both intentional and spontaneous, I have designed my research to include several theories and applications. My research and synthesis of theories, combined with my personal and professional experiences, form the basis for an educational curriculum with transformational potentials. This curriculum, which is not therapy, is a layered, flexible approach to transformation that has a variety of applications to meet the context of the clients or groups it serves.

**Imaginal States in Liminality**

Liminality paired with the invocation of deep imaginal states provides a unique opportunity for transformation and paradigm shifts. In his seminal work, van Gennep (2019) describes the three parts of transitions that include the phase of separation from the old, a liminal

in-between state, and the incorporation phase (Figure One). This liminal state, a physical or

metaphysical threshold, boundary, herm, portal, or passage in between the separation and

aggregation phases (van Gennep, 2019) is the critical space one must pass through in order to 1)

relinquish the old paradigm that no longer supports well-being and 2) integrate the new vision

for life. My research focuses on imaginal states within the liminal state of transition and the

critical components for transformation. As a subtopic, I have a particular interest in the

transformative role of eidetic images as a specific state of imagination in terms of invoking the

dynamic relationship between myth and ritual, increasing the potency of liminality, and its

connection to indigenous paradigms.



Figure One

Three Parts of Transition

1. Separation Phase

2. Liminal State

3. Integration Phase

Birth
Creation
Death  Paradox
Destruction
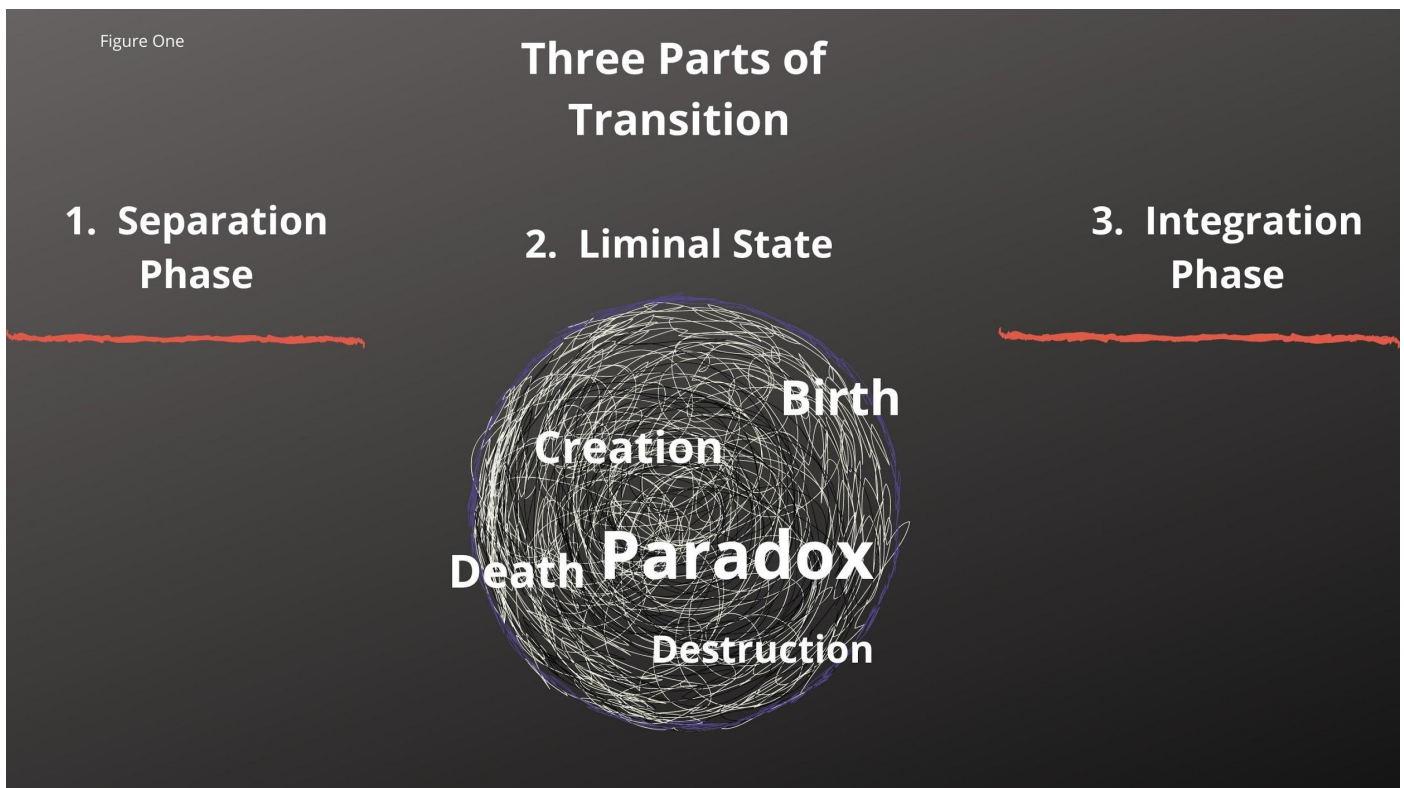
As seen in Figure One, both the separation and integration phases have a ground, pattern,

or quality of stability to them as shown by the red line. The liminal state, in contrast, is

characterized by uncertainty, paradox, and a state or place where disorientation is common. The

image of a dark, womb-like environment may be the best analogy for what a liminal state holds in terms of an experience and its potentiality. However, without empathetic and compassionate support, transitions in the context of our modern paradigm can be terrifying and incomplete, if they are possible at all.

**Key Terminology**

   **Crisis, loss, ordeal.** Rite of passage structures, with their requisite crises and ordeals, are expectations in vision questing and indigenous traditions. These significant, natural, and expected ordeals, either external or developmental, are embraced in order to bring about necessary changes for the individual and community. The ordeal itself offers a transformational opportunity. Crisis and ego-destructuring, both non-ordinary states of consciousness, have the ability to create a profound shift in awareness. Entering liminality through soul-encounter practices induces non-ordinary states of consciousness that often cause one to question their belief systems, creating an altered sense of awareness that opens a new perspective (Plotkin, 2003). These crises tend to intensify the sense of isolation, uncertainty, and disorientation. In a blend of traditions including Mexican, Chicana, and indigenous, *este choque* (life threat or crisis) provides entry into the liminal space for transformation. It is only within this liminality that the initiate experiencing the crisis finds emotional expression and the potential for radical change (Anzaldúa, 2015).

   **Transitions, liminal states, ritual.** The specific meaning of transition and liminal states as used in this discussion includes historical references to the way our individual lives are composed of a series of  transitions, often developmental, in the context of the culture in which one lives (van Gennep, 2019, vii). Transition is the passage through a doorway as we move from the profane into the sacred territory, often associated with rituals, rites of passage, and similar

ceremonies that mark a change in one's development. Van Gennep (2019) specifically delineates the rites of passage, transition, or change as those acts that occur in the threshold state or liminal space that is different from those of the separation and incorporation phases. The presence of both the profane and sacred (secular and spiritual) co-occur in the liminal state during this ritual stage (van Gennep, 2019). Ritual involves an intentional act or action on the part of the initiate in the midst of transformation, a death and rebirth process, offered with the intention of making contact with the divine, spirit realm, or invisible mythological powers. Ritual acts are often a series of actions, incantations, gestures, story, songs, or dance performed in a sacred or designated location (Deflem, 1991).

Within the liminal state of the transformative process, ritual action is the medium for change. Emotional expression provides an opportunity to recover from distress, moving from upset to calm states, and emotional self-management and regulation (Goleman, 2006). Contemplative exercises enhance a participant's agency and introspection for a greater understanding, while also increasing self-knowing, connection, and compassion in relation to the situation. Contemplative practices as ritual acts create a potent, focused experience of new information generating a higher rate of retention and meaning (Barbezat & Bush, 2014). Participants embody the liminal state through ritual actions so that ego can dissolve and new creative ways of being might be discovered (Plotkin, 2003). For Azaldúa, imagination and story are the ritual acts where personal and social identity narratives manifest physically, emotionally and spiritually (Anzaldúa, 2015). In a crisis, a sense of agency and belief in the power to influence and repair a disconnect builds resiliency (Goleman, 2006) and a transformative pathway. The Coyolxauhqui imperative, inspired by the Aztec mythology of the Moon Goddess,

is the drive and challenge to heal and recreate oneself, one's identity, from the scattering traumas

and fragmentations that occur over a lifetime (Anzaldúa, 2015).

Turner (1969), a British anthropologist who drew upon van Gennep's work, further

describes the liminal state as being marginal, ambiguous, between, and betwixt. The liminal

state, derived from the Latin root limen, takes on a modern manifestation as a frontier or entrance

to therapeutic healing when we locate trauma within the liminal state. The ordeal or trauma

invites liminal states "between order and chaos, … a state of extreme openness and

vulnerability…an alluring state, highly charged with transformational opportunities and energy

for re-creation and re-configuration" (Wirtz, 2020, p. 62). Morrison's (2021) research aligns the

phases and states of transition to those exhibited in indigenous people, who purposefully, and

often regularly over a lifetime, separate from their current paradigm and move through an

orchestrated ordeal to enter the liminal space for transformation or transcendence.

**Imagination, image, myth.** For my research, imagination and image have specific

interpretations relative to consciousness states. Vernon (2020) delineates imagination and

imagery referencing the qualities of the visionary poet-artist William Blake whose imagination

entailed "vivid prophetic and visceral…imagery" (Vernon, 2020, p.2).  Hillman (1996) speaks of

imagination in terms of a perceptive eye that can see the whole complex image and its

potentialities at once, proclaiming the utter "Truth of the Imagination" (p. 127). Ahsen (1977),

the father of eidetic imagery, describes imagination as "a psychical visual image of unusual

vividness" (p. 14) that is seen on the screen of the mind and shifts consciousness. Eidetic images

are experiences that can be accessed over time and offer the seer new perspectives, connection,

and resources (Ahsen, 1977). Images are partial or incomplete, but because they are holograms

the whole can be completed from the part. Being in eidetic images moves the seer both into

consciousness and the sensual body, into the holographic representation of the wound or event.

Imagination includes the ambiguous concepts of myth and mythology (storytelling) that are

inextricably entangled with one another. Myth, found in all cultures in the world, provides a

lasting and dynamic story of human trials and tribulations over time that can connect to the

current context of a culture (Gentile, 2011). Imagination in terms of eidetic imagery and

mythology provide a particular portal for deep imaginal states of consciousness.

**Paradigm and transformation.** Vision, paradigm, perspective, schemata, and worldview

are the lenses or constructs we use for interpreting the world around us. These organizing

structures are formed by the shared belief and mutual foundations of society, nature, and the

workings of the world (Meadows, 2008). Within any given paradigm, change occurs when an

ordeal or trauma event exceeds the capacity of our vision for life. The ordeal prompts the rite of

passage; and the level of change or transformation that occurs in the liminal state is related to the

capacity of the initiate's social paradigm. Organizational development research describes several

levels of transitions ranging from first, second, and third order changes (Bartunek & Moch,

1987). First order change (incremental) occurs within a current and shared schemata or

perspective. Second order change (transformative) modifies the perspective or paradigm;

whereas third order change (transcendent) involves altering the capacity of the system itself to

shift its paradigm as challenging events present themselves (Bartunek & Moch, 1987).

First-order, second-order, and third-order change are possible on the macro-level (within

cultures) and micro-level (for individuals).

Change is an inevitable aspect of living, particularly with the current global

circumstances that are rampant with viral pandemics, racial discord, environmental destruction,

economic strife, and political unrest. Yet, many in modern society live in a cycle of first order

incremental change that does not relieve persistent symptoms or provide a new vision for living

to accommodate rapid and often life altering circumstances. First order changes essentially

establish coping mechanisms for a repeated pattern of struggles that may on the surface appear

different in some way; however, structurally they are the same problem. Second and third order

change, are the result of a transformational and transcendent worldview, and are necessary if we

are to overcome what currently feels insurmountable for our planet and species.

This research project identifies some key elements from the change-oriented paradigms of

myth-ritualist theory, indigenous knowledge systems, and eidetic imagery theory. In application

of this research, these synthesized components give shape to an application that expands the field

of consciousness studies and provides another avenue for second and third order change.

**Transformational Leadership**

Transformational leaders, with their unique qualities and various names, usher others

through the liminal state into their next metamorphosis. The term transformational leader refers

to those who lead with vision, inclusion, and equity. Elected officials are not necessarily

transformational leaders. In fact, some of those elected to positions of power fall short of

leadership and have even been quite destructive to the health and wellbeing of those in their care.

In the context of this discussion, transformational leaders or leaders are those risk-takers who

garner support toward the healing and wholeness of all.

The qualitative difference between the general term leader or elected official and a

transformational leader is profound. To expound upon that difference, the following discussion

further illustrates and identifies a transformational leader's qualities and actions.

Transformational leaders are the wanderers, traversing back and forth across borders and

thresholds in order to know the unknowable and find, through a felt sense of resonance, what

may not be tangible (Plotkin, 2003). These leaders or guides experience for themselves the work

that they in turn ask the initiate to do. Wandering is a willingness to explore the edges personally

and then again, alongside initiates. For the *mestizas*, a particular group of guides who live

between the various worlds of multilayered identities within a culture, navigating and negotiating

identity from the margins is a constant state of process. Particularly, in light of the constantly

evolving and conflicting perspectives among gender, race, sexuality, religion, and nationality,

mestizas' identity is in a constant state of flux and emergence (Anzaldúa, 2015). Knowing the

terrain on behalf of the collective, principled risk-takers challenge inequity from a compassionate

heart and foundation of oneness (Sharma, 2017). Artists and activists are guides and mediators

through the liminal in order to ensure safe passage through the difficult path of transformation

(Anzaldúa, 2015). Unifying architects, in their fearless actions, with their reverence for universal

values, and ability to see the beauty of the paradoxes of wholeness, discern what facets of a

system are inequitable and dysfunctional. These transformational leaders identify the barriers

that are often invisible aspects of the system, cultivating an atmosphere and opportunity

creatively to restructure society and its systems based on fairness, compassion, and dignity

(Sharma, 2017).

        **Paradigm shifters.** In certain contexts, paradigm shifts require leaders who generate

enough momentum for a conscious full-spectrum response to the complex problems of inequity.

Leaders engage others to act from the place of universal values and contribute to the paradigm

shift through large and small initiatives repeating patterns of emergent change in the world

(Sharma, 2017). Teachers and guides maintain a discipline of resiliency in their pedagogical

flexibility that supports the context of the specific circumstances and to meet the needs of those

they serve (Barbezat & Bush, 2014). *Nepantleras*, as artists and activists, function from a place

of rupture and disruption to overthrow the old order and allow for new identities and political

movements to form. As the nepantleras push up against and dismantle traditional worldview,

new images and language emerge around identity (Anzaldúa, 2015). Vision quest guides often

engage participants in deep imagery, Jung's active imagination, and pictures from the depths of

consciousness that appear on the screen of the mind (Plotkin, 2003). Imagination as a ritual

action can produce visionary encounters when it works together with the senses to intensify the

experience (Plotkin, 2003). Similarly, an artist is capable of transforming an ordinary object, like

a key, into a symbol representing a culture's false sense of security or power. Art as ritual action

elevates the ordinary or discarded pieces of culture to invoke a new vision. The artist has the

"capacity to see in an object's 'potential transformation' and to infuse it with life"

(Pruska-Oldenhof, 2011, p. 260).

     **Presence and compassion.** Transformational leaders manifest presence and compassion

in many ways to create a womb of support for those in the midst of transformation. Engaging the

healing presence of belonging within the context of significant relationships supports an

individual's healing (Goleman, 2006). In a safe community of support, coming into full

awareness of our fears allows us to notice and attend to our body's signals (fast heart rate, pain in

stomach) instead of suppressing the symptoms and fear. Suppressing our fears limits us, trapping

us, while speaking our fears out loud creates movement and freedom so that we are no longer

isolated and have more agency in our circumstances (Sharma, 2017). Leaders engage in Right

Listening in order to enhance communication, understanding, and dialogue that includes a

variety of practices within the context of paying close attention to the communications from

another such as a) listening without an agenda or "should'ing", b) listening for feelings and as a

caregiver, and c) being curious and asking questions (Barbezat & Bush, 2014). In a quiet state of

compassion and presence, there is space to discover our judgements and needs in order to

express and respond with our feelings and unmet needs (Rosenberg, 2015). This deep,

compassionate listening without analysis or judgment is an evolution of intentional hearing based

in a state of deep presence (Barbezat & Bush, 2014). From this same place of presence, unifying

architects ask subtle, reflective questions in order to shed light on new potentials, aspects, and

edges within confusing circumstances (Sharma, 2017). Using insight dialogue, stemming from

Buddhism, leaders use an interpersonal lens to practice, deep compassion, appreciation, and

empathy with others as a potential means of mitigating personal suffering (Barbezat & Bush,

2014). In the context of intentionally carving out wider circles of belonging, leaders create

environments that cultivate Sarvodaya, a Sanskrit word meaning inclusively to raise up, to lift up

everyone so that all may thrive (Sharma, 2017). Leaders who practice Tonglen, a Tibetan concept

that means "giving and receiving", connect compassionately with the suffering of others in order

to soften all hearts (Barbezat & Bush, 2014). Holding deeply present and compassionate spaces

supports the transformation process.

　　　　**Supporting liminal states.** Leaders encourage participants from the place of soul to

embrace bi-polar or paradoxical states. The liminal, in-between place of transformation is where

the initiate must remain long enough in their struggle to find the creative force against the

paradox of what the world dictates and what is coming into being (Anzaldúa, 2015). This

capacity to live in ambiguity is related to maturity and higher states of consciousness (Plotkin,

2003).  Within the context of a soul or vision quest, awareness of and experiencing one's lament

allows for deep longing to develop. Coming into the state of our lack and longing positions the

initiate to embody and linger in the liminal to receive a vision (Plotkin, 2003). Leaders teach

various meditation or concentration exercises to improve the mind's efficiency, increase

introspection and sensitivity, and make voluntary attentiveness and presence more accessible
(Barbezat & Bush, 2014). Mindfulness practices serve participants in a variety of ways as they
quest for a vision, a shift, a transformation, including quieting the mind in order to receive the
essence of consciousness. These practices open the possibility of experiencing both soul and
spirit beyond the confines of the personality, ego, fears, and desires. (Plotkin, 2003).
Transformational leaders are masters of working within liminal states and recognizing the
various ways to support an embodied presence in this place for those seeking transformation
through crisis.

<div align="center">**Research Approach and Scope**</div>

**Literature**

Based on the literature, several topics emerge as important concepts in terms of
imagination in the liminal state of transition. This project focuses on four major aspects
supporting second and third order change. 1) The potency of the liminal state itself offers a prime
environment of paradox and potentiality where new visions and innovative solutions arise. 2)
Myth-ritualist theory provides a foundation that reunites and engages the dynamic relationship
between myth and ritual in support of transformation. 3) Local Indigenous Knowledge Systems
(LINKS), a designation which encompasses systems that are typically process oriented and
contextually specific, offers a unique, complementary paradigm for modern society to consider
in terms of transformational work. (The term LINKS will be further defined in sections that
follow.) 4) As well, eidetic imagery as a theory, method, and practice provides a direct path for
transformation whereby clients embody imagination and connect with the larger mythology.
These perspectives each exhibit patterns for transformation with shared features and
complementary components that support imaginal states in liminality.

Several commonly sought applications provide healing modalities through grief and loss. Many of these take the shape of traditional therapy, grief support groups, and earth-based vision-questing journeys. Some of these structures for change, while effective, are inaccessible for many people due to cost and time commitments. Therapy can be an expensive endeavor, and does not always provide an end date for the particular issue being addressed. Vision-questing may also come with a hearty price tag and/or extensive travel and time commitments. Support groups may not appeal to those requiring a more individualized, intimate setting. Additionally, support groups and therapy may or may not have a clear beginning and end to their structure. Through this particular research and synthesis, I propose an alternative application that 1) is not therapy, a support group, or vision-questing, 2) engages the myth-ritual dynamic within deep imaginal states of a potent liminality, and 3) is accessible (cost-effective and time-limited) to those seeking transformation through change and loss, particularly those segments of our society who are often underserved.

**Experience**

I have drawn extensively upon my own professional training and experience in the area of grief and loss, indigenous knowledge, and eidetic imagery to extract patterns and practices that relate to this research. I have been working in the area of transitions of one kind or another for the last 30 years, including direct services to homeless youth, single parent families, and families reuniting after interventions for abuse. Specifically, I draw upon my work with clients and professional organizations in the midst of difficult changes to identify how imagination in the liminal states is employed, when it is effective, and when it is not.

Through the Eidetic Institute, where I have been training since 2004, I have often experienced and observed the impact of imagination meeting myth for transformational potential.

Examining coded eidetic images from those who have engaged in eidetic practice as part of their own healing has been insightful as a basis for this specific application of eidetic imagery. Having identified the persistent symptoms and story or mythology of client images and observing the eidetic process makes clear how inviting nature and mythology into the transformational experience deepen the potency of the liminal state while circumventing the developmental triggers for trauma response.

As a certified Grief Recovery Specialist through the Grief Recovery Institute, the benefits of the social-emotional education and experience serves many clients well. The Grief Recovery Institute's curriculum provides a firm foundation for understanding grief and loss as a natural process, particularly in contrast to modern social paradigms. This incremental shifting or first order change curriculum bridges the developmental gaps within modern society by broadening the scope for understanding grief and loss. However, it is also my experience that this highly beneficial educational curriculum is enhanced significantly when ritual acts are incorporated into the process that include components from indigenous knowledge systems, eidetic practice, and the client's own natural inclinations toward specific ritual creative actions.

**Synthesis**

Synthesizing these theories, my application model encourages transformation or second order change through a three-pronged or spiraled approach. 1) Education and training for professionals expands the foundation of support for grief and loss, particularly during a time when we are experiencing enormous upheaval due to viral, economic, and social crises. 2) Rite of Passage work serves individuals seeking to heal through a particularly difficult and painful loss. 3) Transition Support brings ritual action to the loved ones gathered in anticipation of a new

life entering or one coming to an end. This three-pronged model is described in detail in the last

chapter of this paper with additional examples in the appendix section.

**Research Question/Thesis Statement**

My research began with the question: What are the commonalities and complementary

components of myth-ritualist theory, local and indigenous knowledge systems, and eidetic

imagery that support deep imaginal states in a potent liminality in order to promote

transformation and transcendence? The significant, common, and complementary components

include: ritual actions, imagination, storytelling; context-based and relational approaches;

verb-based and present-tense language; non-linear time concepts; deep states of presence;

experiential and process oriented approach; empathy and compassion; co-consciousness

holographic, fractal, and body-centered imagery; and myth-ritual dynamics.

These complementary components provide a flexible method to meet the specific context

of the client's circumstances over a specified period of time. The examples for the unfolding of

this model will focus on the Rite of Passage work that generally lasts for 7-8 weeks and that is

the foundation for the other two tiers of service: education and training; and transition support.

For the duration of the client's work, the container is held and communication is open, meaning

we are in contact via phone, email, or text between regular, weekly in-person sessions. The

model's structure establishes particular rituals marking the separation phase, threshold state, and

integration phase. The fusion of these critical components derived from myth-ritual theory,

LINKS, and eidetic imagery create a supportive, potent liminal space for deep imaginal states

that encourage transformation and transcendent change.

Ultimately, the synthesis of the components from these interrelated theories have resulted

in an application that serves to 1) educate professionals supporting others experiencing loss and

change, 2) provide a rite of passage for those in the midst of difficult losses and transitions, and

3) offer support to the loved ones gathered in the anticipation of the two biggest transitions of

our lives, birth and death. The flexible curriculum and variety of experiential practices serves

those less likely to seek or lack access to traditional therapy, vision quests, or support groups.

The research and my own experience and training support a process that encourages deep

imaginal states in liminality of the transition process, allowing participants to safely step into the

ambiguous, paradoxical womb of transformation. Additionally, the research and model

contribute a practical application to the consciousness field that promotes, encourages, and

supports transformations within a modern paradigm that often inhibits or even prohibits such

change.

<div align="center">**Limitation and Scope of Research**</div>

The limited scope of this research includes other important key terms 1) grief and loss as

a concept and 2) Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (LINKS) or Indigenous Knowledge

Systems (IKS). (The terms LINKS and IKS are used interchangeably in the literature. However,

a preference will be given to LINKS in this paper as a reference for both terms.)

LINKS is more than a way of thinking and believing; it is a way of being, doing, and

referencing the skills and philosophies of communities who for centuries have lived in

relationship with their natural environment (UNESCO, 2020). This knowledge of the landscape

and seasonal patterns over time and experience have developed into a particular community

skill-set, specific to each indigenous culture throughout the world. This term is not meant to

generalize the rites of passage, culture, or perspectives of indigenous communities, but rather to

offer an overarching philosophy to describe a paradigm for living. This indigenous knowing over

time and in tune with the local environment informs decisions and everyday living (UNESCO,

2020). Societies categorized as LINKS communities have a foundation of knowledge that is

integrated into their culture, language, practices, relationships, and rituals (UNESCO, 2020).

LINKS offers a diverse and important lens for expanding the modern understanding of relational

ways of living, developing, and transforming.

       The Grief Recovery Institute (James & Friedman, 2009) expands the concept of grief and

loss beyond death and divorce. Grief is both the "normal and natural reaction to loss of any

kind….[and the] conflicting feelings caused by the end of or change in a familiar pattern of

behavior" (2009, p. 3). James and Friedman (2009) describe over forty types of change and loss

that might result in grief, including job loss, relocating to a new community, career change,

long-term or intense work-related stress, having a new baby or miscarriage, and chronic illness

or major accident. These natural losses, changes, and ruptures incurred over a lifetime are often

dismissed and not valued. Western or modern society often avoids addressing major loss through

transformative processes, and tends to by-pass the painful liminal state of transformation.

Additionally, in the wake of recent losses, we have endured the impact of a global viral

pandemic, economic, political, social divisions, violent racial discord, and attacks by radicalized

fascist. These are personal and cultural losses that manifest on a mass scale impacting our daily

lives, personal relationships, mental and physical health, and belief systems.

       While the scope of this project cannot address all of the massive societal losses, further

research in several areas would certainly shed light upon the penetrating divisions we suffer.

Considerations for further more in-depth research with regard to transformation and paradigm

shifts might include the massive changes that are occurring as a result of the COVID-19

pandemic, climate change, radicalization of far-right political constituencies, and the resurgence

of and related backlash against the civil rights movement that includes LGBTQ, Asian

Americans, and particularly the Black Lives Matter groups. In general, race as a social construct continues to devastate and divide our society. The impact of our historical enslavement of people of color, inhumane treatment of native people, and destruction of the environment continue to be a barrier to our cultural healing. While examples of these major issues will be touched upon in this research, the complex nature and historical implications are beyond the scope of what this project can accomplish. However, these enormously complex symptoms of our structural division (racism, classism, violence) point to a massive cultural disconnection that our current paradigm has not been able to heal or transform.

**Summary**

In summary, the scope for this research is limited to the components that provide a potent and supported liminal state in order that imagination as a ritual act might commingle with myth to reveal new potentials and transformative opportunities. What follows is a description of the imagination problem that modern culture faces and a literature review that informed the basis of this study. Finally, I outline a path to explore the three areas of myth-ritualist theory, LINKS, and eidetic imagery as they converge in the potent liminal state of change.

CHAPTER ONE
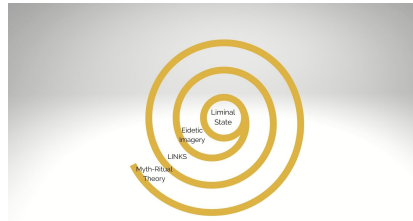


**An Imagination Problem in the Midst of Massive Loss, Masses Lost**

The massive loss and masses lost in the liminal state of current times are impacting our entire planet and species with regard to our ecological, political, social, and economic systems. As a modern culture suffering grief and loss on a mass scale, our ability to tolerate change and remain in uncomfortable states is limited by our worldview. Contemporary culture often disables the transformational process, and instead encourages and provides many opportunities for numbing, shaming, blaming, and other coping mechanisms to maintain the status quo. We ignore our growing pains that are beckoning us forward at the expense of our ultimate potential, divine purpose, and transcendent nature (Hillman, 1996). We are currently stuck in our development in a form and capacity that does not fit or serve during a time when so many crisis opportunities push us to transform.

For generations throughout the world, in indigenous communities where rites of passage are intact, community members have provided safe passage through the difficult liminal territory of transition as a normal part of life (Turner 1969). With modern culture's disconnection from our ancestral ways, traditional rituals, and community support, we are more inclined to by-pass the disconcerting between and betwixt places. Contemporary society flounders and fails to successfully incorporate change into our way of life as part of our expectation. This failure shows up as various symptoms including mental imbalance, chronic illness, relationship

fractures, substance abuse, economic disparity, racial divisions, ecological destruction, and political chasms (Meade, 2019).

**Collective Cultural Crisis**

Crisis is derived from the Latin version of the Greek word *krisis,* which means turning point, critical moment or decision. However, its Western connotation aligns with a weakness or failure to overcome external forces (Moura et. al., 2020). In modern culture, crisis is not seen as an opportunity, but a personal failing. Viewing crisis as a sign of weakness within the system generates a barrier toward change and perpetuates resistance to transformation. It has become a cultural norm to resist crisis as opposed to welcoming its transformative power.

Meade (2019) suggests that, as a culture suffering mass loss, modern society has already separated from the old worldview or paradigm. In our separateness from the predominant paradigm, we embark on uncharted waters of ecological and cultural crises. Our collective response to being thrust into this liminal state is messy and fitful as we sit in the destruction and chaos of our own making. Meade (2019) describes a path of transcendence to reconnect both with the ways of our ancestors and to our place within the natural world. Referencing the rite of passage trajectory, Meade addresses his view on a way to move through the current collective crises: 1) separation from the predominant worldview, 2) movement through the liminal space, and 3) transformative return or arrival with a new understanding of self and nature (2019). Letting go of one paradigm without yet knowing the bounds of our new worldview, modern culture struggles in this place of between, without firm ground or clear path forward. As a society, we do not have the collective imagination yet (or the compassionate womb of support) to necessarily see a way out of this dark liminal state.

**Capacity to sacrifice.** As a modern culture, we are no longer standing on firm ground. As a society, we quake in our foundation of norms, beliefs, and ritual putting our legitimacy on the line (Omar, 2005). We have not yet as a collective faced our cultural traumas (Omar, 2005), although evidence of those ordeals are palpable in the symptoms of racial, political, and economic divisions that have become even more starkly apparent in the midst of a viral pandemic. While Meade (2019) suggests we are in a collective liminal state, Omar (2005) challenges the depth of our commitment in that potent place for change and wonders if we are even fully in that liminal state. He questions our willingness and capacity to sacrifice our old worldview, potentially surrendering our privileges and perceived power, for the possibility of knowing our true interconnectivity with each other and the natural world (Omar, 2005).

**COVID-19 crisis.** The novel COVID-19 virus initiated a worldwide pandemic of unprecedented uncertainty prompting individuals and institutions to reorganize. Moura et. al.(2020) describe how the social, educational, and economic systems were immediately impacted, disrupting the systems of daily routines and interactions. For some, new life structures such as working from home have become the new normal. For others, who were already experiencing stressors, the pandemic exacerbated the crisis and escalated issues related to mental health, economic stress, or domestic violence (Moura et. al., 2020).

Human development and transformation occur in the context of social relationships, and the meaning-making is directly linked to the agency and actions of thinking, behaving, dreaming, imagining, and experiencing the world. The pandemic has created a new framework for meaning-making as new rituals for living in this uncertain time emerged. The pandemic sparked a series of ruptures or losses to daily life impacting family, social, educational, systems on every level. The simple routines of life came to a screeching halt in many cases. In terms of its

transformative qualities, the COVID-19 pandemic has been an historical and non-normative

event disrupting even the expected, developmental life transitions such as birth, graduation,

marriage, aging, death, and other predictable changes over a lifetime. This kind of massive,

disruptive, unpredictable loss has generated inappropriate and maladaptive strategies (substance

use, denial of the virus's risks, increased aggressions). As well, social isolation took a toll on

support networks particularly for those already marginalized (Moura et. al., 2020). So, while

some transformations have occurred, in many ways the crisis of the pandemic has exposed issues

of resisting other transformative opportunities.

**Facing our transgressions.** We can no longer deny the ways we have harmed indigenous

people and the landscapes that hold us. Modern culture, particularly American culture, has

displaced native peoples, isolating them on reservations so we can take from the land without

reciprocating. Znamenski's (2007) research speaks to this trauma of indigenous people

documenting that when disconnected from their native lands they suffered emotional, psychic,

and physical symptoms that sometimes could not be alleviated. Additionally, our American

history of enslaving and disenfranchising people of color contributes to our collective societal

traumas. As modern people, until we face these collective traumas that we have pushed into the

margins and outside of the central focus of our convenient worldview, we will remain in the

abyss, and continue to contend with the chaos and destruction of the liminal state.

**Separate from nature.** Seeing ourselves as separate from the web of life puts

contemporary people at odds with the problems we face. We cannot be true agents of change if

we see the plethora of crises, particularly the ecological crisis, as separate from ourselves. This

chasm allows us to turn our backs on nature, cutting us off from the enormous benefit of being

more intimate in our relationship with the natural world. Meade (2018) describes how the

build-up of issues like global warming is creating a collective trauma and existential crisis of

worldwide proportion. Meade (2018) describes the threats (including rampant materialism and

substance abuse) that we must respond to because they affect both nature and culture. The threat

of rapid change creates collective disorientation and dissolution (Meade, 2018) within the

cultural liminal state. This dissociation permits us to continue to destroy ecosystems,

contaminate waterways, and annihilate forests. While destruction is part of the liminal state, at

some point we must invoke imagination in order to create a new way of being.

**Imagination Problem**

Modern culture prefers certainty and does not like to be uncomfortable. Our modern

paradigm does not accommodate or tolerate discomfort and uncertainty to allow for sustained

immersion in paradox where new potentials may emerge. We dip our toe in the waters of the

liminal destruction, and externalize the cause of the pain from a predominantly dualistic and

binary perspective. In this way, we by-pass the liminal state never truly arriving in a new place.

We blame and shame to avoid the discombobulating and disorienting liminal, chaotic, and

paradoxical territory. We often do not have sufficient capacity or support to tolerate discomfort

and remain in the destruction of the liminal state long enough to also invoke imagination, meet

myth, and behold creation (Figure Two).

Figure Two
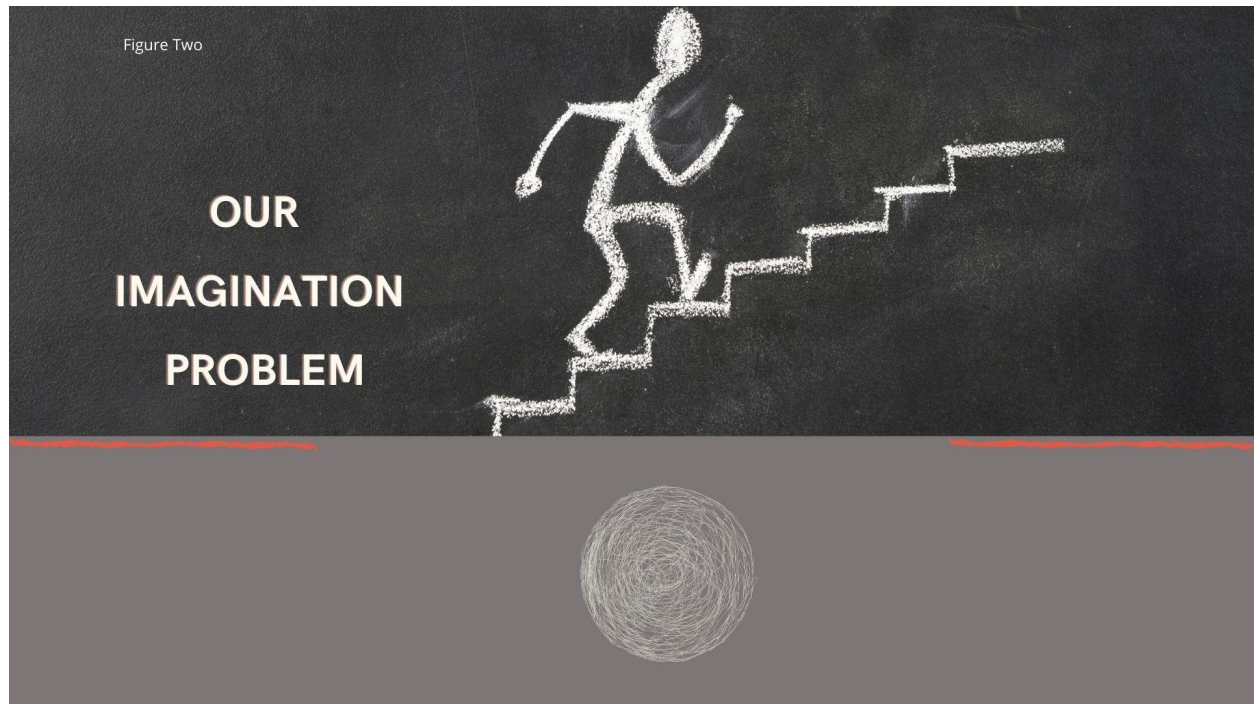
We begin to enter change not fully conscious of the map or process, and, in our

independence, jump into the abyss without compassionate support. We hold destruction only

long enough to quickly implement incremental, first order change and relieve the immediate

symptoms of the current crisis. In the predominant cultural paradigm, our limited imaginal states

result most frequently in first order changes that maintain the status quo, leaving us in a

recycling of pain and disruption without transforming or finding a new position on the spiral. We

leave the liminal space before myth arrives, and we miss our chance to mingle in the depths of

deep imaginal states. Myth and imagination reside in liminality, and together, their dynamic

relationship allows for transformational (second order) and transcendent (third order) change.

Ultimately, as a culture, we have an imagination problem barring us from societal

transformations.

If Meade is correct, and we are already unknowingly in the great abyss, our penchant for

nihilism may be at the root of our imagination problem. Looking for answers with a prolific

aversion to uncertainty, it is understandable that conspiracy theories would surface with a

vengeance with regard to the current viral pandemic, mainstream media, and political structures

in the United States. Perhaps the imagination problem is embedded in our paradigm that seems to

drown us in fear and false foundations. Incremental change of the first order will not shift the

paradigm or the symptoms we continue to experience.

## Literature Review

### Rites of Passage

In order to speak to liminal states and the role of imagination in terms of generating

paradigm shifts that embrace change, it is important to first put liminal states, which are often

hidden from our modern view, into context. Early research circa 1906 revealed a classically

structural perspective on ritual and rites of passage that allowed for individuals to shift from one

role in society to another, maintaining stability of social systems (van Gennep, 2019). Studies of

the fluctuating daily life in African societies from the 1960s through 1980s expanded the

understanding and implications of ritual theory (Turner, 1969).

An anti-structure theory emerged from Turner's research that showed how rites of

passage offered agency toward social change (Turner, 1969). While both van Gennep and Turner

saw that the rituals occur in the temporary place of liminality, Turner claimed that rituals, which

inherently require entry into the liminal state where new possibilities exists, are actually

contradictory to the status quo. Liminal experiences of these possibilities allow ritual participants

to experience and experiment with alternatives or entirely new identities (Turner, 1969). Ritual

also seems to cut through social constructs, allowing for the community support of these rites,

often requiring members to take on unlikely roles. Additionally, the ritual ultimately benefits and

changes the community based on the initiate's new vision (Turner, 1969). Turner's expansion of

van Gennep's original theory offers potential applications for social change in terms of what liminal states offer both to the initiate and her supporters or community, including a momentum for change.

Bell (1992) further expands the theory, putting forth a new framework for ritual theory that has impact across disciplines. Her research focuses on the "social act" itself in terms of ritual and rites of passage. Ritual as strategy is embedded in daily human doings; and from this perspective, it offers a restructuring of our agency or power structures of the world (Bell, 1992).

The ritual act is elemental to our society's structures and capacity for imagining something new. Similar to Turner's perspective, Rao (2006) describes ritual in its function as a reorganizing tool for social systems. She offers insights of several approaches in terms of their contributions to the larger conversation and social relevance (Rao, 2006). In the argument that rituals are embedded in society, Rao (2006) explores the social dynamics during and through ritual, as well as the impact outside of the ritual experience. From an anti-structural perspective and with globalization in mind, she also looks at the impact of rituals in terms of their influence on the imagination of the community. Her research is centered on the dynamic relationship of ritual within community (Rao, 2006).

Ritual theory provides many avenues for application of this important model for change on both personal and cultural levels. Specifically, van Gennep provides an important container for viewing transformation, while Bell's perspective sees potential agency for change in daily activities, and Turner's research shines some light upon the gap between indigenous and modern paradigms. Likely, had we maintained a worldview more integrated with the natural world, where communities draw upon the wisdom of other non-human beings and the surrounding landscape this discussion would not be necessary. The modern worldview, in all its immediate

gratifications and inclination to maintain the status quo, perches itself precariously across a great

chasm from the more change-oriented perspectives of many of the indigenous cultures who live

more in balance with their particular environment.

This is not to say that Western culture has not changed in many ways over the last

hundred years. However, those changes are for the most part based on a particular trajectory

toward the modern concept of "progress" meaning more possessions and power. The underlying

paradigm that supports the trajectory of progress is to maintain the status quo, which in large part

also maintains that some have most of the power while others are pushed to the margins. This

marginalization is necessary in order to maintain the status quo even as the crisis opportunity of

the civil rights movement continues to push back. Additionally, on the surface, many indigenous

cultures appear to have remained unchanged over thousands of years, evidenced by their

traditional language, dress, food, and ceremony. However, in order to maintain the foundations of

their culture, indigenous people have had to transform with the native lands or on the

reservations where they have been relocated. Indigenous cultures have continued to draw upon

their cosmologies and rituals to transition and transcend what modern culture has imposed. The

idea that a change-oriented culture may look very much the same on the surface as it did

hundreds of years before requires that we look beneath the surface. It is nothing short of

astonishing that indigenous cultures like the Mi'kmaq have been able to maintain their native

language, land, and culture despite the tremendous efforts of early Europeans and modern

culture.

**Qualities of Liminality, Paradox, and Communitas**

The qualities of the liminal state are important to note in that it is not a phase with a

particular foundation or secure paradigm. As shown in Figure One, both the separation and

integration phases have a red line showing a definite ground or foundation. The liminal state is without a firm place to stand, and is disorienting and fluid, much like an embryo in the womb's amniotic fluid. Noting the qualities of the liminal allows us to recognize both the difficulty and viability for transformation that are most possible in this particular, open, ambiguous state of being. To further this point of ripeness for change in liminal states, Turner (1969) describes the impact of imagination on cultural systems through the change mechanisms of rites of passage, concluding that the liminal space of ritual is where change emerges. The presence of paradox, the coexistence of opposites, is the nature of liminality (Turner, 1969). Because of this paradoxical quality in liminality, dualism dissolves, releasing us from linear, rational thinking in order that we might hold both destruction and creation together, signifying a moment of potential rebirth.

The liminal state is zero ground, a place where all possibilities are present. Support systems provide a safe womb-like crucible during this liminal state that is often dark, ambiguous, and frightening for the initiate or client. Research of the Ndembu, a central African tribal community, showed that a companion, witness, or support system was present during ritual providing important support during the marginal states (Turner, 1969). This support system was called the "communitas" meaning a social togetherness and equality among all. It is in the liminal phase, when the initiate is required to surrender her secular structures and own desires even at the expense of the community (Turner, 1969), that the support mechanisms can be most critical for the transformation.

**Orders of Change**

The dynamic between ritual and imagination, and its potential for transformation can be understood within the schemata of systemic change (Bartunek and Moch, 1987). Organizations and systems move through various levels of development and change. First order changes occur

in small shifts within the capacity of the status quo. Second tier changes become possible when

the organizing system or schema modifies in some way to accommodate an event that was

previously insurmountable, thereby changing the formation of the predominant power structure

(Bartunek & Moch, 1987). Third order changes involve a new capacity emerging within the

system itself to change the schema to meet the occurring events (Bartunek & Moch, 1987). Third

order change is transcendent, and moves in sync with other systems. Furthermore, in terms of

ritual and imagination, it is important to consider the various applications that instigate first,

second, and third order change.

**Imagination, Myth, and Story**

    **Imagination and myth.** The role of imagination in this liminal state is a powerful

vehicle that ushers us toward transformation. Wirtz (2020), drawing upon Jungian training,

describes transformation as a result of our individuation process that can transcend dualism of

the mind-body relationship. Meade (2012) describes imagination as a creative act of bringing the

invisible into being, pointing out the quantum shift that occurs between the implicate and the

explicate, two opposites in one moment. Imagination was the spark that originated our very

existence, bringing us from chaos and destruction into order and creation (Meade, 2012).

    Ahsen (1977) invokes this kind of mythological, embodied imagination in the eidetic

image. In this way, using imagination in the form of an eidetic image, the seer exists in the

liminal state inside her own imagination. Here, imagination and images are a spontaneous,

holographic, and somatic experience (Ahsen, 1977). Ahsen considers imagination to have

"unitary, original, and first manifestation" (1977, p. 29), qualities that are inherent in all human

beings.

**William Blake's four-fold vision.** Specifically engaging imagination as an application, we can look to William Blake's four-fold vision. In relation to the lens of imagination for building creative solutions to complex modern problems, Vernon (2020) unfolds the potential of poet-artist William Blake's four-fold vision from its historical roots to its modern applications. Blake's four-fold vision is a nested layering of various states of imagination (Vernon, 2020). Being able to identify the state of imagination one is in at a particular moment creates a portal for engagement and empathy to meet the situation at hand (Vernon, 2020). Blake identifies four states of imagination which are described both in their service and shadow: Ulro, Generation, Beulah, and Eden or Eternity (Vernon, 2020). Using Blake's visual art and poetry, Vernon explores how the depth of imagination manifests in behavior or action. Ulro is the most elementary imaginative state, single vision, and generally speaking, offers us fight or flight responses. Generation is a two-fold vision, with a focus on reproduction. Beulah, the third state of imagination, has an awareness of relationship (I-Thou), ethics, and morality. Eden offers the full four-fold imaginative perspective, as it contains the intelligence and expanse of all the other states. Eden is a state where time and space are boundless, and all interconnection is experienced and known.

Elevating Blake's imaginal states as a structure, O'Gorman (2020) shares his process of using Blake's four-fold vision to organize a particular project and problem solve. As an organizing system, O'Gorman (2020) uses Blake's images as a lens or schema to map a project and identify patterns. The deepening states of imagination relate to first order, second order, and third order changes.

In terms of psychology, particularly within family systems theory, Palmer (2014) explores the applications of Blake's four-fold vision in Gregory Bateson's work with his patients.

Palmer (2014) emphasizes Blake's influential mysticism on Bateson's integrative style and ability to see through the lenses of four-fold vision when working with clients. Bateson was able to be both subjective, personal, and vulnerable with his patients and still observe patterns in their behavior (Palmer, 2014).

      **Mythic lens.** Aligning imagination with the myths that meet our fragile ego in the disorienting liminal state is a powerful tool when faced with the terror of apocalyptic events (Meade, 2012). However, it is when humanity's imagination becomes diminished that conflict turns to chaos, and the state of overwhelm occurs. The powerlessness sends many of those living in the modern paradigm into hiding, or toward numbing, medicating, or other destructive behaviors. Yet, we possess innate creative instincts to make visible the invisible images of our mind, as we manifest change. From the mythic perspective, imagination was the spark that originated our very existence, bringing us from chaos and destruction into order and creation (Meade, 2012). When we invoke myth, we are in essence repeating the original creative process that began life on this planet. Meade (2012) explores various mythological beings and tales from various traditions to offer understanding and perhaps a way forward in these dark times. Ancient, mythological stories have applications in modern times to address our fear, frustration, and doom so we might find our way even in overwhelmingly difficult times.

      Encountering a mythic moment often feels timeless and dreamlike. Iyer, journalist and writer, in conversation with Tippett, expresses his experience of mystical knowing in the liminal spaces where myth and ritual mingle as

> what stands out of time and beyond circumstance. Read a 13th-century Zen
>
> discourse, pick up St. John of the cross, and listen to the latest Leonard Cohen
>
> album, and you are instantly in the same place. [It is] the unchanging backbeat

and backstage truth that stands behind all the changing surfaces and shifts in the

world. (Tippett & Iyer, 2015, n.p.)

We have, in large part, lost our connection to or ability to listen and respond to this "unchanging

backbeat" that has the potential to create a common cultural ground. Without being grounded in

the backbeat of mythology, the timeless tales that encapsulate humanity, our rituals become

habits without meaning. Finding ourselves in connection with the stories of our cosmology is an

opportunity to turn a crisis into a transformative moment through ritual engagement.

   **Storytelling.** Storytelling is a ritual act; and imagination draws on myth as either an

active or latent part of our psyche. In liminal states, ethos makes contact with muthos, and the

story manifests through our being. Aligned with myth-ritualist theory, ritual, in its mythological

and storytelling acts, offers a way for our ego to relate to the transcendent realm of our spiritual

nature (O'Kane, 1994). Engaging imagination through storytelling creates a bridge between the

sacred and profane (O'Kane, 1994) as imagination emerges as the vehicle navigating through the

chaos of the liminal. Story provides movement within the liminal state, offering ways to remain

in the discomfort long enough to move from destruction into creative resources.

   **Dreams.** As instinctive expressions, dreams are the body's most practical way of

bringing something important to the attention of the mind (Jung & Sabini, 2016). The liminal

state of dreaming allows what is in the margins to appear often metaphorically on the screen of

the mind. Dreams and the unconscious are compensatory, filling in the gaps of what we hold

outside the central focus of awareness (Jung & Sabini, 2016). Even the shadow aspects of

personality experienced indirectly, projected upon others, or in dream figures have

transformative potentials (Stein, 1998). The foundational psychic energy and patterning of the

archetype are the primary sources for the creation not only of personality but of civilization

(Stein, 1998). Historical structures of mythology, religion, and culture, while perhaps outside of our conscious minds, are bound up in the mind-body and instinct of all human beings. It is only through the process of individuation, a conscious engagement of the paradoxes of being, that the unique aspects of any person become conscious (Stein, 1998). Jung's active imagination and amplification processes provide a deeper way to explore dream images from the collective culture, religions, history, and mythology that seep into our unconscious (Stein, 1998). Dreams are a precious portal into the liminal to discover and unfold our individual and collective selves.

**Mythological Leadership: Hermes the Spiral**

Wirtz (2020) sees the role of imagination, manifesting as mythology and storytelling, in this liminal state as a powerful force ushering us toward transformation. The liminal and paradoxical entanglements of mythology and story are evident in the Greek God Hermes who is associated with this marginal space of liminality, with his shape-shifting ability, and who represents both holding and permeating boundaries through light and dark realms (Wirtz, 2020). Myth provides fertile ground for healing trauma and building resilience.

Hermes, inventor of the lyre, is like the artist who often expresses cultural shifts and changes before they are evident or in the awareness of the mainstream (Pruska-Oldenhof, 2011). Hermes is the personification of spiral motion. As the messenger and trickster, he shows up to move us along the spiral, to "overthrow the 'old order'" (Taylor, 1998, p. 151). In his infinite agility, he traverses easily back and forth and between worlds, crosses boundaries and, at times paradoxically, holds them firmly (Taylor, 1998).

Hermes, in his psychic movement, prompts us toward buoyancy, light-footed flow, and imaginative transformation, keeping us from stagnation (López-Pedraza, 2010). He is the "connection-maker, the god of commerce, messenger of the gods, lord of the roads"

(López-Pedraza, 2010, p. 17), revealing our instincts, and inspiring the mischievous trickster and imaginative, inventive artist in us. As the god of the borderlands, he is both protector and provoker moving effortlessly between realms (López-Pedraza, 2010). Often relying on his luck, Hermes' ability to stand in the paradox, befriend all beings—god and human alike—connect others with resources, and guide them on the difficult road to the next realm puts him in the ideal position to live in the margins without a need to claim a center or power status (López-Pedraza, 2010). Hermes, whose essence is the spiral, reminds us of the opposing paradoxical forces of life and death and the unending movement between the two (Pruska-Oldenhof, 2011) in the way we are always beginning and ending.

## Spiraling Path Model

The flow for this paper beginning with Chapter Two is arranged in a Spiraling Path model (Figure Three). The model includes three main theories: myth-ritual theory, local and indigenous knowledge systems, and eidetic imagery. Each theory is part of an encompassing spiral that flows from one theory to the next without firm thresholds between them, illustrating the blurry, merging, complementary perspectives within the three main theories being discussed. Moving along the spiral path from the outermost circle toward the center, the critical components, or what I call in this paper Golden Threads, are the elements that support deep imaginal states in the liminal space of transition. Golden Threads are identified and clarified in the chapter summaries. The synthesis of these Golden Threads comes together to create a unique application for transformation in the final chapter. Additionally, I have chosen to arrange these theories in a particular order that provides the most flow. Certainly, re-ordering these theories is another possible path toward similar or even different conclusions. However, for this project, I have chosen to move through the spiral path in the model shown in Figure Three.

Figure Three

**Spiraling Path Model: Imagination in Liminality**

Liminal
State

Eidetic
Imagery

LINKS
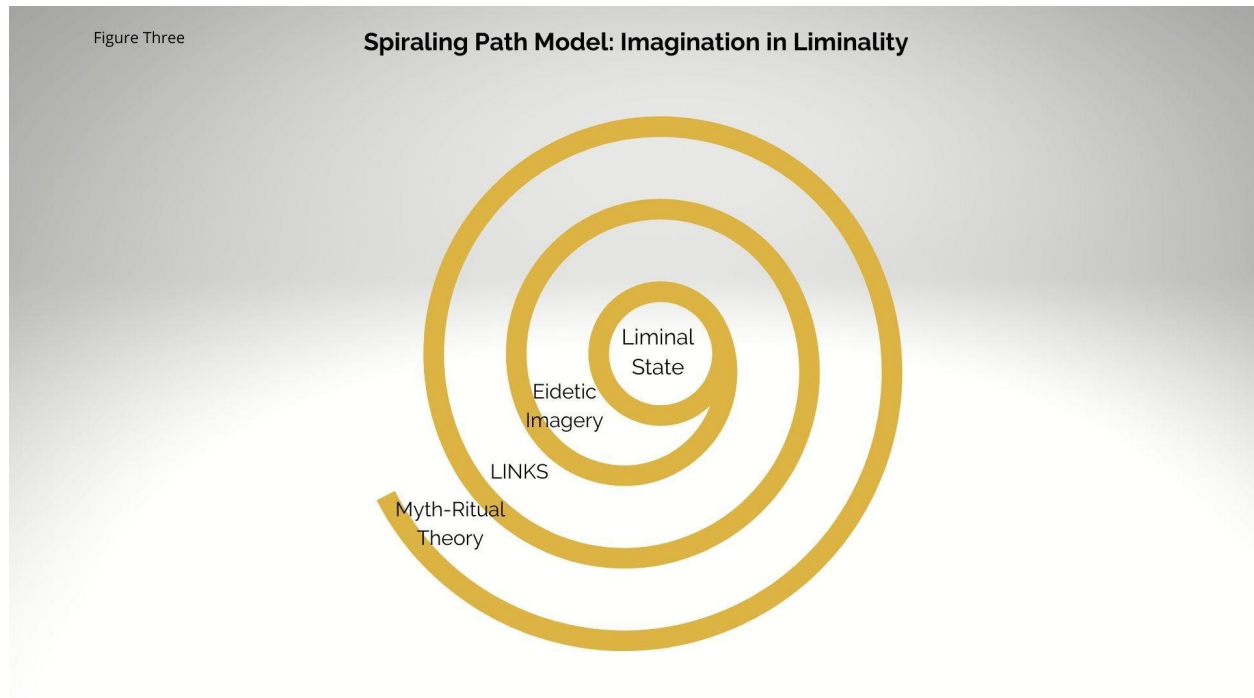
Myth-Ritual
Theory

## Myth-ritual Theory

The outermost and largest circle of the spiral path represents myth-ritual theory.

Myth-ritual theory forms the open ended container for all other unfolding aspects of this

particular research project. In its essence, this container serves several functions for establishing

a framework and scope for this work. 1) Myth-ritual theory includes all the other theories

designated by the smaller circles of the spiral, and is part of the whole picture. It is part and

whole, simultaneously, with Golden Threads of myth and ritual surfacing and connecting

throughout the discussion of the other encompassed topics. 2) The container formed by

myth-ritual theory also excludes several related and other important aspects of imaginal states

within the liminal space of transformation. While some of those theories and approaches may be

mentioned, it is not possible to note or know all theories that might apply to the topic of this

research. In this way, the outer spiral circle of myth-ritual theory serves as a boundary

designating the specific focus of this paper with the understanding that there are many other

possible avenues to potentially achieve the same or quite different outcomes that address the

research question. 3) The opening of the outermost spiral also reveals how the synthesis of these

theories might connect into the larger territory of consciousness studies. The spiral system is not

closed, and is only a particular chosen path among many possible pathways toward the same

center.

**LINKS**

Myth-ritualist theory merges fairly seamlessly into local and indigenous knowledge

systems (LINKS) which is explored in terms of its paradigm, science, and cosmology. A general

overview of the major aspects of LINKS along with specific examples from various indigenous

communities illuminate the Golden Threads most relevant to the application model. The

Mi'kmaq, an ancestral lineage within my own family line, is explored more extensively in terms

of its specific values, worldview, language, and stories.

**Eidetic Imagery**

Eidetics, the third curve of the path nearest the center of the spiral, offers theory,

methods, and concrete practices of imagination as a means toward transformation. This chapter



Figure Four

Local Indigenous Knowledge Systems

Eidetic Imagery

Myth-ritualist Theory
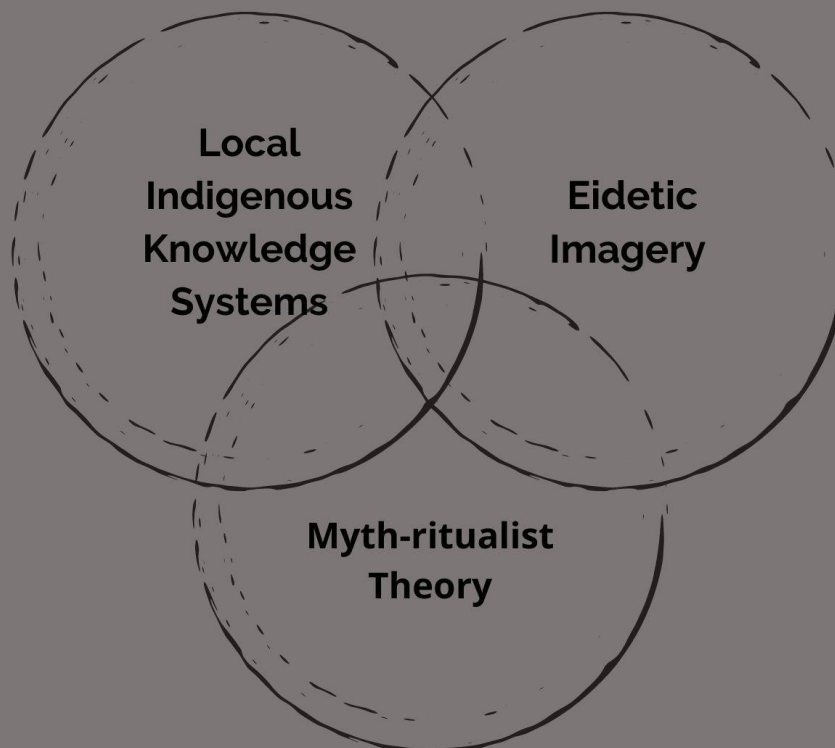
unfolds eidetic imagery's contributions toward deep imaginal states in the liminal state of

transition. Eidetic imagery is a foundational practice in the application of the synthesized model.

**Liminal State**

The center of the spiral represents the potent liminal state where the Golden Threads

woven from the three theoretical approaches come together in a unique manner (Figure Four) to

create an original contribution to the consciousness community.

CHAPTER TWO
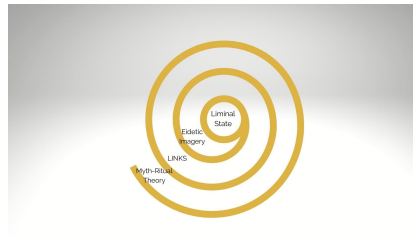


**Dynamic Myth-ritualist Theory**

**Framing Imagination in Liminality**

The foundational framework for this course of study is myth and ritual theory as a single

concept. Myth and ritual cannot operate independently, and cannot effectively exist in isolation

from one another. Although, a more moderate version of the theory allows for ritual and myth to

either emerge separately and then come together or originate together and then separate (Segal,

1997). In terms of the ritual act that is most potent during this liminal state of transition, the

implications of myth-ritualist theory provide a dynamic lens to better understand the interplay

between ritual acts and mythic imagination as a means of evolving change within the liminal

state. Segal (1997), in a broad overview of myth-ritualist theory, tracks both its historical

development and the theoretical variations. There is an inextricably intimate and profound

relationship between ritual and myth, practice and meaning, from the standpoint of the major

theorists since the late 1800s. Segal (1997) provides a multifaceted perspective of the dynamic

relationship between ritual and mythology. He offers a deeper, interdisciplinary retrospective of

myth-ritualist theory highlighting both the contrasting theories and their applications (Segal,

1998). Noting evidence of the theory in literature, beginning with Greek mythology,

myth-ritualist theory appears throughout literary works over time from its ancient origins through

modern applications (Segal, 1998). Considering the myth and ritual connection as a basic,

foundational element to all human cultures, the theory's discussion of the split between myth and

ritual suggests significant consequences for modern culture (Segal, 1998).

Segal (1997) draws on several early theorists in his exploration of the theory as a whole,

beginning with William Robertson Smith's seminal myth-ritualist research that puts practice

ahead of belief in religious ritual. It is the practice, the ritual act, that reveals the belief or myth.

Myth-ritualist theory holds that meaning is a secondary consequence of the practice. The

practice, above all else, is clear and structured. The meaning that may arrive based on the ritual

practice is fluid, changing, and emerging. Rites are associated with particular myths that have an

evolutionary capacity. Within the theory itself, there are leanings more toward myth or ritual

depending on the theorist's perspective (Segal, 1997). The intimate connection between the ritual

practice and mythological story serves as a foundational structure of this research and model.

While van Gennep's (2019) early work on the rites of passage sets the larger picture for the

transformation process, the focus for this project is on the liminal space where dynamic

ritual-myth relationship interacts.

If ritual is the expression of emotion that emerges as a consequence of an act taken by the

initiate or participant, myth is the lens or story held in the mind of the participant and his

community (Segal, 1998). Myth is the sense of belonging to something larger than ourselves in

the midst of a sacred act. Frazer described myths as "documents of human thought in the

embryo" (Segal, 1998, p. 84). The very notion that mythologies contain all of the potentiality of

an embryonic being opens the portal to zero ground and the potent place where all possibilities

once again exist. In this embryonic state of myth, the foundation of the experienced separation

and the latent integration phases fades into the background. Myth waits for the initiation of ritual

in order to exploit the multitude of possibilities. This precious, bountiful, place of potential is where the communion of ritual and myth destroys what was and creates something new. Hooke speaks to the powerful entanglement of "original myth, inseparable … from its ritual" (Segal, 1998, p. 85). The deep belonging to each other of act and story is part and parcel of our own entanglement with myth. When we are separate from myth, we lack the power and agency to transform. Myth is fertile ground for the specific ritual intention. Seeing through this mythic lens while enacting ritual provides a powerful, contextual opportunity for transformation. Hooke described ritual patterns as the acts accompanied by the mythological storytelling that occurred during the ceremony itself (Segal, 1998). This oral tradition that survives through the ages takes on a context of the present, allowing myth to simultaneously shape and be shaped by contemporary events.

**Elaborate and Intense**

The intensity of what can occur in the potent liminal state can be shocking and powerful, particularly for those living through the paradigm of a modern lens. Harrison's accounting of her research among tribal communities of the Americas, Africa, Australia, and South Pacific Islands describes remarkable similarities across cultures in the rites of passage from childhood to adolescence (Segal, 1998). The sequence of the ceremony involves ritually simulated acts of killing and destroying the child-identity. Harrison notes that the highly creative and counterfeited murder rituals are often accompanied by bladders filled with blood to fully engage imaginatively, and to invoke the emotions necessary to transform. Boys even forget their own names, or how to speak and eat, as they are fed by their mothers through this ceremony (Segal, 1998). Emotions rise up through the actions of the living myth, encouraging the alchemical process of

transformation to occur physically, emotionally, spiritually, communally, and culturally. The

intensity of the mythic story is the foundation for ritual acts or enactments of the story.

Frazer recounts tribal rites of the Wiradthuri for boys being initiated into adulthood. The

boys are hidden under blankets near a prepared fire as the ceremonial leader, playing the role of

Dhuramoolan, the mythical being, recites the legend of how the boys are to be burned up in the

roaring fire. Another tribal member enters into the role of an even more powerful being who

takes the boys into the bush to teach them the laws and customs of the community. While these

lessons in the bush occur, the rest of the community witnesses the Dhuramoolan pretend to cut

up the boys bodies and burn them to ashes. He then makes a clay from the ashes and reforms

them into a new human shape (Segal, 1998). The intricacy of these rites engage the senses and

emotions through imagination and the guiding myth.

Harrison explains that as the boys engage in the liminal state of the ritual, they connect

with their ancestors, leaving their individual identity behind in order to belong to something

larger (Segal, 1998). This something larger is the flow of the past, present, and future generations

of the community. This absolute destruction through enacted killing resulting in ashes insists that

the initiates entirely abandon their former identities. They fully separate from the old way of

being and die to who they once were in order to be reborn as a full member of the tribe (Segal,

1998). The elaborate and intense ritual acts that involve many actors and props speak both to the

deep imaginal states provoked and the guiding myths that serve transformation.

**Uncertainty**

Many indigenous people, particularly the ancient cultures of the world, were regularly

subjected to and expected devastating and disrupting events. Hooke and Hocart both describe the

role of myth-ritual in terms of cultural paradigms that expect uncertainty in the world. Hooke

maintains that early tribal cultures of Egypt and Mesopotamia anticipated unpredictable weather events and had a certain assumption about the uncertainty of the future (Segal, 1998). The myth-ritual dynamic occurred in regular ceremonial intervals and typically aligned with the seasons. These ceremonies were part of preserving the balance and well-being of the community and a way of engaging with the uncertainty (Segal, 1998). In our modern or Western culture where myth and ritual often remain separated, we struggle to find agency and initiative to engage uncertainty. More often, we resist uncertainty even when it is upon us.

**The Split: Consequences of Cultural Transmission**

Hocart describes myth-rituals among the Aranda and Brahamans, emphasizing the myth-ritual connection that ultimately cannot be separated in discussion due to their intimate intertwining relationship. He even calls out our ability to truly understand other cultures if we insist on dividing what the particular peoples have joined. Hocart illustrates the sacredness of the mythology among the Winnebago of North America who do not even utter the mythic story outside of the ritual that includes an offering and transmission of the story in private to initiates. The recitation of the myth includes the ritual process; the two are inseparable (Segal, 1998). The relationship between myth and ritual are so sacred they cannot even be apart in their revelation. To separate them would annihilate the liminal state as a change mechanism.

According to Hooke, as ancient cultures began to engage with one another, cultural transmissions occurred, likely resulting in the adaptation, disintegration, and/or degradation of the myth-ritual relationship (Segal, 1998). Hooke describes the transmission of culture that often occurs through symbols. These symbols are appropriated during cultural exchanges between two distinct groups of people. Hooke notes that symbols are "merely a detached fragment of myth or ritual which has acquired a separate life of its own" (Segal, 1998, p. 86). The severing of the

relationship between myth and ritual destroys their powerful interplay leaving only the secular

habits and worldly symbols behind. This is not dissimilar to the way we come to know symbols

as objects devoid of their sacred meanings, and language constructs that objectify nature

disregarding intimacy of the relationships between living beings. Hooke points to the

consequences of adaptation, disintegration, and/or degradation that result in the separation of

myth and ritual from each other diminishing the possibilities of their dynamic interchange. This

separation of myth and ritual creates cultural losses including the loss of skills, emotion,

connection, and meaning.

**Cosmology and Liminality**

Myth-ritual relationship is tied to our cosmology. Cornford describes the cosmogony and

etymology of our beginnings from chaos from his myth-ritualist perspective. Chaos is the

"yawning gap…or void space…[that] comes into being by the separation of two things that were

formally together" (Segal, 1998, p. 121). This space is what exists between sky (heavens) and

earth, and any large space or area with boundaries and limits. This chaos or yawning gap is often

referred to in Greek and Norse mythology as a sphere shape (Segal, 1998). The separation from

what no longer serves or fits into the context of the moment degenerates into chaos. It is in the

separating that a new configuration takes shape. Various cultural cosmologies depict the

necessary separating of two unified opposites in order to create something new. Alluding to the

paradox that exists in the sphere of chaos of liminality or the "yawning gap" is where creation

and destruction co-occur.

**Modern Manifestations of Myth-Ritualist Theory**

**Trauma Model**

**Counter-cultural theory.** Hollis (2020) addresses the issues of finding resilience in a constantly changing modern world that cannot support our transformation with palliative therapies that are essentially first order change remedies. Creative connection to a source bigger than our individual selves offers entry into this liminal space where we can bear the unbearable (Hollis, 2020). For example, palliative care is a ritual separate from its mythology. When the ritual therapy is in relationship with myth, the dynamic propels the participants toward transformation and transcendence.

Additionally, Hillman (1996) critiques the modern worldview that magnifies the focus of trauma often causing us to set aside the "annunciation" of our soul's calling and code. We miss the mark by seeing development through the overly magnified lens of trauma that spotlights the destructive forces of an ordeal. Instead, Hillman supposes that the traumas, neuroses, and marginal behaviors, particularly in childhood, are part of the shape of our soul from the start (Hillman, 1996). Much of modern psychology pathologizes and stigmatizes childhood events blaming parental behavior for marginal characteristics and symptoms that surface in a child's development. Hillman (1996) flips the devastations and symptoms on their head, giving us a sacred opportunity to shake out the gems from the deep pockets of those original wounds and mysteries to discover our soul's divine image and purpose. In this sense, life itself is a liminal sphere for the myth-ritual to constantly transform us as we follow the breadcrumbs of symptoms and ordeals.

Vrbata (2015) stands behind Hillman's Imaginal Psychology and gives equal weight to all images across cultures and polytheistic views. He develops the central idea that images rule the

mind or psyche, and are essential to our understanding of consciousness. He addresses the

Western suspicions of imagery on a cultural level that do not fit into the Western scientific

paradigm. Agreeing with Hillman, Vrbata asserts that mental images are essential to our human

consciousness experience (Vrbata, 2015). In bringing these images into their sacred position,

Vrbata engages images as a myth-ritual process.

Therapy and analysis are the modern approach to transformational growth through

trauma events. It is often in the office environment where the initiate/client risks her own ego and

role with the support of her therapist. From the Jungian perspective on aspects of the shadow in

relation to the transitional process, emergence of the sacred poses a threat to the individual's or

collective's status (O'Kane, 1994). This perceived threat is the ordeal that propels the

initiate/client into the necessary liminal state, where destruction, creativity, and possibilities

co-occur. This potent liminal state is critical both to 1) the release of the old ways that cause so

many uncomfortable symptoms and 2) the integration of the new way of being that takes hold

following the liminal or threshold state (O'Kane, 1994).

**Sacred and profane, transference-counter-transference.** It is in the liminal state of the

therapy session where paradoxes, including the sacred and profane, co-exist — providing a

marginal place of possibility for transformation (O'Kane, 1994). Therapists or analysts are the

modern counterparts of the supportive companions or Turner's communitas (O'Kane, 1994;

Turner,1969). Therapists count on the transference-counter-transference relationship dynamic

between analysand (patient/client) and analyst (therapist) (O'Kane, 1994) to offer the same

quality of support that is integral and tightly woven within indigenous communities. Various

paradoxes (dual relationships) and oscillation between the shadow and light aspects of self in the

individuation process occur in this modern version of the liminal threshold. The nature of the

relationship between therapist and client is a critical contributing factor in moving safely through

the frightening liminal space so that clients can enter the necessary margins where the profane

can make contact with the sacred (O'Kane, 1994). The transference-counter-transference

provides the womb-like membrane for the clients to enter the liminal state safely and with a

supportive, empathetic companion.

Wirtz (2020) further opens the door to the modern transformative process in the context

of therapy from a trauma perspective. With influences from clinical, anthropological, and

Jungian psychology and philosophy, Wirtz (2020) deepens the understanding of the liminal

referencing its Latin roots in the word limen as clearly signifying a frontier or entrance. Trauma

is the ordeal, the rite of passage, situated in the liminal state. Trauma naturally brings about the

liminal qualities of chaos, vulnerability, and intensity that sets the stage for re-creating and

re-configuring our identity and role in society (Wirtz, 2020). Seeing through the filter of Jungian

or indigenous perspective allows the partnership of therapist and client to reshape the role of

victim to agent.

**Healing the split.** Knowing we carry trauma signals that we have entered or are at the

gate of liminal possibilities. Khalsa (2012) describes trauma as creating chasms and fractures in

the psyche. These splits in consciousness are evidenced by accompanying symptoms of bodily

numbing and other sensory experiences (Khalsa, 2012). Trauma is the initiation that prompts an

ordeal of symptoms that may become so unbearable the individual seeks therapeutic healing.

This is different from rites of passage within indigenous communities where the ordeal is often

orchestrated purposefully ahead of an anticipated change and in order to induce the liminal state

and transformation process.

However, transformation is part of all spiritual traditions where the liminal state is often described as an experience of oneness and connection with all that exists, where time and space disappear, and spirit, mind, and body are whole. Trauma experiences are a portal to the liminal state with both the power to destroy or transform the individual. Within the threshold space, both imaginatively and/or physically, the individual reestablishes their identity, inventing new structures, and meaning (Wirtz, 2020).

**Grief Support Groups**

**Grief support and recovery.** Grief and loss support groups typically offer incremental change (first order) mechanisms, where participants often speak in turn about their loss and current relationship with grief (James & Friedman, 2009). Grief Recovery Institute offers participants a six to eight-week experiential process that goes beyond the support group style work. The process provides a step-by-step social-emotional experiential learning that has some commonalities with twelve-step programs addressing belief systems and rituals for forgiveness and apology (James & Friedman, 2009).

**Professional experience.** I work with clients struggling with grief and loss who are willing to cross the threshold into the liminal space of my office. While I do not have numbers and data on those who do not willingly (desperately) cross the threshold to transform, it is my guess that there are many more who choose to remain in their pain and sorrow because stepping into the liminality is utterly frightening and not yet part of our modern worldview. This work can upend our identity, often loosening our grip on the certainty of who we think we are. Usually, clients arrive either because they know someone else who has benefitted from the work or when the pain has become unbearable. Their physical health and daily functioning become negatively impacted by the grief associated with the change or loss they have experienced. Many who cross

the threshold asking for support are desperate. Many clients seek support only after recognizing that well-intentioned but unhelpful advice of friends and family is not working. Time does not heal; logical linear thinking does not make it better. Most people, at some point, feel there is something permanently broken in them that is not allowing them to transcend the loss. In desperation and disconnection, their ordeal of pain moves them to summon the courage to act on their own behalf. My role is that of a supportive companion who holds the safe space, the sacred womb of support, around the liminal territory of transformation. Typically, my clients have no words, understanding, or example of this process of transformation. Once we have defined what loss entails, clients revel in the moment to begin to value all the losses they have endured over their lifetime that have gone unacknowledged. As we work together to uncover belief systems and cultural barriers, a softening and opening begins. It is my work with people suffering deep loss that motivates this research to find more pathways toward a supported liminal state for healing.

**Reclaiming our Ancestral Connections as Support**

Halifax speaks directly to those of us in Western or modern societies when she says "[w]e think that the ancestors are behind us, but they are actually those who go before us. They are a vanguard, a spirit wave that pulls us along. …the darkness of the past for the light that is hidden by time" (1993, p. 190). The notion that we have to create a new path, or find our way independently without the benefit of the wisdom of all those who came before us is terrifying and exhausting. Yet, most of us wake up with that belief every day, and it is socially reinforced. The indigenous knowledge systems, like the Mi'kmaq, value elders and ancestors and maintain connections as a means of support. These connections and traditions encourage a willingness to reconcile and heal old wounds that have been handed to us along with our skin tone and eye

shape. Knowing whose shoulders we are standing on is an awareness that carries the blessings of all the lessons learned and, for many, an inheritance we have yet to fully claim.

Halifax's words could not have rung more true during the rituals of my final childbirth experience. Four months before the birth of my fifth child, my father-in-law died suddenly and unexpectedly. My pregnancy was an elevated experience for that reason and because of some other significant losses the previous year. As I began my ritual of breath and images calling in my support from all directions as the labor waves rose and fell, I saw a choir of our ancestors in the birthing room with us. All who had gone before us, my husband's father and grandparents and my own grandparents appeared from the waist up in three tiers. My husband's paternal grandmother also appeared in the array of relatives even though she was still alive, living in a state of dementia. These ancestors stood before me in three rows, like a choir ushering in this new being. I felt the cool comforting chills prickle over my skin as they smiled upon us, and I smelled the lavender in the water where I labored. The ancestors and water held me and this fetus/child who had not yet emerged to fully separate from me. The tub was our womb, holding me holding her in ambient waters.

Time was different and still, in a humidity, a mist of Otherworld. Between contractions and two pushes, I spoke with my friend/doula about death and birth. I cannot remember our exact words, but she shared this altered liminal state with me where a knowing arrived of how we all come here and eventually depart. We were there in the cycle of life knowing it was the same to be born and to die. Our beginning and end are the same—these two most profound transitions that represent every small and large moment of our lives. There was a lightness to the air about us, the veil was thin, and our ancestors' presence was palpable. I spoke of the choir's presence only to my husband and my doula, our sacred shared sacred experience. As I pushed sweet

Elaine Sidney Sabatier Moreland (her name flush with ancestry), the midwife remarked in

astonishment that it was a completely bloodless birth. I had breathed her into the world from the

darkness of my womb. She did not utter a cry, but curled up on my chest, breathing her own

breaths now, as we put our hands upon her new skin in a blessing.

This is an image and experience I visit fairly frequently or when it calls me. This birth

experience was my last birth, a letting go of so much, and a beginning of a new season in my life.

It pushes me to the edges of what I can do with grace and breath when I am in contact with the

greater mythology. It pushes me to allow the flow and to be in relationship with the pain and

labor waves. It calls me to be present to the transitions available in the course of each day. This

visceral image of the choir of ancestors holds me and connects me to the present moment of what

is happening in this very instance. Breathing Elaine into the world was a vibration of presence. It

is not possible to be in a breath and not be present. With the support of the choir of ancestors I

know I am not alone. These relations pull me forward through the dark womb-moments that a

lifetime offers, and if I can breathe through it, I will be present for my own birth, my own

transcendence of what is painfully difficult or blissfully easy.

### Golden Threads of Myth-ritualist Theory

Due to the dynamic relationship between ritual acts and mythology, their powerful

pairing creates an imaginal entry into the liminal state of transformation. Reunifying ritual and

myth give agency to the initiate toward their own healing. As well, meaning is a secondary

consideration after the initial, primary concern surrounding the ritual practice itself. Therefore,

the ritual act requires an embodiment and presence, unlike the disembodied logical construct of

meaning making that occurs when the liminal state is by-passed. Rituals intensify their related

mythologies and encourage emotional expressions in order to usher in the alchemical process.

Myths are the guiding images that transcend time, evolve to meet contemporary circumstances, and represent embryonic potentialities providing entrance to the liminal state. Because uncertainty is elemental to myth-ritualism, this theory plays an important role in shifting cultural paradigms and normalizing responses (instead of resistance) to change events. For more rigid cultures where myth and ritual remain separated, this theory offers important wisdom toward healing that split and building resiliency.

Many psychotherapies view trauma and crisis as a counterpart to the orchestrated ordeal of indigenous cultural traditions. The trauma, although unwelcome, offers entry to the liminal and presents the opportunity for re-configuring identity. Modern therapies that embrace myth-ritual theory incorporate the supportive relationship surrounding the ritual actions within the liminal state. The transference-counter-transference relationship dynamic between therapists and their client holds a similar quality of security moving though liminal states. The compassionate, empathetic support is critical for safe passage through the liminal space to explore the margins of possibilities.

CHAPTER THREE
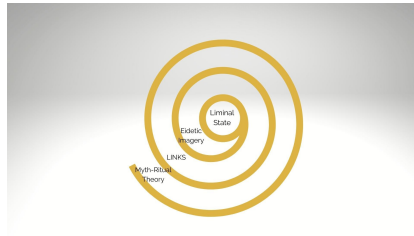


**LINKS**

With regard to change and transformation, we can look to indigenous cultures for wisdom and perspective. Indigenous cultures, who have intact rites of passage traditions and whose communities regularly engage ritual as a mechanism for transformation, guidance, and wisdom, have a worldview that is quite different from that of modern culture. There are unique values and applications within both LINKS and Western science (Lipe, 2013). Western science is the predominant and linear worldview for solving the complex and multi-dimensional problems of our times that include climate change, social inequities, and economic concerns. However, the new paradigm for these complex problems can be found within indigenous knowledge systems (Lipe, 2013). Generally speaking, LINKS is 1) non-dualistic—both Otherworlds (or realms) and this world exist simultaneously, and 2) the whole of the natural world is ensouled—all of Nature (including humans) is alive and connected. Harnessing "the powers of the animals, of the plants, of the sun, of the basic energies of the universe…to live a joyful existence in harmony with the totality of Nature" (Harner, 1990, p, 73) is a predominant guiding concept within indigenous perspective. However, LINKS is a paradigm that cannot effectively be interpreted through a modern lens, but must be experienced. The following research reflects upon how some

indigenous perspectives and practices provide invaluable wisdom for modern culture in terms of generating a productive liminal state for transition.

**Trauma of Disconnect**

Modern society's disconnection from wisdom traditions permeates the modern agenda as the dismantling of indigenous culture continues. In our objectification of all things not human, we miss what calls to us from the periphery for the sake of our centralized focus on progress. Paradigms collided when Western civilization relocated indigenous people to land elsewhere so modern society could develop and mine natural resources. This battle and dismemberment of native people from their land continues today as evidenced by the Keystone Pipeline that runs from Alberta, Canada through Montana, South Dakota, and Nebraska. For indigenous people, being taken from their ancestral lands and having those lands desecrated, is tantamount to being cut off from family.

In the early 1900s, the devastation of removing indigenous people from their homelands was already obvious. Those perpetrating these catastrophic invasions that often included sexual abuse documented the impact of the trauma indigenous people experienced. In Canada, where the Inuit of Ellesmere Island resided, "four-fifths of the reported episodes of arctic hysteria happened after natives were removed from their familiar environment or after the separation of families" (Znamenski, 2007, p. 91). Any one of us who experiences this loss of the familiar suffers grief and anguish. To have ancestral lands stolen and dishonored; and the territory of one's body desecrated and violated are traumas that live on through generations. It is impossible to begin to imagine what it must be like for people so in tune with their environment to suddenly and violently be ripped from their landscape. The attack on the land and bodies of indigenous people must have felt as if a physical and energetic part of their being had been dismembered.

The fear of having loved ones and a beloved landscape taken had to have been terrifying. As modern people who are descendants of either the perpetrators or the victims of these crimes against humanity, we have separated ourselves and nature, each other, and our own true nature. Perhaps this partitioning and split in our cultural psyche have, for a time, benefitted our own survival. The time has surely come for facing these tragedies. Still, without proper support it would be overwhelming. Yet, we literally live the devastation on a daily basis, except that many of us are not awake to this great loss of connection.

For early indigenous cultures, "there was wholeness in the manner in which our ancestors related to the world that transcended the popular beliefs of today and had a place in human understanding alongside other great spiritual and philosophical traditions" (Deloria, 2006, p. xx). This statement is one of hope and loss with an awareness that there was, at one time, a stronger connection to spirit and the natural world. Humans once knew their place within the web of life. The intersection of nature with rituals and ceremonies is an integral component for indigenous practices and rituals. (Deloria, 2006). Perhaps this wound and chasm between the non-natives and the indigenous people of the landscape is a place to begin to reconcile.

**Mi'kmaq: Language of the Land**

The depth of intimacy between the Mi'kmaq and their language and land cannot be overstated. The Mi'kmaq are deeply intertwined with their homeland of Eastern Canada where many currently continue to live. The Mi'kmaq call their homelands *Mi'kma'ki,* while *Mi'kmaw* is both the singular and adjective form of the word to refer to one who belongs to the (plural) Mi'kmaq group or Mi'kmaq nation as a whole. Even with the invasion of European settlers, the Mi'kmaq have not been significantly displaced from their traditional lands. Most Mi'kmaw communities still exist in Eastern North America, their ancestral lands, where their home has

been for over 11,000 years (Sable & Francis, 2012). The long history of residing on ancestral

lands has, in large part, allowed the Mi'kmaq (a word meaning allies) to maintain their culture,

traditions, and language despite the destructive efforts of European settlers.

The language itself echoes the landscape through dance, song, story, and other

expressions that rely heavily on vibrational sounds and flexible linguistic structure (Sable &

Francis, 2012).

> The verb infinitive, *weji-sqalia'timk,* is a concept deeply ingrained within the
>
> Mi'kmaw language…that grew from within the ancient landscape of
>
> Mi'kma'ki….[that] expresses the Mi'kmaw understanding of the origin of its
>
> people as rooted in the landscape of Eastern North America. The "we exclusive"
>
> form, *weji-sqalia'tiek,* means "we spouted from" much like a plant sprouts from
>
> the earth. The Mi'kmaq sprouted or emerged from this landscape and nowhere
>
> else; their cultural memory resides here. (Sable & Francis, 2012, p. 17)

This concept of deep belonging to a landscape was astonishing to the European settlers and

missionaries in the 1600s who witnessed the expression of *weji-sqalia'tiek* noting how the

Mi'kmaq carry their homes with them so they can rest and make home wherever they please

throughout the vast territory of Eastern Canada. Mi'kmaq saw the whole landscape as home, and

lived on the land according to the season and food availability. The maps that they made were

skillfully detailed, and they recognized particularities within the landscape throughout the

dramatic seasonal changes that occurred over a year. *Weji-sqalia'tiek* expresses the dynamic

relationship among its people, their spiritual psyche, language, and culture with the landscape

itself (Sable & Francis, 2012). The deep relational connection to the land serves as a support and

extension of the Mi'kmaq.

**Permeable boundaries.** The Mi'kmaq continue to refer to the various territories of ancestral lands by traditional names that often reflect or describe the landscape itself. For example, Ktaqumkuk, which means across the waves of water, is the indigenous name for the large island of Newfoundland off the eastern coast of Canada (Sable & Francis, 2012). However, even the boundaries between portions of the landscape were permeable, flexible, and shifting as the land itself transformed and the people's needs changed. Boundaries were not geopolitical, but practical, physiographic, and related to all beings (human, animals, birds, plants) who inhabit it. Boundaries with flexibility that respond to and move with the change of time, season, and events create a sense of expected transformation and change as part of living. Permeable boundaries create an entry to these changes and shifts.

**Oral Traditions and Storytelling**

LINKS intrinsically values oral traditions which has allowed a worldview that 1) sustains ancient traditions and knowledge, while 2) broadening the scope of understanding to accommodate events as they occur. Storytelling transmits specific knowledge about the workings of the world despite being sequestered outside of the traditional Western scientific paradigm (Lipe, 2013). This priority of the relational aspects of indigenous paradigms enhances and establishes accountability for storytelling as a method and component for transformation. As well, the emphasis on listening to and observation of animals, birds, plants, and weather is the avenue for learning over a lifetime. Listening to the stories of elders to extract lessons is part of the Mi'kmaq value of non-interference. Telling a story of your own experience does not interfere or suppose a right answer for the person listening who may or may not require assistance in their choice or action. It is a supportive engagement of the relationship that extends a piece of mythology to be transformed toward the specific circumstances of those listening.

**Nonlinear Time-Space**

      **Causality.** The burden of causality in Western science at times is exhausting as it finds its way into the blame and shame aspects of our cultural paradigm. Native people's notion of causality is much less direct, and often engages the actions of spirits or nature energies, more akin to alchemical theories (Peat, 2002). Invoking mythology into the actions or events softens the barriers toward change and transition, opening up the imagination in order to see a wider view.

      **Verb-based, non-linear language.** Paradigms manifest themselves in many of our social constructs, especially language. For instance, English and European languages are typically noun and object based. The word "medicine" in English refers to some pill or liquid we might ingest to cure our symptoms or disease. In native cultures, language is typically more verb-based and context-oriented. There is generally more flexibility in how to arrange language and determine meaning. Peat (2002) emphasizes that for Blackfoot "medicine" means a whole range of possibilities including herbs, actions, dreams, weather patterns, and animal encounters. This flexible nature of language also applies to symbols. Within indigenous science, a symbol such as a circle contains many possible meanings (Peat, 2002). Symbols provide a "direct connection with the energies, spirits and animating power of nature….a holograph…can enfold the whole of reality" (Peat, 2002, p. 257). Native images serve to unify in their vitality, providing access to the whole through symbol/image (Pete, 2002).

      Verb-based, present tense, and flexible construction further generates transformative states in response to change, loss, and transition events. Indigenous paradigms favor languages that are verb-based, non-linear, and heavily influenced by vibration, sound, and movement, noting that this "emphasis upon verbs…perfectly reflects a reality of transformation and change"

(Peat, 2002, p. 237). Algonquin tribes, including the Mi'kmaq, speak a language filled with vibrational popping sounds, particularly when they meet each other (Peat, 2002). Their language is "a complex music, a counterpoint of vibrations, a weaving of powers of animation that reflects, in a very direct way, the powers, energies and alliances of the universe" (Peat, 2002, p. 230). Nouns are not part of indigenous language constructs, but serve as a temporary reference for the ever-changing process. The nouns that are used have roots in a verb. The Hopi Indian language places great importance on temporal elements stemming from their unique cosmology. Hopi language is without a notion of linear time; it has a language structure quite different from English and Latin-based languages which is based on past, present, and future (Buru, 1997). The object-orientation language constructs of modern paradigms separate us from what is happening. As a result, object-oriented languages reflect and create a barrier to engaging in relationships with all beings. The linear time construct in English, German, and Latin-based languages creates barriers to accessing the potent state of presence required for the liminality of transformation. Indigenous concepts of nonlinear time, where the past, present, and future co-exist, are expressed linguistically and provide a portal where change and transformation are a more expected and regular state of being.

**Relational Way of Being**

Indigenous knowledge systems emphasize relationship and relational aspects between living beings and/or elements of the natural world. The relationship between storyteller and the story, between hunter and prey, and human and the land is of the utmost importance. Acknowledging and tending relationships significantly strengthens the sense of interconnection within the natural world (Lipe, 2013). LINKS implicate important ways of forging sustainable relationships with community eco-systems. Specifically, LINKS can support socio-economic

development differently compared to the Western growth-oriented models (Romm, 2017). From

a LINKS perspective, everything is considered part of the great web of life. Everything that

exists is interrelated, and it is the relationship that is held in the highest regard. Indigenous

systems tend to focus on mechanisms of change that allow community to thrive, including the

local ecosystem (Romm, 2017). This perspective may offer modern paradigms new disciplines

and technologies from which to integrate the relationship losses we currently suffer

economically, environmentally, socially, and politically.

**Quantum bridge.** Bridging the gap between modern perspective and that of indigenous

paradigms is often difficult because of the chasm between the two very different vantage points.

As well, there are not necessarily analogous parts, so translating particular concepts and

principles can be difficult. Often, translation and understanding occurs only through spending

time in such a vastly different paradigm and learning through first-hand experiences. Quantum

physics is one specific avenue of understanding that bridges Western linear theories and the

world view of indigenous knowledge systems. Through the lens of quantum physics, it is

possible to understand the concept of interconnection of the Blackfoot Indians (Peat, 2002). The

pattern and "role of chance, flux and process within Indigenous science" is evident in the

language-worldview (Peat, 2002, p. 237). In many ways, quantum theory is catching up to what

indigenous people have always known. Quantum mechanics, in terms of the implicate and

explicate nature of being, can be aligned with indigenous language structure and

process-oriented perspectives (Peat, 2002).

**Nature-culture split.** The nature-culture dichotomy is the result of various historical

events. When humans ceased living as nomadic hunters and gatherers and settled into farming,

their relationship with the landscape and seasons changed. The rise of Christianity, with its

anthropocentric projections, sees man as both the face of God and master of the natural world. This perspective that humans live separately from nature has contributed significantly to our contemporary environmental crises and our inability to find our subjective place in the natural world (Hornborg, 2008). We fail to transform even as we experience the consequences of the crisis. The Renaissance and view that the physical world operates like a machine "destroyed the image of nature as a perfect organism…a life giving mother" (Hornborg, 2008, p. 14). Nature was no longer ensouled, and modern humans split off from their place in the natural world. For modern humans, this polarization creates a gap toward understanding indigenous paradigms and further limits our imagination to include other than human beings.

**Lost in Translation**

Europeans saw the landscape as a blank slate, alien, and from an I-it relationship. The Mi'kmaq share an I-Thou relationship with the land, speaking of the landforms as if talking about another member of their community or family. European settlers were confounded by the Mi'kmaq's deep sense of belonging and sense of home within the vast and varied landscape that seemed to contradict their nomadic lifestyle (Hornborg, 2008). The Mi'kmaq were not confined to a small territory, but traverse the land frequently, feeling at home in the forest as well as on the shore. In their kinship with the land, the Mi'kmaq did not see the chaotic wilderness the European settlers saw. Instead, they "organized the land into well-defined units…divisions coincided with natural boundaries such as a bay or a river" (Hornborg, 2008, p. 55). These boundaries were not permanent but in flux and flow with the rise and fall of the waters. Because of their intimate relationship with their homeland, the Mi'kmaq were skilled mapmakers, drawing highly accurate and detailed maps of the land and waterways.

**Biocentrism.** In an attempt to describe the paradigm of Mi'kmaw, the beauty and unique

worldview is often lost in translation. Eurocentric Canadians and Americans often project a

perspective upon the Mi'kmaq of being biocentrist in terms of their view of nature (Hornborg,

2008). While many of the behaviors of the Mi'kmaq align within the Western understanding of

biocentrism, conservationism, and environmentalism, this is a projected perspective by

Westerners that misses the profound differences of the indigenous way of being. Observing the

Mi'kmaq from a specifically Eurocentric paradigm dismisses and excludes the nuances of the

indigenous way of life that offers much needed wisdom for modern society. The claim that the

Mi'kmaq are environmentalists is not substantively correct (Hornborg, 2008). The truth is more

subtle and complex. Mi'kmaw paradigm, like many other indigenous perspectives, is a way of

being in relationship with nature, subjective and experiential, not objective. Native peoples like

the Mi'kmaq have a worldview of dependence, one that is "based on a connection rather than a

boundary between them" (Hornborg, 2008, p. 20). Mi'kmaq are nature beings, no different from

other animals, plants, or landforms. While it is true that Mi'kmaq live in rhythm with the seasons

and respond to the bounty and scarcity, their actions are based on relationships with landforms,

animals, and plants. The exchange is on-going between all living beings.

The romanticized view of indigenous people as deep ecologists misses the point of the

native people's perspective of themselves. The Mi'kmaq, sensitive to the shifts of season and

landscape, know that spring has arrived when wild geese fly above, new leaves appear on trees,

and baby seals are born (Hornborg, 2008). This knowing of the season comes via witnessing and

engaging, not through a formulated calendar of days that hangs on the wall. Hunting and

gathering local food is not motivated by conservationism, but by cultural values that include an

emotional relationship to the natural world and the responsibility in the context of those

relationships. As well, a key cultural value is one of deep respect for food which entails taking only what is needed and not more**.** The agreement between all beings of nature is one of reciprocity and partnership between hunter and prey, gatherer and plant.

A biocentric worldview held by indigenous hunters must be based on their experiential knowing from the practice of hunting—not scientific studies or data collection. Subjectifying their world through engagement, seeing through the eyes of the other subjects encountered, has resulted in an ethical responsibility to the other beings of nature. Mi'kmaq relate to their prey instead of detaching from the elk, deer, or rabbit that they kill. This deep empathy intrinsic to their worldview is not prohibitive of fulfilling their role as hunter. The biocentric worldview is constructed as a way of preventing Earth's destruction, which is different from the Mi'kmaq notion that "animals, plants, water and earth have intrinsic value and should not be treated as objects" (Hornborg, 2008, p. 29). Destruction that is not part of the reciprocity of living is a values issue that goes against Mi'kmaq ways.

**Experiential knowing.** For anthropologists and others studying LINKS, being in the field alongside native peoples invites a lived experience of a very different worldview. It is not a knowing that can be had in a logical, linear, fact-oriented learning. Knowing the indigenous way of being is an experiential, participatory knowing. Nature itself is another human construct that is not necessarily recognized within the indigenous mind. Mi'kmaq and other Algonkian tribes have "an image of an integrated universe, where the lions of different 'persons' (animals as well as humans) functioned as an integrative force" (Hornborg, 2008, p. 16). The differences between a Western perspective and that of the Mi'kmaq are stark when we consider the vast number of social and cultural constructs within modern society. Modern humans spend an inordinate amount of time thinking about thinking without entirely engaging. In contrast, the Mi'kmaq from

the vantage point of an integrated universe, apprehend the world not as "a matter of construct but

of engagement, not of building but of dwelling, not of making a view of the world but of taking

up a view in it" (Hornborg, 2008, p. 16).

**Cosmology**

Dreams, not trance states, are how Mi'kmaq autmoin access other realms and worlds.

Through sleep and dream interpretation, the spiritual leader, or autmoin, of the tribe could

determine if healing had occurred (Hornborg, 2008). The autmoin is not equivalent to the

Western constructs of shaman. The autmoin or buoin possesses the mighty power of buoin

(godlike essence). Buion can refer to the power or the possessor who can be human or animal.

Buoin travel between one of six worlds described in Mi'kmaq cosmology and can switch

perspectives. Those with the power of buoin can distort the perspective of others. In this way,

they have the power to impose their view upon another.

**Dissolving boundaries.** Kluskap, a prominent mythological hero in Mi'kmaq culture,

appears as a human but his grandfather is a whale. Other stories about girls marrying loons or

men marrying beavers capture the dissolution of the boundary between human and animal

(Hornborg, 2008). Trees, plants, mountains, rivers, and winds are also considered people,

relations, and appear in many cultural myths. When humans do not construct a special role for

themselves in nature, "the relation between them and the rest of nature will be as equal as other

social relations" (Hornborg, 2008, p. 23). These cultural mythologies support the values of the

Mi'kmaq. The hunter still hunts, and the prey assume their role in the relationship. The

relationship between the hunter and prey is prescribed and assumes each sees and feels from the

perspective of the other. These deep relational ties appear in the cosmologies and in the way of

life of the Mi'kmaq.

**Modern Manifestations**

**Earth-based Retreats and Vision Quests**

Despite the chasm between indigenous cultures and modern society, some of these important attributes of LINKS have manifested in ways that guide modern people through transitions and loss. Harner (1990; 2012) bears witness to his experiences within shamanic cultures, where rites of passage are intact, in a way that reaches beyond his culture of origin and the particulars of his training. The "cosmology of non ordinary reality" (Harner, 2012, p. 81) includes the Upper, Middle, and Lower Worlds or realms. The near universal qualities of indigenous cultures include Ordinary and Non Ordinary States of Consciousness and trance or altered states achieved through drumming, ecstatic dance, or plant-based medicine journeys (Harner, 2012). Elevating the universal elements of shamanic practice to address a general audience, not to appropriate or diminish the unique contributions of indigenous people or to dilute the practices for Westerners, offers contact with the Divine to those hungry for another way. Shamanic practices provide a way to re-enter the web of life, especially for those who have lost contact with our ancestral lineage, do not reside in an indigenous landscape, and who have no or limited access to the wisdom of elders.

**Vision questing/nature-based retreats.** There are striking similarities between indigenous people, who purposefully enter separation, ordeal (liminal), and return (Morrison, 2012) and those who seek transformational therapies because of imposed or perceived trauma. Indigenous people, during rites of passage, expose the initiate to controlled violence to encourage transcendence. These stressful conditions are held sacred, and intended to loosen orientations, dissolve boundaries, and, ultimately, generate resilience. The separation phase and ordeal state (liminal state) simulate the circumstances for individuals experiencing trauma

(Morrison, 2012). Plotkin (2003) provides a process for those seeking a self-imposed ordeal through nature-based rites of passage. Various organizations and programs utilize his work as the basis for their process of transformation. Most of these programs typically span ten to twelve weeks or more, and involve a solitary time (usually between eight hours and three days) in nature. Having participated in nature-based retreats based on Plotkin's model[1], the time commitment is significant. Considering that some of these retreats occur in specific locations, the cost and travel can be prohibitive to some members who desire this kind of transformation.

**Golden Threads: LINKS**

**Relational, Reciprocal, Mythology**

While LINKS offers much wisdom for transforming our modern ways, several threads seem most relevant to the transformational model application being presented through this research. The indigenous paradigm supports a more intrinsic relational, permeable, and reciprocal way of being. Living in kinship with the landscape sensitizes native people to the flux of life for all beings. This deep connection and support from the human place within the natural world engenders the transformation process. Cosmologies and other stories offer openings to a wider perspective on and acceptance of crisis and change as well as access to other realms and worlds. The buoin, who travel between worlds and switch perspectives with other nature beings, embrace empathy as a cultural value. LINKS mythology forges a belief in the equality between all beings, and creates a more nuanced causality to explain events without as much blame or shame. Oral traditions and stories, that respect the value of non-interference and share the wisdom of the elders, provide momentum and a map for the liminal territory of transformation.

**Language, Vibration, Non-linear time**

LINKS linguistics both encourage and reflect non-linear time and a greater sense of presence, both of which create greater access to the liminality of transformation. Language is verb-based, present tense, and has flexible constructs that meet the context of the moment at hand. As well, the vibrational nature of many native languages attunes a community to the experiential and subjective experiences of being present and connected. Non-linear time creates an expectation of non-ordinary states.

**Permeable, Flux, Momentum**

Permeability and dissolution of boundaries creates access to liminality where flux and presence states are common. It is a way of being for the Mi'kmaq to shift their hunting, gathering, and resting based on the season. This lens of flux and flow among nature beings, weather patterns, and landforms is embedded in the indegenous paradigm. The exchange between all living beings is one based in empathy and the expectation of change. The momentum of cultural wisdom toward change and transformation is a perspective that would serve modern culture whose barriers to change and transformation can at times seem insurmountable.

More detail is provided in the final chapter in terms of these particular threads weaving into the final application. Allowing these qualities described here to seep into my way of being in the world through personal practice, including regular time in nature, comes through in my work with clients. Finding a deep presence within myself makes space for others to become more present to themselves. Utilizing various tools and techniques to bring sound and vibration into the process provide more support for entering and remaining in a liminal state.

CHAPTER FOUR
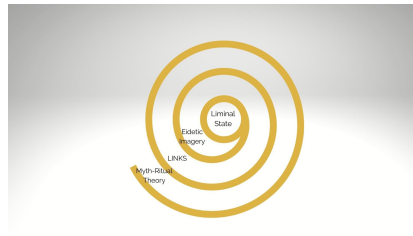


**Ritual Act of Eidetic Imagery**

Ahsen (1977) provides a concrete modality through the consciousness theory, method, and practice of eidetics in which to enter imagination as a ritual act. Eidetic, from the Greek word eidos meaning form, is a particular type of image that Ahsen calls a gift from the gods. His development of the theory of eidetic imagery engages the fields of consciousness, psychology, and systems theory. Eidetic imagery is most typically and commonly used as a modality in a professional therapeutic practice and as a training component for licensed therapists (Ahsen, 1977). For the purposes of this paper and this potential application, eidetic imagery will be used to establish deep states of presence within the liminal state of imagination. Eidetic practice will not be used to diagnose or resolve complex psychological traumas, but will instead encourage a liminal, meditative, open state where the client can engage their imagination in connection with their body to discover the creative powers of mythology. The ritual act of entering an eidetic state establishes the ground where ritual and myth can commingle and reclaim resources for healing and transformation through the ordeals of grief, loss, change, and transition.

Eidetics offers a healing modality and remedy of our collective imagination problem. For most modern people, the tendency is to react in panic and flight and not experience, think, or remember from a place of presence. Because we are not present in our bodies, by-passing the

liminal state, we often guess and misunderstand the meanings of past relationships and experiences. We construct a present built upon false foundations (Dolan, 1997). For example, in childhood, we may have misread the anger of our father as a direct response to our ineptitude. The unresolved anxiety and lack of agency persist as symptoms in the present based on the single original conflict. Only through states of presence will we be able to explore and express the Self to reconnect with a vital resource (father) and construct a present based on a foundation of true meaning. With the aim of making contact with and releasing new potentials of the Self, "the eidetic approach presents its healing structures through mental image experiments" (Dolan, 1997, p. 93) in repeated small original moments and projections.  Eidetic images are links that create a focusing of attention and opening of consciousness and body states (Dolan, 1997).

**Eidetic Images and States of Imagination**

Eidetic images might begin to be understood in contrast to other types of images humans create. Fantasy, for instance, occurs on a spectrum of self-indulgence ranging from conflict-avoidant, pleasure-seeking behavior to obsessive-compulsive tendencies. Unlike the looping, passive use of fantasy, eidetic imagination is a method for actively engaging and exploring our nature of being and the way we relate to and find meaning in the world (Ahsen, 1977; Kaminker & Jaenke, 2021). Images that stem from the imagination are extensions of the seer's consciousness (Ahsen, 1977), unlike some daydreams, hallucinations, or visions that are believed to be external (Kaminker & Jaenke, 2021). Eidetic images are similar to Jung's active imagination in that both seek insights that are otherwise out of direct awareness and engage the five senses to generate the alchemical process of transformation (Ahsen, 1977; Kaminker & Jaenke, 2021). Jung and Ahsen are neither entirely aligned nor inconsistent in their

interpretations of self and consciousness. They complement one another in their divergence or differences, creating in essence a larger vision of the whole (Dolan, 1997).

**(I)mage, (S)oma, (M)eaning.** Ahsen (1977) further distinguishes eidetic imagery from other types of images such as guided images and cognitive construction. Eidetic images are spontaneous, connected to "key memories…associated with basic growth and conflict situations…a composite imagery phenomenon with a visual nucleus to which are attached somatic and affective components" (Ahsen, 1977, p. 26) that tend to move toward transformation and wholeness. According to Ahsen (1977), eidetic images have three key components: Image (I) or what is seen on the screen of the mind, Soma (S) or emotional and physical sensations that occur as a direct emanation of seeing the image, and Meaning (M) or shifts in consciousness as a result of seeing and feeling an image. These components, to truly be an eidetic image, must occur in the order I, S, M (Ahsen, 1977; Hochman, 1994). Images related by clients using their exact present tense language to describe their eidetic experience can accordingly be coded as I, S, M. Both in empathy with the client and in reviewing transcripts of these eidetic sessions, it becomes evident when the client is in an eidetic state versus a cognitively oriented state. When I/S/M is out of order, the client is usually constructing an image in their thinking mind, and the image is not situated in the requisite landscape of the body. The psychological and emotional experiences of the I/S/M model binds the outside world with the internal world (Hochman, 1994). In this way, image is an act of presence as it changes the mind through visual, somatic, and meaningful experiences. It is our experience (I/S) that prohibits or allows for neurological growth and expansion of consciousness (M) (Appendix A sample of I/S/M transcript).

Images also follow a typical trajectory of development from image through somatic response to meaningful outcomes. "When I see, I feel" best captures the way an image opens in

the body. This can be done with the eyes open, focusing on an object in the environment like a vase, painting, chair, rose, tree, or dog; or the very same objects can be seen on the internal screen of the mind. Moving through the seeing slowly, with concentration, the client becomes aware of subtle shifts and feelings in the body. The simple act of noticing the like or dislike of the object, the smell or texture of the object, or any number of emotions connected to the image deepens the experience. As the image is repeated and continues to unfold, the somatic response intensifies, and there is room for experimenting and exploring the image and its periphery. Expressing the image is an important component that first occurs when the client shares the experience verbally. Other forms of expression may include drawing or sculpting some aspect of the image related to contact with the emergence of a resource. Having these expressions empathetically received deepens the experience of reconnecting with resources. Reception might include deep presence and feeling with the client from a compassionate state. It is in being received that the clients' experiences are validated.

Because images are a reflection of the seer's consciousness, these holographic images generate soma (feelings) from the internal landscape that ignite neural pathways and potentially generate new chemical pathways creating a transformation on a physiological level. If the image is not seated in the body, the client by-passes the alchemical process, jumping to meaning or interpretation without actually having made contact (emotional) within their physical being. The by-passing of feeling states is directly related to the imagination problem we face on a cultural level. Without experiencing these images in our body, we are essentially not fully present to them in a way that offers second and third order change, transformation and transcendence.

**Laws of Consciousness**

      **External and internal.** Psychologists have typically described how the various parts of

the external world interact to form the internal psychical system, specifically separating the

objects from the ground in which they occur. In Ahsen's exploration of psychical growth, the

ground and objects are whole and inseparable. Sensation, stored in the brain, is the most direct

form of the image experience. Ahsen views the inherent nature of the visual to "spearhead and

symbolize events with specific space-time reference that bind both the inner and outer worlds in

a single stroke of materialization" (Hochman, 1994, p. 19). Life experiences can often hide or

cover up the original primordial gifts.

      Ahsen sees the external and internal issues according to six basic principles or laws. 1)

*Visiosomatic Association* is the way a significant relationship or emotional event is stored in the

I/S/M model. This kind of image is an undifferentiated whole and has the potential to trigger old

patterns. 2) *Visiosomatic Dessociation* (Ahsen's word) is the way visual cues become

economized or split off from the somatic patterns. In order that the individual is not in a constant

state of trauma, the fragmentations of soma (dissociation) show up as symptoms and

de-somatized images. Only through concentration on the eidetic image is the full experience of

image and feeling reunited. 3) *Simultaneous Contradiction* is the concept that there are multiple

outcomes. If an event occurred in one way, it could also have occurred in the opposite way. This

ground is the birthplace for alternatives, solutions, and personality multiples. 4) *Visio-Fixation*

occurs when, for the sake of economy, a monumental event is reduced to a sliver of a visual cue

while maintaining relationship with the behavioral patterns and interpretations associated with

the original event. Repeating the sliver of the image eventually unfolds the larger scope of the

event. 5) *Bipolarity* is the way the ego binds rigidly to the positive or negative end of an event

due to its inability to hold the paradox. Fixation leads to looping through the attached qualities of the particular pole, and can be softened through oscillation of the images between the poles for a more integrated association. 6) *Magical Laws* include four principles: part is whole, contact is unification, imitation is reality, and wish is action. Children fulfill these magical laws most easily as do the poets. While many anthropologists, including some myth-ritualist theorists, consider these magical principles unrealistic and unscientific, Ahsen was already making the claim about how these images had the capability to jump from part to whole. The pure desire and will to move toward wholeness highlights the power of emotion over logic in terms of healing and transformation (Hochman, 1994).

**Image Facilitation**

**Co-consciousness.** Co-consciousness refers to the material and experiences (intentions, memories, perceptions) that are generally outside of awareness but live in the margins of consciousness. These fringe aspects of images are often portions of the whole we partition in cognitive states for efficiency and central focus. However, in more liminal states of eidetic imagery, we have access to the whole. Eidetic images in their dynamic structure with both multiple layers and dimensions, "cut across consciousness, from the surface to the deep, containing…a co-conscious quality which reflects into many interrelated areas of the mind and its images" (Ahsen, 1992, p. 53). Eidetic images allow greater access to these fringe parts of consciousness bringing these lost or disconnected resources into the foreground. Additionally, there is no barrier between the object of the image and the person seeing the image. The object or image and the seer are one and the same, an extension of the person's consciousness (Ahsen, 1992). The co-conscious nature of the eidetic state allows the seer to have access to new insight and resources. In this sense, co-consciousness is essential to the eidetic practice.

**Companion.** Having an image facilitator or companion is ideal in terms of providing

support to the client working the image. A facilitator or image companion supports the I/S/M

order in several ways, particularly through the avenue of empathy and presence. When the image

is related in the present tense, the facilitator sees and feels with the client often connecting to and

reporting portions of the image that are on the fringe or edges. The facilitator enters

co-consciousness, sharing their experience of the client's image in order to both intensify the

somatic experience and potentially see details in the image that the client skipped over or failed

to disclose. In my experience, when I see and feel with a client through their eyes as they share

their image, there have been many occasions when I have seen and felt details of the image that

had not been shared verbally. However, when I recount these experiences or images, the client

often confirms the presence of these details in their original image. Being able to share an image

field is part of the womb of support through the liminality of grief and loss.

**Development, Nature, and Myth**

**Parent images.** Each image, in its holographic qualities, contains aspects of our

development, nature, and mythology offering several points of entry into consciousness. Images

can be entered directly through developmental stages or events. For instance, the parent images

involve the clients seeing his or her parents standing in front of them. The client is asked who is

standing on the right and who is standing on the left. One of the experiments in this

developmental image is to ask the client to try to switch the position of the parents. This typically

creates a tension both visually and physically, like a rubber band stretching and returning to its

neutral state (Appendix B).

**Running Stream.** Nature images, like the Running Stream, reveal more subtlety the

whole of our development. In the image, development and gaps in development show up in the

metaphors of the image. Allowing a client to enter their consciousness through a nature image avoids triggers close to the surface and keeps the cognitive mind from alarm. Ahsen's Running Stream image begins

> See that you are a running stream. See the running stream that you are. See
> something in front of you as you experience yourself as the running stream. See
> an obstacle in front of you as you see yourself as the running stream. See how you
> run through this obstacle or the problem it offers. (Appendix C for entire Running
> Stream image)

The facilitator slowly unfolds the image, allowing time for the image to develop. The client reports the image, and if necessary, is prompted by the facilitator to describe how their body responds to the image as it unfolds. Typically, the image is repeated to deepen the contact within the body. The image moves and shifts organically and spontaneously.

**Ganesh.** Likewise, using mythologies further supports the client as they move through gaps in consciousness to reveal and retrieve vital resources for their wellbeing without re-traumatizing. Ahsen developed mythological images from nearly all major cultures. The client need not be familiar with the particular mythology to engage the image. According to Ahsen, eidetic images are part of the human psyche and consciousness inherently.

Steeped in his own Indian and Hindu culture, Ahsen developed many variations and mythic images of Ganesh. Ahsen begins eidetic images with a fragment of a story. An image of Ganesh begins by telling a story of a being who has the body of a boy and the head of an elephant. Ganesh likes to eat candy and pretend to ignore you, but really pay attention to you also without ever looking directly at you.

In a way he is in charge of important experiences so you want to invoke his

presence at the beginning of any important journey. See Ganesh, he seems to be

ignoring you but really he is aware. See he is nibbling on his candies a short

distance away. See that you do something to get his attention. Call him sweetly,

"Ganesha, Gunny, Gunny, Gunny." Touch his navel to make him laugh. He is

melting a little bit and he is going to pay attention. Then say to him, "Go away

and leave me a gift." When the gift is there he is gone. It is your gift from Ganesh.

(Ahsen, n.d.; Appendix D for several Ganesh images)

As the image unfolds and creates various sensations within the body, the gift that is left is the

new resource. The playfulness of Ganesh invokes and invites the curiosity and mischievousness

of a child, freeing the client to explore in ways that their adult self may not be inclined to do.

While each eidetic image may on the surface appear to be more developmentally, nature, or

mythologically oriented, they each contain all three qualities at all times due to their holographic

nature.

**Cognitive Image Gaps**

Eidetic images are manifestations of the self in terms of developmental milestones or

gaps, and are metaphorical reflections of the natural world and universal mythologies (Ahsen,

1991). Ahsen calls these spaces or areas of disconnection Cognitive Imagery Gaps (CIG). When

an image becomes stuck or stagnant, trained eidetic facilitators or therapists can direct the client

with subtle prompts (ex: see the periphery, or see that a cool wind comes and swirls all around).

As well, these subtle prompts that redirect awareness to some other aspect of the image can

expose CIGs. These gaps show up as symptoms for the client (anxiety, fight/flight/freeze,

depression). Eidetic therapy begins from the place of symptoms, not necessarily with events

since it is common for people to point to meaning (event) without having somatically moved through the happening. We often assume the causality of trauma, finding our footing on false ground due to the CIG. Eidetic imagery provides a portal to re-enter through image to locate the actual moment of trauma which may be different from the meaning we have assigned. Trauma can occur before or after the more dramatic event that is held in our memory.

CIGs are gaps in consciousness that can be recovered through eidetic imagery (Dolan, 1997). Recovering "experiential material composed of event recollection, original body feelings and new meanings" (Dolan, 1997, p. 88) transforms the client's perspective and expression of life. When the CIG appears as an element of the image itself, it is important to concentrate on the optical gaps. The facilitator uses a variety of maneuvers that involve repetition and directing the client's focus to the particular gaps in the image. Somatic gaps, where the client sees the image but lacks or avoids physiological involvement with the image, can be resolved with careful concentration on the optical image allowing them to settle into the body. A therapist might prompt the client with a simple phrase like "See the image. Allow the body to respond". Typically, meaning surfaces spontaneously, often accompanied with surprise on the client's part. However, meaning gaps occur most frequently when the client clings to misunderstandings of old belief systems or requires repetition of the image to build confidence in the new ideas surfacing. The slow repetition reveals potentials on a subtle but profound level. It is important to repeat these images slowly and often to deepen the experience of the image.

Having the image situated firmly in the body opens a liminal space so that what happens in the imagination is a real experience in terms of the outcomes and the alchemical process of seeing and feeling. These experiences of deep imaginal states create new neural pathways in the body (Ahsen, 1977). New neural associations and pathways for experiencing the world provide

more choice for clients. Instead of treading the well-worn pathways of familiar dynamics when encountering trauma constellations, after making contact with resources through eidetic imagination, clients have another neurological pathway and lens through which to receive and respond. Triggering events that previously created trauma, anxiety, or depression no longer cause these same symptoms. These newly formed resources reside in the body, expanding and transforming consciousness.

<div align="center">**Eidetic Language and Fractal Patterns**</div>

**Myth as Act of Presence and Emergence**

In the liminality and chaos of grief, loss, change, and transition, eidetic images intervene as a manageable form of chaos. The mythic qualities of eidetic images are acts of presence in the state of chaos and transition.  When image and soma have been separated due to trauma, myth is often the most likely bridge across the CIG. Ahsen describes myths in terms of their openness to new meanings within contemporary contexts. Because of their construction around epic ideas, "[m]ythic action is a begetter of concepts and the reason for things to exist in the world. … We know what follows action only after it has taken place" (Hochman, 1994, p. 49). The poetry of mythology's metaphors has an incompleteness and absence that encompass, hold, or go around the rigidity of whatever has become the focal point. The coexistence of both the central focus and the ambiguous, incomplete periphery elevates the mythological image to the highest states of meaning. The incompleteness of the image is a device for discovering the absent objects or possibilities. It allows the mythology to have relevant meaning across space and time. Ahsen also likens this incompleteness to something sacred and like God (Hochman, 1994).

**Eidetic Language**

The facilitator often provides the prescribed image or can restate a client's image (usually a dream or memory) into eidetic language. The language of eidetics in many respects reflects the verb-based language of the Mi'kmaq and other indigenous people who understand the nonlinear aspects of time and relational nature of all beings. Eidetic images are crafted in the present tense, using open verb-based expressions that move around the cognitive mind. Getting underneath the thinking mind allows the seer to experience the image from a place of being that includes the peripheral and marginal areas of the image or experience. Ahsen coined the term "appear-act" to describe the process-oriented eidetic image that is a "generative new action, being essentially mental but bearing substantial consequences for an outside world" (Ahsen, 1991, p. 65). Language enables the image to become a ritual act.

The expressive language of an eidetic image most noticeably reflects poetry and mythology (Ahsen, 1991). Both poem and myth provide an open structure that evolves and meets the context of the present moment, allowing for new iterations and the emergence of new meaning. The images are "psychical acts… [that] replace the inflexible laws of reality…an appear-act…an active magical-mythic mental reflection with many personal and social significations" (Ahsen, 1991, p. 65). Eidetic imagery's flexible and permeable components move around the barriers of modern linguistics and culture.

**Releasing potentials.** For the person seeing the image, there is a "tension and pressure in the visual apparatus. The eidetic phenomenon…is considered to be intermediate between the ordinary memory-image and the positive after-image of an object" (Dolan, 1997, p. 52). Memory images typically hold only part of or selected details from the whole event. Memories are often more two-dimensional in their quality, and lacking a ground. The eidetic is whole, holographic,

and grounded. Because of these attributes, an eidetic image is more accurate and mimetic than

the image of memory. In order to override the engrained story of memory and retrieve the more

holistic image and its potentials, the eidetic image is repeated to allow the sensory arousals to

deepen and intensify. Invoking the eidetic image releases hidden potentials and allows the client

to connect with resources that were not previously available (Dolan, 1997).

Psychotherapy utilizes eidetic images that focus on more complex conflicts and

mind-body splits in response to patient symptoms. However, before broaching the images that

typically produce resistance, therapists introduce patients to eidetic work through non-conflictual

images, having them focus on the pleasant aspects. This early practice allows patients to

acclimate to the eidetic process (Dolan, 1997). Some eidetic introduction prompts might include:

"Recall a pleasant vacation, and see it like a movie in your mind. Experience the most pleasant

scene and concentrate on it" (Dolan, 1997, p. 86). These types of images open clients to the

eidetic realm which is a liminal state, from a place of support and ease. Several of the images I

am using with clients in this particular application of grief and loss work are included in the

appendices (Appendix E-L).

The idea that image is action meets the notion of ritual action to invoke myth.

The co-consciousness of the imager who has entered the liminal territory through eidetics allows

for a nonjudgmental knowing of the whole including what is located in the periphery that is

typically outside of awareness or action in the more ordinary states of living. Becoming aware of

these other aspects of the periphery at the edges of consciousness offers clients access to more

choice and new resources (Dolan, 1997). Eidetic images act as another form of support and an

emissary between the symptom and the body, providing entry into the liminal state. Moving

through painful, disorienting loss without support often results in by-passing the liminal state

altogether. Without support, the liminal state becomes terrifying and threatening causing the cognitive mind to engage and avoid the ambiguity of liminality. Eidetic images move around the protective, thinking mind and give grief and loss clients an opportunity to remain in the liminal state of imagination for longer periods of time to explore the edges of consciousness where new patterns emerge.

**Fractal Patterns**

Cycles of chaos and order are inherently natural. Transformations in the natural world occur within the context of the interconnections and relationships of weather, plants, trees, animals, and other life forms. Humans, who have in large part stepped outside of our place and participatory role in the natural world, suffer as a result of resisting the natural inclination to transform in relationship to circumstances. The chaos and order cycle reflects the ways the mind battles between presence and absence, and imagination separates and unifies. This transformative flow is part of healthy development and elevates levels of consciousness (Hochman, 1994). As chaos moves toward order, it reorganizes and transforms its structures. Fractal patterns and eidetic images are transitional thresholds supporting and sustaining the transformation process.

Holographic eidetic images are a fractal pattern and action for emerging patterning. The fractal nature of the eidetic forms a pattern that becomes evident only after the action of image has occurred. Fractals are creatively spontaneous, deeply patterned, ordered and stable, random and spiraling—a paradox. The idea that "each new point is shaped by all that has gone before" (Goerner, 2001, p. 122) has a resonance to the previous incarnations of ourselves from which we are presently but another extension. The pattern repeats in a long line of patterning that is self-similar but with perhaps a strange attractor that nudges toward changing the whole (Goener, 2001). When the patterns of consciousness become fixated or stuck, an eidetic image from the

mythic perspective might be that very nudge toward a shift in consciousness. Eidetic images are salient, buoyant parts in the sea of liminality keeping the client afloat in what otherwise might be overwhelming and consuming. Being able to begin creating order from a partially constructed image is a ritual act toward wholeness.

Ahsen contemplates Mandelbrot's theory and the fractal qualities of eidetic images even before fractal theory is being discussed in mainstream psychology (Hochman, 1994). He sees that fractals are part of the order and chaos continuum with fractals being an intermediary and malleable chaos; because "[u]nderneath the apparent chaos is a pristine order" (Hochman, 1994, p. 58). Ahsen joins fractal theory with the hologram of the eidetic in that a single piece can reconstruct the whole. With fractals and eidetic images, even when the part is but a fragment or a malformed piece, it "contains the whole picture; separate pieces of the universe contain whole pieces. After magnification, the boundaries between the objective and subjective are again broken, and perception and imagination again participate so that we may again see something new" (Ahsen, 1992, pp. 75-76). Leaning into fractal theory, Ahsen embraces what psychology deems pathological with the understanding that what appears chaotic is the reordering of a new structure into a more harmonious and unified pattern (Hochman, 1994).

Ahsen constructs eidetic images as fractals, offering a piece of the whole. It is this incomplete, fractal image that provides a place of connection. By offering the open, incomplete piece of mythology in an image, eidetic images are the intermediary fractal of possibility and potentiality when held in the mind and body. The eidetic images offer a map for an uncharted territory of consciousness. Emerging patterns of the eidetic fractal can at first be clumsy, imperfect, and often lack "smoothness or expected consistency; anomalies, 'strange sets,' and

paradoxes..." (Jackson, 2004, p. 64). As well, the fractal quality of eidetic images does not provide a predictive but only a probable future pattern.

Inherently, fractals operate on the edge of structure and move toward wholeness, and this is also the nature of eidetic images. However, the emerging fractal patterns that are rough around the edges and unpredictable do not tend to sit well in our modern society that insists on perfection and certainty. Thankfully, predictive patterns are not necessary because it is enough to look back at the patterns of the path created over a lifetime to find the edges of potential developments. Noticing the subtle shifts that created a particular pattern or pathway to the present moment also takes us to the most likely periphery. Remaining present and repeating the image at this potent edge of possibility creates confidence in the new pattern emerging, transforming through imagination.

## Modern Manifestations of Eidetic Imagery

Eidetic imagery has several manifestations and practical applications. Clinical therapists use eidetics as a modality to address a wide variety of symptoms related to and including trauma, depression, anxiety, and other mental health disorders and diagnoses. It has been effectively used with athletes to improve their focus and abilities. Eidetics offers those with mental incapacities and disabilities a broader range of communication and expression. The Eidetic Institute offers workshops for personal and professional development. Personally, I have used eidetic imagery with non-profit organizations to generate co-conscious and empathy among the group so that the transformative process occurs from a common ground. I also use eidetic imagery with clients in order to sustain the liminal state and navigate grief and loss.

**Golden Threads: Eidetic Imagery**

Eidetic theory is a remedy toward our collective imagination problem, especially because it values crisis in its transformative potential and engages the body through image to generate new neural pathways and choice as a way of being in the world. Verb-based, flexible, permeable, and present tense language of images generate new actions on the part of the seer that maneuver around the rigid structure of modern culture and the cognitive mind. Eidetic images have the potential to add dimension to memory to release new potentials.

Eidetic images are ritual acts that deepen states of presence and liminality to support transformation. The holographic and fractal nature of eidetic images support healing, wholeness, and transformation. The co-consciousness widens the perspective by incorporating the image from the margins and periphery. Facilitators or companions guiding the image process engage in deep empathetic and presence states that create a shared field to further support the client's process. Images are partial holographic constructs that contain the whole; and development, nature, and mythology simultaneously. The mythic qualities of eidetic images are intermediaries to help navigate the liminal territory where chaos is reordering. The incompleteness of the eidetic image is sacred, God-like, and elevates consciousness to participate in the transformative healing.

CHAPTER FIVE
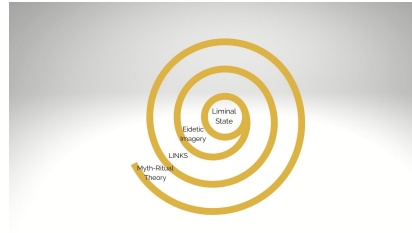


**Learning and Applications: Golden Threads Spiral Service Model**

Trauma need not be bloody to be brutal. When our soul's essence is threatened, our consciousness will do what it must to survive even if that means leaving our body behind to hold onto the physicality of the terrifying event. When we do not yet have the developmental capacity or community support to process a crisis, trauma splits us in two as a self-preserving measure. Many times, particularly in cultures who do not value ordeals and crises as opportunities for transformation, the traumatic event is kept in the deep pockets of our psyche outside of conscious awareness. Trauma lives in the margins, holding us hostage, keeping us from our potentials. Associated and trigger events unexpectedly expose wounds bringing on the emotional and physical symptoms of disconnection and dissociation from ourselves. Trauma, crisis, grief, loss, change, and transition all put us in the opportunistic position to expand our consciousness, peek into the shadows of our margins, and move our fractal pattern forward.

Figure Five

**LINKS**

relational, reciprical, flux states, dissolves boundaries cosmology, nuanced, flexible, empathetic, nonlinear, oral traditions, non-interferenece, vibrational, verb-based, present tense, non-ordinary states

**EIDETICS**

values crisis, verb-based, present tense, expressive flexible, partial, presence, holographic, fractals, emergence, supportive, choice, empathy, agency, movement, ritual action, ISM

Imagination

**MYTH-RITUAL**

values crisis, dynamic, reunifying, whole, embodied, presence, mythology, intense, emotionally expressive, supportive, empowering

**Method of Incorporation: Weaving it into My Way of Being**

Weaving the wisdom of myth-ritualist theory, LINKS, and eidetic theory (Figure Five) required that I first weave these threads into my own life. In order to authentically allow the flexible curriculum to flow through my work with clients, the elements of myth-ritual, LINKS, and eidetic imagery had to find their flow within my way of being and transforming. My own traumas that had not been solved due to a lack of support were tucked away as physio-emotional symptoms or relationship dynamics, poking their sharp heads out enough times for me to begin to recognize the painful patterns. These patterns of healing and wounding were the fractals of my life, and the symptoms became the strange attractors nudging me toward transformation. In terms of recognizing the rites of passage of my own experience and the moments of by-passing liminal states, the common element was nearly always support or lack of it. Because we live in a culture that lacks the capacity to show up with presence and not look away from other's pain, I had to first imagine my womb of support and then invent it. The foundation of my womb of support has

been a community of healer-friends, the landscape of the natural world, and the embodied

practices from a variety of wisdom traditions.

**Mythic Life**

We live in a culture where myth and ritual, in large part, remain separate and without

their dynamic power to heal. Noticing the potential to reunify myth and ritual has been an

important element of my personal practice and transformation. Immersing myself in deep states

of presence, I allow the ritual action of art to invoke myth. While in deep imaginal states,

something bigger arrives. The meaning is not always clear until after I have resurfaced from the

depths of liminality; and the particular mythology sometimes takes a while to clarify. The ritual

actions of dreaming and spending time in nature also invoke myth, and allow powerful

connection and meaning to come through. Myth-ritual practice permeates my daily life in large

and small ways. It is a way of being in the world.

**Indigenous Wisdom**

Bringing LINKS wisdom into my lived experience is an ongoing process. Discovering

my Mi'kmaq ancestry as I was scrolling through a family tree was an invitation to connect more

deeply. The listing of Jean Lambert's marriage to Micmac Woman called to my heart. This

precious ancestor's name remains unknown, unlisted, and lost as a result of modern progress. To

know her name and how she lives in me began with a deeper understanding and the traditional

practices of her Mi'kmaq culture. Slowly and intentionally making my way through the

landscape of Mi'kmaq values, subtle and profound shifts have emerged in me. Working with my

children using a Mi'kmaq cultural studies curriculum, I have been able to sink more deeply into

the mythology, stories, and value system, especially the concepts of reciprocity, relationality, and

non-interference. I bring the vibrational element of the Mi'kmaq language through for myself

and my clients utilizing various tools including Tibetan bowls, OM chanting, and windchimes. Cultivating this ancestral lineage into my way of being brings a new vantage point and perspective to my work with clients.

**Eidetic Imagination**

Eidetic imagery practice has been part of my own healing and training for over 15 years. Bringing particular images into the work for my clients based on their unique relationship with loss is a skill I continue to hone. Finding creative ways for expressing images during the time in-between our in-person visits has been critical in terms of deepening the experience of transition and the womb of support. In the online modules, I have included audio recordings of the eidetic images combined with Tibetan bowls or other sounds that hold a vibration throughout the facilitated image. My eidetic practice continues to transform, and those transformations come through in how I unfold practices for my clients.

**Core Learnings**

The core learnings from this research project have become part of an expanding foundation for the work of transformation through grief and loss. Being able to draw upon the research, mythology, stories, and practices offers my clients yet another foothold toward healing. Being able to connect with the larger perspective of healing and transformation that spans time and culture brings a new kind of belonging for the clients who cross the threshold into my office to participate in the opportunity of transformation through crisis. The major learnings I have brought into my work and application are outlined below.

1. Context matters. Both from a relational perspective and from a place of deep presence, our ability to guide others through the ambiguous liminal state requires that we be attuned empathetically to the unique experiences of each person's journey.

2. Existing and emerging patterns are the stepping stones of transformation. In the context of deep presence, we notice our own fractal patterns and our own incompleteness. From the incomplete parts, we naturally move toward wholeness, completeness. And, as we notice these patterns that live in the margins and on the periphery, we move to a new edge of who we are. It is here, on the edges, that we shift our patterns, transforming our trajectory.

3. Reunifying ritual and myth empower a dynamic that holds and connects us with something greater than ourselves. Ritual action gives us agency toward our own healing and invokes the mythic powers of the universe to support our transformation. When one person transforms, there is a momentum that makes it more likely and more possible that others will also transform and heal.

4. Storytelling transmits wisdom from a nonlinear perspective. From a place of reciprocity, sharing our experiences or the related mythology honors each persons' role and the value of non-interference. In our role modeling through the story of our own missteps and traumas, we invite others to value losses and perceive crises as an opportunity to transform. Storytelling from this place of wisdom-sharing generates a larger circle of belonging.

5. Imagination is real. When we enter imaginal states through the body, the emotional and physical experiences generate new neural pathways. These experiences close the cognitive imagery gaps and reconnect us to resources giving us more freedom and choice in the world.

6. To express and be received are essential to moving through the liminal state of transformation. Expression and creation are inherently part of the human experience.

Having those creative actions builds and strengthens our connections within the natural

world.

7. Living a mythic life is the transformational way of being. When we begin to step into our

place within the natural world, moving from the objective into the subjective perspective,

the interconnections become more apparent. Our dreams and waking life, including the

weather, animal, and plant encounters, merge into the totality of our lives. Our sense of

connection and belonging expands exponentially. Transformation is always at our

fingertips.

**Overview of the Application**

Golden Threads Spiral Model opens a variety of portals into a supported liminal state

where participants can experience deep imaginal states and serves many layers of healing at a

variety of intersections and inflection points. Support, presence, embodiment, imagination, and

ritual provide agency for entering and remaining in the liminal place of longing, destruction,

loss, and grief. In acknowledgment of the separation of what has been lost, imaginative ritual

action connects with myth to create a new way of being.

The practices and the core learnings expand the foundation of my delivery system of this

application for grief and loss, change and transition. I founded my company, NewBloomz, in

2004 as a result of my own transformation through the crisis of divorce. NewBloomz has

transformed its service model as my life has continued to develop and change over the last 17

years. Currently, NewBloomz is the delivery system for the Golden Threads Spiral Model. The

tiered service model offers educational and training opportunities, experiential healing

modalities, and sacred support during transition times. Several elemental components create a

container for the work with clients.

**Crisis: Boundless Mobiles[2]**

My own transformational rite of passage and the ritual expression of that work begat the Boundless Mobiles project. The Boundless Mobiles are made of twisted wire and gemstones. I utilize two variations of the mobile sculptures to demonstrate aspects of the rite of passage with my clients. The first incarnation of the mobile series is made from a tiered wire frame that supports nine dangling gemstones strung on twisted wire. As I strike one of the members of the mobile system, disturbing the stability and stillness of the structure, the client has an opportunity to witness externally (visually) and internally (emotionally) how a crisis or change impacts the deep interconnection we have in the world. The counteraction of the other dangling gemstone members eventually brings balance back to the system.

**Sacred Womb of Support**

Without support in the liminal state, we can become lost in no-man's land. Being in the CIG is excruciatingly uncomfortable —painful beyond measure. However, within a womb of support which includes practices and rituals that give us agency toward healing, deepen self-awareness, and the ability to be present, moving through crisis becomes possible. With ritual acts of imagination, we find support and movement in this in-between, disorienting state of transition in order to release what is no longer serving our well-being. We invite myth into the ritual space as the new creation emerges from the chaos, transforming us, and taking us to the next edge of who we are.

To fully demonstrate the sacred Womb of Support (Figure Six) for my clients, I point to the second variation of the Boundless Mobiles. Emerging from the original mobile's dispersed coiled wires and gems is a more tightly woven construction that hangs from a found deer vertebrae bone. The pieces entangle and move with each other instead of in the

counter-balancing motion of the more separate pieces that dangle from a wire framework. This mobile reflects the safe, empathic container of co-consciousness I offer my clients. As they move through the liminality of grief, I move with them. It is this womb of support that provides safe passage and regular connection through the process of transformation. Within this safe space, we agree to do the work confidentiality, with emotional honesty, and from a place of non-judgment (including self-judgment). Between weekly sessions, my clients and I communicate via text messaging so that I can witness their expressions as they notice emerging patterns and feel their way through grief. In sessions, I hold the space allowing and encouraging my clients to feel fully whatever emotions rise up. This flow of emotion that is so often abbreviated has a safe womb where sobs, anger, and fear can be experienced for longer than we often permit.



Figure Six

**Womb of Support: Presence**

Creation
Birth
Paradox
Destruction
Death
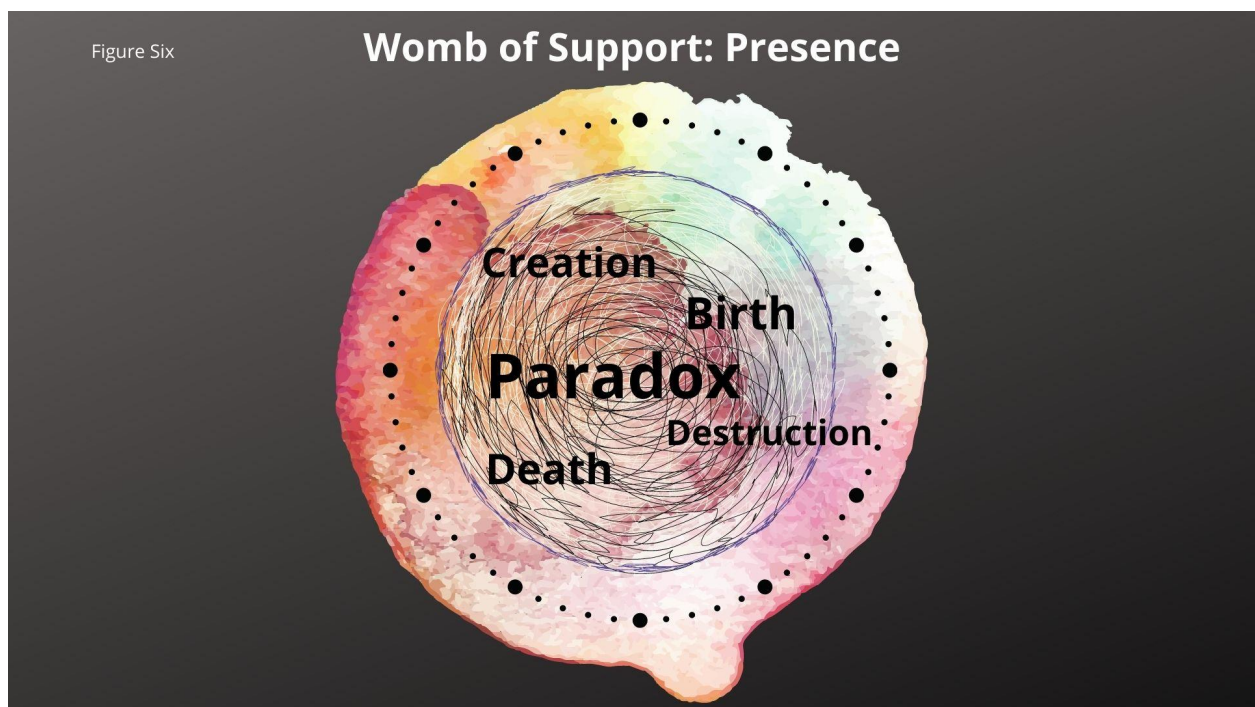
## Education and Training

Expanding the foundation of support for grief and loss is critical, particularly during a time when we are experiencing enormous upheavals due to a viral pandemic. The Golden

Threads Spiral Model brings social-emotional education and experiential practices to those already positioned to care for others (teacher, parent, grandparent, counselor, nurse, and other professions). Partnerships with nonprofits and community leaders leverage the reach of this program. 1) The Truth About Grief, in partnership with The Greater Mercy Foundation, and 2) Human Project, in partnership with two colleagues, are two community programs designed to equip those at important inflection points with an embodied understanding of grief, loss, change, and transition. By engaging in relationships to provide services, more individuals and industries have access and are impacted. Materials are tailored to the participants, and serve all age groups including school age learners. Partnerships with professionals, schools, and nonprofits open the door for a robust community that is equipped to thrive in an ever-changing world. Strengthening community through intentional relationships expands the circle of inclusion that honors both those in the center and the margins.

**Rite of Passage Work**

Loss and change are normal and natural. Experiencing a loss may feel devastating and traumatic such as when a death or divorce occurs. Change can also be exciting in its uncertainty like when we start a new business, graduate college, or reinvent our organization. Loss and change create conflicting feelings and an opportunity for transformation. Valuing our losses within the context of compassionate support allows us to safely step into an in-between place where new possibilities are revealed. Rite of Passage work serves individuals seeking to heal through difficult and painful losses. This work typically occurs over 7-8 weeks following a flexible curriculum. Rite of Passage work is also an offering for organizations and groups in the midst of change. The modules for this service are the most fleshed out version of the curriculum and serve as the resource for education and training and transition support services.

**Transitional Support**

Birth and death are the two biggest changes we experience in a lifetime. The transition

period just before birth and death are a precious, precarious, and sacred time. In anticipation of a

new life entering or one coming to an end, the support of loved ones is crucial. Transition

Support is provided at the family's request and in partnership with doulas, midwives, and hospice

services. The Boundless Mobile Project is currently the primary vehicle for providing a

co-creative ritual in preparation of these life events. Family members participate in the ritual

action of building a unique mobile from twisted wire and gemstones. The mobiles are transition

objects, a ritual of motion, memory, and presence for the loved ones and the person being born or

dying.

**Modules**

Each of the areas of service contain some version of the modules with variations based

upon the request for support. The modules are online materials and practices that complement

the tailored in-person sessions. The modules support the client between sessions with reading,

reflections, ritual actions, and experiential practices. This work is not meant to be separate from

daily life, but integrated into a way of being. This subjective engagement and awareness of

patterns and emerging patterns is a reflection of the client's fractal pattern or living mobile.

Modules Zero, One, and Two focus on increasing awareness and presence upon entering

the liminal territory of transformation. Figures One, Two, Six, and Seven are used in the modules

to orient the clients to this uncomfortable state of liminality. Reading and journal reflections

engage clients in social-emotional aspects of grief and loss while addressing some of the cultural

barriers to transforming through grief. Experiential practices and images allow clients to

experience liminal and imaginal states conducive to transformation and emergence. Each module is organized into four major sections.

**Reading and reflection.** The readings primarily come from the Grief Institute and the learnings from this body of research. The readings move synchronistically, deepening the liminal state. Clients broaden their view and increase the value they place on crises and losses as they become more aware of the cultural prohibitions to the full experience of grief and loss. With a new understanding of what actions support the grief process, clients are invited to step into the specifics of their lifetime of losses. Every step of the way, as their guide, I share my own stories in brief so that I am never asking my clients to do something I have not done before or am not willing to do again. As the work intensifies, the reading and reflections culminate around a specific relational loss.

**Journaling.** Participants also journal and reflect upon how the reading, reflections, rituals, and practices impact them throughout their day, shift their perspective, or create awareness around particular patterns. Journaling is meant to provide a deeper awareness of subjective states, interrelatedness, and presence. Clients are encouraged to make notes about anything that feels emotionally important which are typically the source of our in-person sessions. The act of noticing is powerful in the transformative process. Clients begin to notice the way the work is not partitioned off from the rest of their lives and relationships. Like the counterbalance of the mobiles, this work integrates, moves, and changes the systems of their belonging.

**Ritual action.** The first ritual action clients perform is creating an altar and ritual space where they will complete the reading and practices for the week. This space is personal, flexible, and in flux along with their process. Clients are asked to pick a particular location inside their

home or outside near their home where they can easily spend uninterrupted time. I ask them to

make a commitment to do the Rite of Passage work in this particular space most of the time. The

time spent in this space creates a ritual pattern and space for doing the work that deepens over

time. Clients may include whatever precious items they choose (stones, candles, or other

meaningful objects). The arrangement of this space or altar is not stagnant, and is meant to

change through your process.

       **Practices.** Experiential practices and exercises are offered in audio and written formats.

The practices are short and easily accessible for clients throughout their day after they have spent

a little time with the module. Breath work, eidetic images, Tibetan bowls, mantra, and other

vibrational sounds engage the senses and the body. I encourage clients to try each practice a few

times, and to continue to perform daily those exercises that resonate most deeply.



Figure Seven — Imagination in Liminality: Rite of Passage Work
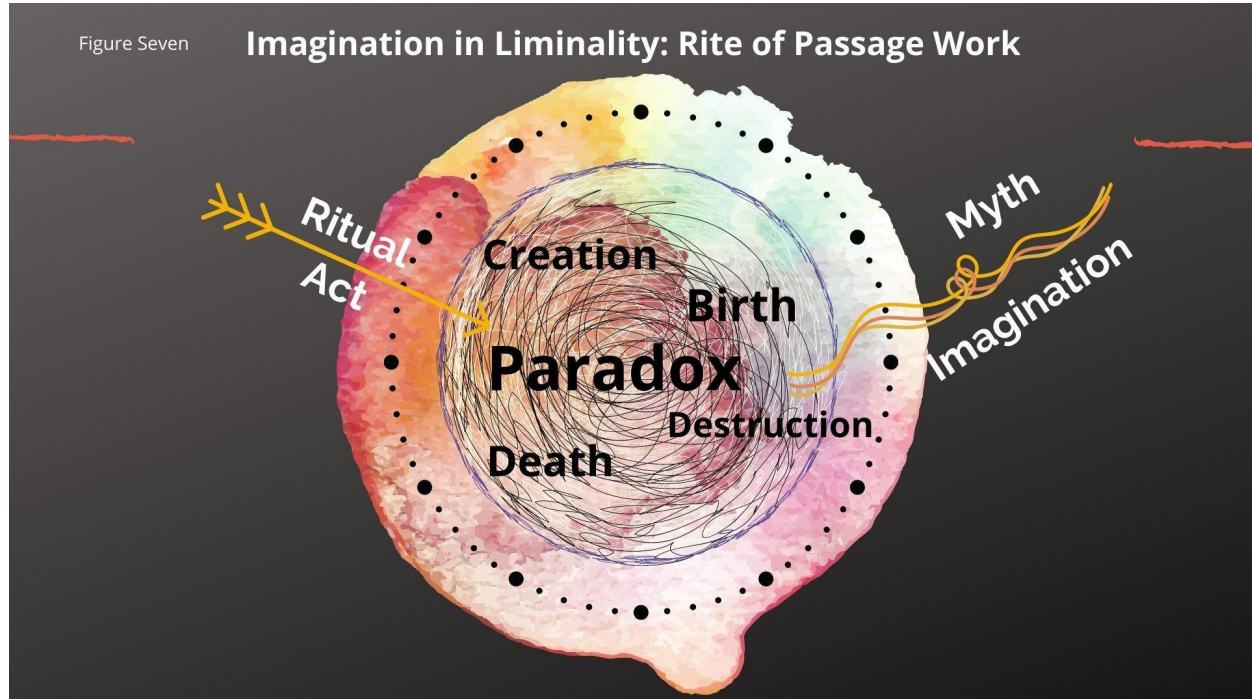
       While there are many ritual expressions throughout the work, the process concludes when

the client has had their culminating ritual action, a personal letter, witnessed. I encourage clients

to continue and extend their ritual expressions beyond the letter turning to their own creative

outlets (music, art, dance, cooking, woodworking, gardening). These expressions reinforce the

connection to resources, transformations, and new neural pathways that have emerged through

the rite of passage process. Figure Seven shows the totality of the rite of passage work.

  While this application includes many elements and components, I expect it to continue to

unfold and transform. As I learn new practices, those will be included as resources for those who

engage their crisis as an opportunity to transform. This offering is a time limited and financially

accessible application to serve at various intersections of transition. The Golden Threads Spiral

Model is a foundational place for growth, development, change, and transformation through the

normal and natural difficulties we face in a lifetime.

**Epilogue: New Edges**

We can change it from the edges, we can challenge all our borders

There is always a new leader, there is always a new order

Our pathway is proceeding and the way is always changing

We are free from what prevents us to realize our destination

Free from all old stories I've been told

I walk through the valley of my own shadow (Yaima, *Pellucidity* 2014 Gajumaru)

We are always beginning. Even as so many things come to an end. This thesis project and masters degree program are concluding, and I am already beginning again. Like the Coyolxauhqui imperative insists, going to the edges of the next layer of our consciousness meets the collective and reveals more of who we are and how we will serve the world. This sense of presence and wandering are part of the collective transformational momentum[3].

After having left so many breadcrumbs for myself over a lifetime, clues and colors, symbols and guides, garnering a beautiful circle of friend-healers, finding my home, building a marriage with a husband who does not look away, and raising five amazing children who are the most interesting people I know, it was time to approach yet another edge. With the security of my grandfather's hand in mine giving me the freedom to move in the world, the body symptoms of trauma in my throat, neck, jaw, and head urged me forward again.

I recently spent time with a Medicine Woman. My medicine came in many forms including the land where we met that was just south of the city of my birth. There was the medicine of our conversation, meditation, yoga, and tea. Plant and animal medicine, tree and wind medicine provided exactly what was needed in their perfect timing. I journeyed, taking my deepest dive into the original medicine of a wound my body had kept for me until it was safe to

know. As "I walk[ed] through the valley of my own shadow" (Yaima, *Pellucidity* 2014 Gajumaru), with my right hand firmly and tenderly held in Medicine Woman's, my left hand reached off into the shadows that were waiting for me. I called them in from the periphery. My childhood sexual abuse was revealed to me. It came like a wave of truth pinning me to the ground where Mother Earth held me as I grieved this enormous loss, as I took it in reclaiming my littlest, preverbal parts and pieces. In the morning several hours after sunrise, Owl came to perch on a tree branch for over half an hour making sure I received her medicine. Owl sent me home knowing that I can trust my intuition to see what others may not. She is the medicine that teaches me the wisdom to rebirth myself whole.

The medicine continues to arrive for me as I walk this new edge of the spiral path. I had buried these events in the deepest pocket of my intelligent, brilliant, wise body for 48 years. It is so much to Know, and too much to not know. Suddenly, there are so many more colors to my life. All the precious parts and events belong to this body. It is my desire to include all the flavors of experiences and value them. My heart is now broken open wider than ever before. The sacred womb of support around and inside of me continues to hold me as I integrate this new layer of consciousness into my being. Soon, I will tell the whole story, but first I will tell it to myself.

## Appendix A

## Eidetic Institute: The Running Stream:  Iron Fence Example

| Instruction | Image description | ISM | Comment |
|---|---|---|---|
| **See an Obstacle** | I see an old fashioned white iron fence across the stream bed.<br><br>It seems separated from itself.<br><br>It is wrought iron, historic, set from one side to the other and the water has to separate to go through it<br><br>It is very annoying. An inconvenience | I/S | Sees the iron fence, feels annoyed, inconvenienced |
| **See the image again and focus where you are just preparing to go around the obstacle** | I get aggravated when I see anything<br><br>I don't like to have to parcel myself like that<br><br>I get anxious that I won't recognize myself.<br><br>I have a horrible time readjusting when I have to go in neat little parcels | M/S | Client is jumping to meaning, resisting the image, fear taking her to thinking mind outside of image |
| **Any memories associated with this image?** | This is what happens when I get sober.<br><br>I become more careful, trying to listen to everybody<br><br>And trying to contain myself.<br><br>I am stable but at a price<br><br>There is no passion. | | Associating memories, deepening the image in the context of experiences/development |
| **See that as the stream you are very cold, and that the fence  is cold** | I'm hurrying because I don't like to be cold | M/S | Still resisting embodying image, jumping to notion of "cold" not experiencing the eidetic cold (maneuver) |

| It's not that kind of cold. See that you are cold and the fence is cold and you run through it | Nothing's changed, it's still the same | I/S/ M | She is back in image and her body, she and iron are the same, external world and internal world are one— I feel her in this image. Some thinking about the before but it is in contrast to what she feels not in terms of meaning |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Oh, except that I'm sliding by the metal and not getting stuck | | |
| | I'm still being separated into parcels, but I'm not feeling the aggravation, not the fear. | | |
| | I'm stronger when I'm colder | | |
| | I'm more solid when I'm cold | | |
| | I'm as cold as the iron is, I'm just banging into it | | |
| | I'm not as vulnerable. | | |
| | Before I was anxious and affected by it | | |
| | I was angry. | | |
| | I see the iron gate, Now I'm not affected by the iron gate. | I/S/ M | She is able to find movement within her image and a release |
| | I feel powerful | | |
| | The gate is not powerful | | |
| | (sits up straighter and smiles) I'm looking forward to going through it now | | |
| | www.eideticinstitute.com | | |

**Appendix B**

These images were created by Akhter Ahsen, PhD
And are presented by Katy Swafford, PhD

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## Ep2:  Left/Right Position of Parents

Now set aside this picture of the
house and see your parents standing directly in front of you. Tell me, as you look at
them, who is standing on your left and who is standing on your right? – Now try to
switch their positions. – Do you experience any difficulty or discomfort when you do
this?  Try to switch their positions again. – Do you again experience any difficulty?  Do
you feel that these images are independent of your control?

Source: Ahsen, A. (1977) *Psycheye: self-analytic consciousness.* Brandon House, NY.

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**Appendix C**

These images were created by Akhter Ahsen, PhD
And are presented by Katy Swafford, PhD                                    Image Library

# The Running Stream

NATURE

1. See that you are a running stream.

2. See the running stream that you are.

3. See something in front of you as you experience yourself as the running stream.

4. See an obstacle in front of you as you see yourself as a running stream.

5. See how you run through this obstacle or the problem it offers.

DEVELOPMENT

6. See parents in front of you as you see yourself as a running stream.

7. See your Father in front of you and yourself as a running stream.

8. See your Mother in front of you and yourself as a running stream.

MYTHOLOGY

9. Now see the world in front of you as you see yourself as a running stream.

10. See history in front of you and you are the running stream.

11. The history of the world is made up by people, do not fear.

12. See history and you as the running stream battling each other. Who has authentic power? Are you afraid? Anything new?

13. Now see a negative setting or person and be the running stream.

14. See constraints, prohibition, fears and run through them one by one as the running stream.                                    Akhter Ahsen

True time is this ever-running stream of the present. It does not flow, it runs. It is the stream of creation and it is constantly creating. When you try to catch the running stream from outside, you only get an image to think of; when you become the running stream, you are it. The self-image is not static or unflowing. It is running, like the mountain stream.

Source: Akhter Ahsen, Imagery Paradigm

## Appendix D

#Contact with Ganesh#

##The mythic story##

Akhter as storyteller: "Ganesh has a special quality that it has the head of an elephant, a trunk which sways around casually, and most of the time he is munching candy. He looks to be casual so you can say it is a strange looking being who is kind of casual and preoccupied. And eating candy, ignoring you. But the other quality in him is he is watching you, not ignoring you, although his eyes are elsewhere and he does not look at you straight, he is not dodging you either. In a way he is in charge of important experiences so you want to invoke his presence at the beginning of any important journey.

So before he takes you on this journey, you have to indulge him. He is already eating candy, so how can you please him? First you indulge him, call to him, "hey Ganesha". Usually when someone is trying to connect with him, they point to his pot belly like they are being friendly to him, like being friendly to the child. Isn't he similar to the child? The child does not pay attention to you at first, he is just doing his own thing, nibbling his candy and then you nicely call out his name. And this calling out his name has to be sweet. Then he will pay attention, otherwise he is going to run. When you call to him, Ganesh doesn't run, he just sits there and ignores you - interesting. So you begin to praise him, call out his name in a sweet way. It is said, unless you invoke Ganesh in that way, you cannot reach any higher reality or any important experience, so you have to invoke him sweetly. "


#Image: Ganesh's Gift##


1. See Ganesh, he seems to be ignoring you but really he is aware.
2. See he is nibbling on his candies a short distance away,
3. See that you do something to get his attention
4. Call him sweetly,"Ganesha, Gunny, Gunny, Gunny"
5. Touch his navel to make him laugh,
6. He is melting a little bit and he is going to pay attention.
7. Then say to him, "Go away and leave me a gift"
8. When the gift is there he is gone. It is your gift from Ganesh
                        (AA in personal communication)


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**Appendix E**

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## Sensory Meditation

Select an object from nature (or other complex or interesting object).

Image:
1. Look at the object with interest and focus on one aspect of the image as you see it.
   (may be any element of the object, color or shape, any physical feature)

2. Let your breathing be normal, in and out in a comfortable pace.
   (Biologically, breathing brings awareness, increasing sensation as it moves.
   Mythically, the wind comes from everywhere and goes everywhere, with an unseen
   power that creates visible changes. )

3. Take a breath and while breathing out, say what you see.
   Ex: I see the green color of the leaf

4. Move your attention to another part of the object. Take another breath and while
   breathing out, say what you see.
   Ex:  I see the veins on the leaf

5. Repeat this process for several minutes, exploring the object fully, beyond the first few
   observations till you become completely engaged with the object.

Somatic Response:
1. Go through the process again, this time noting somatic response.

2. Continuing breathing, say something you see and then how you feel as you see it.
   Ex:  "When I see the green color of the leaf, I feel", or "when I see the veins of the leaf I
   feel"

3. Go through each image seen with a breath and a feeling.

Meaning:

Memories may come up, or associations with situations may come to mind.  Since these were
triggered by the ISM sequence, they are connected to reality, are trustworthy, and useful to
explore.

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**Appendix F**

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## Slow Potentials
## Restful Rhythms of the Brain

In the brain, there are rapid electrical
currents that carry messages from one neuron to the next and there are also slow, wave like
currents that ebb and flow, creating a rhythm throughout the body.  These are called slow
potentials.

1. See that there are slow potentials in your brain that reflect in your body.

2. They have their own consciousness.

3. This consciousness is pulsating in the brain in the form of slow potentials, an ebb and
   flow in the brain.

4. Just relax and experience this slow potential.

5. There are low-grade explosions and electrical sparks of energy.

6. They originate in the brain and flow to all the sense organs.

7. There is a constant flow of slow potentials, like waves and tides going in and out.

8. There is a flow of energy in your whole body, and in all of your organs.

9. Feel the constant flow of slow potentials.

10. Your brain and your organs are like a musical instrument with a cyclic music of slow
    potentials.

11. All together they create wonderful music of ebb and flow made of slow potentials.

12. Slow potentials are different from your thoughts and separate from your ego.

13. They are free floating states, like incomplete thoughts and feelings that come and go
    on their own.

14. Be with these slow potentials and their cyclic and ever changeful music.

15. This is true consciousness, the feeling of pure consciousness in your body.

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**Appendix G**

Breath as A Blessing

1.      Become still and breathe. Breathe as you wish. There is no instruction to breathe slowly or strongly or evenly or unevenly. The breath knows what to do.

2.      See the breath traveling in your body and that it is a blessing.

3.      Feel your own breath, which is really divine breath, traveling in your body and it reaches everywhere including to the ends of your toenails.

4.      It passes through all the contorted areas. Straightening them up. Just let it do its work.

5.      What is the feeling that develops between the breath and your body?

6.      Receive the breath as a blessing.

Adapted from an Image by Akhter Ahsen, PhD.
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**Appendix H**

Katy Swafford, PhD                                    Image Report

Himalayan Mountain – Vibration Image

1. See the Himalayan Mountain and the ice on top. The top of the Himalayan Mountain is eternally covered with ice. Even though the glaciers come down, ice is always on top.

2. See your brain is like the Himalayan Mountain, with peaks and crevasse going through, see it also covered with ice.

3. See that the ice on the mountain seems to be still, not moving, but it is moving. There is a slight vibration of movement in the ice as the glaciers come very slowly down. Very slowly.

4. See in your brain, as the ice comes very slowly down bits of ice and water move through your eyes, cheeks, mouth, and neck, all the way down, but very slowly. Feel the vibration created by movement as it loosens any congestion and moves slowly downward.

5. As the ice reaches the chest it breaks into an avalanche. Feel the avalanches tumble over your chest, as the vibration moves down through your body. See it separates symptoms from the center of the mountain.

6. And the legs become long, very long. Feel the vibration move down through long legs till they reach the Kashmir valley. There is a feeling you have come home.

7. Feel your feet in the earth of the Kashmir valley and see the vibration that has traveled through your body move into the earth.

8. See how the earth responds.

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**Appendix I**

These images were created by Akhter Ahsen, PhD
And are presented by Katy Swafford, PhD

**Internal – External Objects of Concentration**

1. This exercise will help you connect what you see and what you feel, whether it is an external object or an image inside the mind.
2. Relax and look around the room at various objects.
3. Find an object that you like, concentrate on it for awhile, notice how your body and emotions respond.
4. Now look at something you dislike and again notice how your body and emotions respond.
5. As you concentrate on the objects for awhile, your experience deepens. Go back and forth between the negative and the positive objects.
6. You can also see this difference when you see it in your imagination.
7. See someone coming toward you whom you like, notice the feeling of pleasure.
8. Now see someone coming toward you whom you dislike or expect a conflict with. Notice how your body responds differently.

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**Appendix J**

These images were created by Akhter Ahsen, PhD
And are presented by Katy Swafford, PhD

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**Concentration on Nature**

1. Sitting facing the twilight on a summer
   evening, looking up through the trees at the midnight blue sky; it is peaceful and relaxing

2. Hearing the rain, the lightning, and the thunder, it is awesome, even fearful. You wonder at first whether someone up there is angry, but it is not so. Then you relax in the awesome feelings of the experience. The rain and the wind in the bushes make sounds, and the smell of freshness gets into your nose. It is an experience of pleasure when you can feel all the three: sound, smell, and sight

3. Sitting on a high ground and watching the blue sky on a clear day after the clouds have just rained and dispersed, there is not a speck of cloud and the sky is all blue and cool

4. Relaxing near a pond of rainwater, watching a toad as it croaks. You can feel the pleasant vibration of the croaking in your mind. Hear the frog croaking in the water. See the frog hopping back and forth in the water.

5. Watching the ants go in and out of a partially wet anthill, carrying food back and forth.

6. Standing in a running stream, in the middle of the water. You are fishing with a pointed stick.

7. Seeing a small green mound of earth being buffeted by wind. You are standing on it, and you experience the breeze hitting your face.

8. Relaxing near the ocean, watching the ocean rolling in and out on the sand. Look at the fish leaping near the shore, and feel the sand and rocks under your feet. Feel the undercurrent, an initial coldness and gradual warmth.

9. Being in a forest, the earth is moist under your feet and the ground rustles. There are numerous sounds – birds, animals. All sounds are harmonious and blend. The smell is fresh and clean and it seems to rejuvenate you. Relax and enjoy being in the forest.

10. Walking in the woods, you find yourself on the top of a hill from which you can see trees with leaves of many colors. There are trees in front and below you, down in the valley, and all along up the mountain in front of you.

11. Looking at the bark of a tree, see all the tiny animals on the tree bark and a small caterpillar climbing up. Put it on your finger and then put it back again. Feel the bark; it is rough. The tree is very tall, awesome. You do not feel small, just awed. It seems like a world in itself.

12. Watching a huge mountain in front of you. Where the peak is you cannot see, but the many snow caps of the mountain are stretching in front of you and go on and on until you can no longer see them; yet you know there are more snowy hills in front. As you progress upward, the snowy hills appear that you could not see before.

13. Watching a huge mountain in front of you. Where the peak is you cannot see, but the many snow caps of the mountain are stretching in front of you and go on and on until you can no longer see them; yet you know there are more snowy hills in front. As you progress upward, the snowy hills appear that you could not see before.

14. Watching the rolling hills and shallow valleys covered with grass. Hear the sound of a few lambs calling out competing with the cricket noise.

15. Watching a cow feeding a calf, how the calf suckles and the cow's tail keeps swatting and both seem unperturbed by anything, it looks like the way it should be. The experience is restful and makes you feel secure.

16. Collecting dry leaves in the middle of the forest, burning them in a pit, and watching the flames rise. Watch the tongues of flames crackle, break, and chew the leaves. Feed the fire and watch it devour the forest leaves.

17. Tilling a vast land in the morning with a bull yoked to a crude plow. You are spreading the seeds as you till and move.

18. See the parted and tilled earth, experience the smell of the fresh, overturned soil spreading in front of you. Look at its moist freshness.

19. Experience the early morning light, concentrate on the slowly growing morning light before you know that the sun is going to rise.

20. Experience and watch the midnight hour of pitch darkness in which nothing is visible, it is awesome and silent. All objects and images invisibly reside in this hour of darkness.

21. Darkness, your eyes do not see, but you walk with the feeling that your foot knows the path.

22. Wake up a sleeping person and ask the person to watch with you from the midnight hour to sunrise. With this person, know the mental process progressing in each shade of darkness as it moves to light.

Ahsen, A. (1977) Psycheye: self-analytic consciousness. Brandon House, NY.

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**Appendix K**

These images were created by Akhter Ahsen, PhD
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**Seven Stones Massage**

Sx (warming up the symptom): Feeling of being tired and with body pain, painful muscles are holding dirty heat. Dirty heat is excessive effort, agitation, or inflammation resulting in a feeling of pain and tightness. The following exercise will help relieve these symptoms and restore connection with the gentle comfortable warmth of our deep nature.

Lie comfortably on a bed or mat. As you hear the instructions, let an image come into your mind. Continue seeing the image until your body responds, feeling the image in your body as well as seeing it in your mind.

1. See Cold Stones, round and flat.
2. One under each heel of your foot,
3. One each side of the small of the back
4. One under each shoulder
5. One under the head, with the head releasing on it
6. Lie on the stones and feel the cold penetrate into the body
7. Feel the cold entering the body and in any area where there is any pain or discomfort, the cold goes in and releases the heat.

Repeat the image with sound:
The deepest vibration is contact. Sound vibration brings awareness and loosens stuck places in the mind.

**Appendix L**

These images were created by Akhter Ahsen, PhD
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**Starry Night**

1.  See yourself sitting facing the twilight on a summer evening, looking up through the trees at the midnight blue sky.
2.  It is peaceful and relaxing.

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**Notes**

**1. Degrees of Disagreement**

  **Rite of passage.** Plotkin (2021), however, sets his Descent of the Soul process apart from van Gennep's (2019) seminal rites of passage work. Plotkin claims that the Descent to Soul is "neither a rite of passage nor a myth" (Plotkin, 2021, p. 361). He holds that his five phases (preparation, dissolution, soul encounter, metamorphosis, and enactment) are different relative to van Gennep's three parts of separation phase, liminal state, and integration phase and Jung's hero's journey. He reasons that the Descent of the Soul is not a rite of passage because the phases are more numerous and have different nomenclature and qualities (Plotkin, 2021).

  I do not agree with Plotkin's view that his work is not situated within rite of passage work. Having participated in a year long vision quest based both in Soul Purpose Guides and as a member of local Earth Tribe (both honor many wisdom traditions), I very much experienced the separation phase, liminal state, and integration phase of the process as a whole, and particularly within the various layers of the work leading up to the time spent on the land lamenting, and waiting for a vision.

  It seems to me that the particular trajectory of the Descent of Soul is aimed at soul maturation instead of societal roles, meaning that van Gennep's model has developed a new application in the brilliant model that Plotkin writes about and practices. His work has earned its way into more than one or two organizations that host vision questing journeys. In one sense, I can see how Plotkin has also further developed van Gennep's model to include sub-phases or states. He also expands the time period for such a transition, adding more depth and nuance to the process. Myth-ritual theory is also relevant and comes through particularly during the time spent on the land building the momentum of emotional lament calling in the vision. Certainly, with more time to attend the subtleties of the soul work, and with more subtle phases of this

transformational process, the results in the context of soul development versus social role would be quite broad. In my view, Plotkin's entire model is a rite of passage[1], with the preparation phase creating an opportunity to separate from the old way of being to enter a place of paradox for an extended period of time to evoke deep soul transformation.

**Social roles.** Plotkin (2021) states that his work differs because van Gennep's rites of passage focus solely on societal roles or status changes over relatively short period of time (hours or a few days). Descent of the Soul occurs over a period of months or years resulting in a psychospiritual shift and "radical alteration in consciousness" (Plotkin, 2021, p. 361). Plotkin (2021) does acknowledge that his soul process involves many rites and rituals throughout and does initiate a type of transition. In his perception of van Gennep's model that is structurally situated in social roles and mark developmental moments, Plotkin claims his model, at its essence, is more than a rite of passage and does not apply to social roles but to soul encounters. Plotkin also notes that his preparation phase is now included in his updated model to fill the gap left by contemporary society (Plotkin, 2021).

I disagree with Plotkin on this point of differentiation because social roles are often transformed as an extension of such a transcendent experience of a vision quest. Plotkin even notes some examples of social roles shifting as a result of vision quest work. Many who seek and receive a vision change their role in society (job, marital status)  after having experienced such a profound passage through the liminal (Plotkin, 2003). In fact, a woman named Annie who participated in the Descent of Soul work "had been making plan for college…[however] her journey of descent had a profound effect on her life path" (Plotkin, 2012, p. 55). After her experience, Annie became skilled healer after discovering her soul path. As well, our human

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[1]

development and soul are interrelated. Development in one area certainly elevates and impacts the other.

**LINKS.** Plotkin (2021) further delineates his work as different from the practices found in a variety of indigenous traditions. He admits he is unaware of any structural analysis or outcome measures of indigenous initiatory practices in terms of the outcomes he proposes his work is able to generate. In the absence of a real comparison, he goes on to ask many detailed and relevant questions to this point of comparison between his model and indigenous knowledge systems. With a clear understanding that his methods and process are not better than or more effective than indigenous practices, he rightly states that each culture must develop and design evolving practices to aid the maturation of its people (Plotkin, 2021). This rings true in that he does not attempt to appropriate indigenous cultural practices, but respond from a place of integrity within his own culture.

While I honor Plotkin's discussion of this clear connection between his model and indigenous traditions, I disagree by degrees with Plotkin's perspective. Plotkin provides unique practices and methods for the particular avenue of soul development that clearly draw on the wisdom of local indigenous knowledge systems. He succeeds at translating better than most what LINKS brings to the table in terms of our collective healing and transformation. He incorporates experiential practices that engage participants from a verb-based, process-oriented subjective position. The practices he encourages develop and allow participants to rediscover their relationship with nature and other living beings. Vision questing provides access to finding our place within nature from the inside.

My understanding of Plotkin's vision is that he offers a modern manifestation of transformation through a rites of passage schemata that draw upon the wisdom of indigenous

knowledge systems and van Gennep's early rite of passage process. While I understand the desire to differentiate an original contribution to the consciousness community, Plotkin seems to go a step beyond by disconnecting his work from the work of Jung and van Gennep. If greater conniption and relations are the goal of the soul descent, it seems he would not be so adamant about what his work is not. His work is valuable and speaks directly to the concern of addressing gaps and barriers toward the maturation of modern culture. He has created such a foothold for modern society that it is promoted by various earth-based transformational organizations including Animas Institute, Purpose Guides, and Earth Tribe, to name a few. The growing attraction for this type of transformative work that utilizes imagination through nature-based practices points to the enormous impact and momentum that transformation creates within a culture.

In my personal experience of Plotkin's process, I attest to its transformative power and the many embedded rites of passage in the form of ritual and ceremony.  As well, the nature of the work includes creating a supportive community—what modern society is in large part is missing and what exists within the Mi'kmaq and other indigenous societies. Additionally, having many close acquaintances, colleagues, and friends who have taken part in a vision quest through various organizations, I can further give testimony to the level of trust I had in stepping into the uncertainty of the liminal state surrounding the entire vision quest process. Knowing others had completed this transformative work, and having their support, created a momentum for my own transformation.

2. **Boundless Mobile project.** The Boundless mobile project (Sabatier, 2021) began as my conception and a visual art work demonstration of the way we are simultaneously held in our interconnection to one another and simultaneously free to move uniquely in the world. At the

time, I did not know all that was enfolded in this project that has become many mobiles that now live across the world. The second incarnation was a nine piece mobile in service and honor of my friend Mark who was dying. I have made one other of these large pieces. It aided in the transition of a woman who I met for the first time as I installed the mobile above her bed where she would eventually take her last breath. These large mobiles are transition objects during the dying process, a ritual of motion, memory, and presence for the person dying and their loved ones. Other mobiles serve to explore a visual expression of an experience not adequately captured any other way. I make singles as gifts, including for a collective group of vision questers. These singles now live in twelve various locations around the globe memorializing our co-conscious experience that continues to ripple into the world. These singles took on a new pattern, taking on aspects of the visions that each person expressed in our community gatherings. Our connection to each other through these mobiles beyond distance and time is vital and real.

It has become clear to me that the Boundless mobiles and each human life are enfolded fractal patterns in and of themselves. Fractals are creatively spontaneous, deeply patterned, ordered and stable, random and spiraling —a paradox (Martin, 2021). The idea that "each new point is shaped by all that has gone before" (Goerner, 2001, p. 122) has a resonance to the previous incarnations of ourselves from which we are presently but another extension. Each new mobile extends from the previous creation with a slightly new form. Both we and the mobiles are a pattern repeating in a long line of patterning that is self-similar but with perhaps the strange attractor that reflects and nudges toward changing the whole (Goener, 2001).

In the mobile incarnation for this cosmology project (Sabatier, 2021), another new pattern appeared. Emerging from the dispersed coiled wires and gems is a more tightly woven construction. The pieces entangle and move with each other instead of in the counter-balancing

motion of the more separate pieces that dangle from a framework. This emerging pattern of the

mobiles reflects the safe, empathic container of co-consciousness I offer my clients as they move

through the liminality of grief. Even the storm that rolled in after I hung the mobile in the garden

seemed to be in alignment with the mobile's implications. Weathering the storm, glistening in the

sunlight still beaded with raindrops, the entangled mobile was intact and somehow transformed.

Video demonstrations of

**Boundless Mobile version #1:**

**www.youtube.com/watch?v=DM4j9CWv2xU**

**www.youtube.com/watch?v=PXIEIuD7QzA**

**Boundless Mobile version #2:**

**www.youtube.com/watch?v=QQ3gXjb7qQI**

3. **Momentum of change.** Transformation carries momentum; when one person transforms or

transcends, it makes it easier for another person to do so. When one person chooses to move

through a loss, change, or transition, it makes it easier for another person to choose to enter

liminal territory toward transformation. In cosmology, the study of our universe and the origins

of life and creation, Swimme (n.d.) describes the universe's power of transformation: the power

of changing a society or community; transmuted individuals "give rise to organizing codes that

create a community in which it is even more likely that new individuals will go through

transmutation" (Swimme, 2018, p. 39). This momentum means that each of us who tends to our

traumas and wounds contributes to the collective healing. As we shift our vibration, like solar

panel we contribute to the collective grid sending waves of change. While there are last ditch

efforts that seem loud and numbers to undermine this paradigm shift, those working from the

place of undercurrents, often subtly, are building a foundation from the bottom up. This

foundation will not topple and it will include those resisting the shift.

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