

Ritual: Refreshing Self

A Paradigm for Understanding the Ritual Process

Words -- with all their denotations, connotations, and associations -- are our vehicle for sharing concepts and, at the same time, opening doors to confusion. In this paper, I

"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said in a rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean - neither more nor less."



Humpty Dumpty and Alice. From Through the Looking-Glass. Illustration by John Tenniel.

construct a paradigm for discussing **ritual** and investigating the roles particular **rites** and customs play across a wide spectrum of

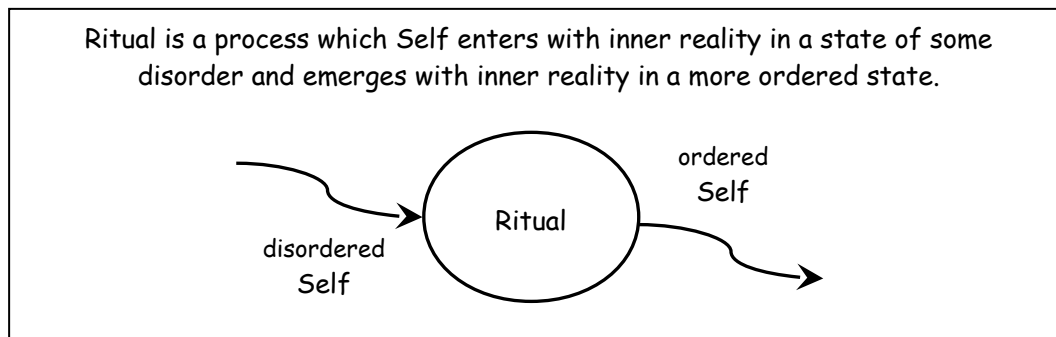
spiritual and cultural practices. The validity of the paradigm rests in its usefulness; its foundation rests on our shared understanding of the words and concepts employed. Rather than argue the definitions of the words I employ, I will state those definitions as assumptions and use them accordingly and consistently.

For understanding, of course, the words and their definitions should resonate¹ with those in the experience of those who would understand and use the paradigm. For this reason, I cite complementary usages from a wide range of disciplines in hope that one or more will evoke a helpful

association for the reader.



The core of RedBird's Ritual Paradigm is:



Appendix A provides a summary of RedBird's Ritual Paradigm.





Self

Self is an individual human being – one like ourselves. In daily life **Self** moves through and interacts with the Universe of **matter, energy, and information** comprising the domain of **outer reality**, which includes all that is external to **Self**: the world of time and space with the laws that govern it; other people; rules, demands, and obligations; actions and interactions; history and myth; cause, effect, and consequences. The domain of **inner reality**, unique to each individual and composed mostly of **information** carried in a framework of matter and energy, is built by **Self** from before birth and continually evaluated and maintained through **Self**'s interactions with outer reality. Among the **information** occupying the domain of **inner reality** are our personalities, our personal worldview and body of knowledge, the rules and memories through which we process all that our senses perceive, assign meaning to that input, and choose to take action accordingly.

Self as a whole has been described as consisting of three interconnected and interdependent components:

Body refers to the physical, palpable construct of the human being, including the internal processes of maintaining homeostasis, ingestion and elimination, breathing, moving, and perceiving through the physical senses – primarily **matter and energy**;

Mind refers to the thinking, speaking, reasoning construct of the human being, including interpreting sensory input, imagining, deciding, and remembering – primarily **information** closely embedded in **matter and energy**; and

Spirit refers to the remaining aspects of the **Self** not easily identified to **body** or **mind**, including emotions and experiences beyond reason and logic – primarily **information**.



Just as disorder in one part can bring disorder to the other two, so also can focusing treatment or refreshment on one part help bring order and health to the other two and, hence, the whole. In allopathic medicine, each of the three parts is the domain of a separate group of therapists: physicians address disorders perceived as body, psychologists address disorders of mind, and disorders of spirit are left to the religious leaders or chaplains. In holistic medicine, on the other hand, the interdependence and inseparability of the three parts are acknowledged, and therapy is developed accordingly.

The Faery tradition of Witchcraft [Starhawk, 1999, p. 45] describes **Self** as consisting of three separate and interacting parts:

Younger Self experiences **outer reality** directly through the holistic view of the right hemisphere of the brain. It is roughly analogous to the *unconscious*. It receives input through all sensory modalities, reacts to symbols as to **outer reality**, and occupies a realm of **inner reality** where time is nonlinear.



Talking Self experiences **outer reality** in terms of language, reason, and linear time, processes more specific to the left hemisphere of the brain. It is roughly analogous to the *conscious*. It receives **information** through **Younger Self**, which it then organizes, validates, classifies, compartmentalizes, and restates in words, concepts, and numbers. It maintains **Self**'s awareness of time and provides the voice by which **Self** speaks to **outer reality**.



Deep Self corresponds to the *Divine Within* and experiences **outer reality** through **Younger Self** and through the *collective unconscious*, in Jungian terminology.



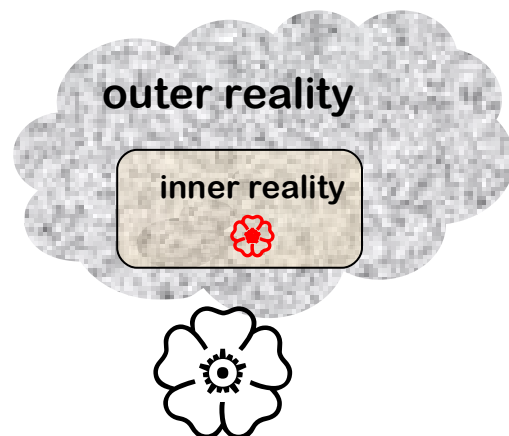
Play is the realm of **Younger Self**, and ritual is a form of **play** that engages **Younger Self** directly and more effectively than reliance on linear time and language.



Inner Reality

From the first stirrings of sensory input in prebirth awareness, the human being grows both the physical structures to support life and the information structures to inform and to gather and integrate new perceptions and realities. Much is in place and functioning actively when the new **Self** comes to birth. The physical structures continue to grow, reaching their peak in about two decades. The **information** structures remain flexible, continuing to grow with increasing complexity.

"According to Jung, this inner world influences biochemical processes in the body, affects the instincts, and determines one's perception of outer reality. Jung proposed that physical matter can only be known through a person's psychic images of outside reality; thus, what people perceive is in large part determined by who they are." [Corsini & Wedding, 2005, pp. 96-97]



Each of us maintains a deep and personal understanding of how the Universe works, how life unfolds, and our role in it. This, our **inner reality**, is the ordered and integrated total of all

that **Self** has learned or imagined to the present moment. **Inner reality** carries the standards and the methods by which we examine all new perceptions and experiences – all new **information** – weigh them against all we know, assign meaning to them, and decide whether or not to allow them to be integrated into the total. It includes memory and also the linkages among memories and our reflections on memories. **Inner reality** is the totality of the unique and fluid configuration of thoughts, beliefs, memories, processes, perceptions, and awareness in each moment, roughly analogous to Carl Jung's use of *psyche*: a combination of spirit, soul, and idea, conscious and unconscious.

Perception

The domain of **inner reality** maintains its particular and unique interface with the **outer reality** that is largely but not entirely common to multiple individuals (it differs from person to person at least in viewpoint and perspective). The interface includes the human biological transducers which convert sensory input from **outer reality** into the **information** perceived by **inner reality**. This is often expressed in questions about how we really know the sky is blue – what is blue to you might not be blue to me, and so on.

Science continually explores the biological basis of perception, identifying the pathways within the body that function as *transducers*, converting energy or signals from one form to another. Since the first

Aristotle's maxim "Nothing is in the mind that did not pass through the senses" is questioned by some schools of philosophy. If "brain" is substituted for "mind," however, and the statement is made a physiological rather than a philosophical one, it then becomes literally true. For higher organisms, the sensory receptor furnishes the only means of gaining information about the surrounding world. [Loewenstein, 1960]

transducer mechanisms in the body were demonstrated in 1950, ongoing research has identified and decoded those mechanisms throughout the **body**; at the same time, research has led to understanding how these function and how their actions might be modified through chemistry, physics, or experience. Without them, **inner reality** is totally isolated from its surrounding **outer reality**.

Our perception is facilitated by our interaction with outer reality. We perceive more clearly and efficiently when we participate in receiving the input than when we merely observe. [[Held, 1965]

Understanding

One essential function of **inner reality** is to evaluate perceptions of **outer reality** for importance, meaning, and congruence with what is already part of the worldview – essentially, its truth. Perceptions which are in accord with what has already been accepted and integrated serve to reinforce the truth value already assigned, while those at odds may set off alarms. Perceptions which are new but which fit accepted patterns in **inner reality** are more likely to be accepted, again, while those at odds may set off alarms.

As humans, we seem to be patterned from our beginning to react with alarm to change – to perceptions which match neither previous perceptions nor patterns formed by previous perceptions – a newborn baby startles and cries at nearly every change of perceptions, relaxing as a database of recognized perceptions grows. The familiar is a comfort, even when unpleasant – usually referred to as “the Devil you know” as opposed to “the Devil you don’t know”.

Reality Testing

Maintaining comfort and integrity of **inner reality** requires Self to reflect, to identify and confront differences between **inner reality** and **outer reality**. Even where thought processes are unimpaired by mental illness, resolving incongruence can require considerable effort and lead to discomfort. Incongruence is a major source of disorder in **inner reality**.



Entropy

The *First Law of Thermodynamics* states that the sum total of all **matter** and **energy** in the Universe is constant, although **matter** can be transformed into **energy** and vice versa. **Information**, on the other hand, is subject to no such law: the total **information** in the Universe has been expanding since the Beginning. **Information** expands recursively: where there is **information**, there is also **information** about that **information**. In the Beginning, the singularity that was All differentiated itself – with difference there was **information**: is/not, before/after; this is not that; not is a relationship between this and that; relationships, comparisons, sequence are **information**; this is a discussion of **information**; and so It grew, explosively.

The *Second Law of Thermodynamics* states in general that **time moves in the direction of increasing entropy** (disorder). In other words, in the absence of some application of energy or effort to counter it, disorder in a closed system increases.

Metaphorically, the Second Law appears to apply to the domain of **inner reality** as well, possibly because **inner reality** is a structure of **information**. As an isolated system, as in complete sensory deprivation, **inner reality** descends into chaos. Within the chaos of the open system of daily life, **inner reality** acquires loose ends, confusions, untested assumptions, contradictory points of view, and challenges to its understanding of how **outer reality** works. The entropy of **inner reality** increases. This leads to the discomfort and disorder

Ritual provides a process for regaining the lost order and, if we so desire, imposing a new order on our inner reality. [Harris, 2009a]

for which **Self** seeks a remedy. **Ritual** is one process by which **Self** exerts effort to reduce its own level of entropy.ⁱⁱ

Appendix B explores the tendency of daily life in **outer reality** to increase disorder in **inner reality** and increase suffering and discomfort.



Play

Play is one of those words whose denotations are many, whose connotations are even more varied, and whose associations in personal experience open paths to extreme misunderstanding – a manifestation of **Talking Self** trying to convey **inner reality**

Play is a rite and a quality of mind in engaging with one's worldview.

[Garvey, 1990]

mediated by **Younger Self**. An excellent and brief overview is available at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Play_\(activity\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Play_(activity)).

Rather than sifting through the morass to a common understanding, I offer a mind picture:

Consider children around the ages of 5 to 7, indulging in activities unstructured by their adult caregivers. The children are aware of some of the rules and conventions of interpersonal behavior and of acceptable conduct; they follow these to avoid adult interference in their **play**. They are becoming aware of how the world works (**outer reality**) but their imaginations are not constrained by that knowledge.

Children play. In their **play**, they create temporary bubbles of shared reality in which rules and facts of **outer reality** can be ignored or varied. Toy vehicles become real vehicles; dolls come to life; and a pointed finger becomes a gun. Children explore **inner reality** and **outer reality** together, testing assumptions, trying new combinations, exploring and abandoning. **Self** finds and incorporates new information into **inner reality** by experimentation, observing the effects of **play**. **Play** is an important part of the process of mental, spiritual, and physical development.

Adults often consider **play** to be frivolous and non-serious, something to be done only when there is nothing more important to do. One hallmark of growing maturity is the extent to which children learn to maintain boundaries between their **inner reality** and the observable **outer reality** of adults. They become constrained to the “possible” and to the “acceptable”. For adults, fully acclimated and adapted to **outer reality**, **play** is as rule-bound, structured, and constrained as the rest of life.

Ritual, like theater, is a form of **play** that provides an acceptable venue for setting aside logic and ~~the rules~~ of “how it is” and “how it must be”. Empowered by willing suspension of disbelief, **ritual** offers the opportunity to let go of adult constraints, to examine and experiment with “what if ...” or “how would it feel if ...”

Unlike theater, role-playing games, and other forms of adult **play**, **ritual** enjoys the sanctions of respectability in most cultures and many situations. Reassured by authority, custom, and familiarity, intentional participants in **ritual** may temporarily allow themselves to release some of the defenses of the boundaries between **outer reality** and **inner reality**.



Ritual

To use Victor Turner's words, **ritual** is a *structured unit of experience*. [Turner, 1982, p. 17]. As humans, we engage ourselves in **ritual** first in our own self-interest: to fulfill a need, to provide ourselves with some benefits that only **ritual** can provide. In this paradigm, the primary function of **ritual** is to enable the **Self** to move from an uncomfortable, disordered state to an ordered state more in line with that unique **Self's** most treasured values and ideals.

And so, **ritual** is a process which, in the course of a *structured unit of experience* uniquely identified as a **rite**, transforms the disordered **inner reality** of **Self** at its beginning to a more ordered **Self** at its completion.

Ritual Reality

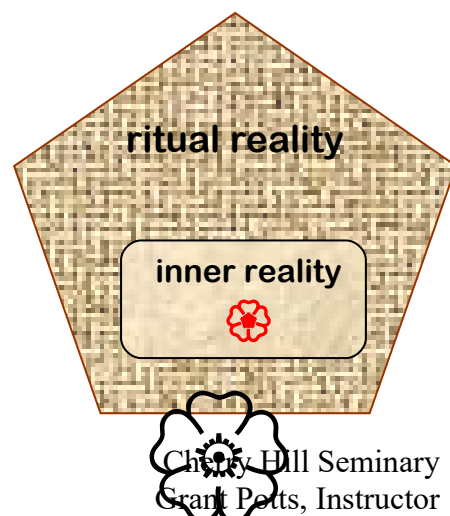
Beyond **outer reality** and **inner reality**, the **ritual process** invokes a third domain which I call **ritual reality**. **Ritual reality** depends on two factors:

- A constructed, coherent worldview, including a set of beliefs, memories, experiences, patterns, rules, and other elements, which is independent, to some extent, of consensual **outer reality**; and
- Willingness and intent by **Self** to allow **inner reality** to move into and accept this worldview, for a time, as a replacement for consensual **outer reality**.

A similar dependence underlies the effect of theater, where a fictional world is established in performance and accepted as valid by the audience in the interest of observing and participating in the play.

Ritual, which differs from theater in its intent, guides the creation of **ritual reality**, manifested on an individual occasion as venue for a **rite**, to refresh the spiritual values and intentions of the participants, who in turn open themselves to that reality in expectation of reordering of **inner reality**.

To evoke effective change in **inner reality** for a participant, **ritual reality** uses a rich set of symbols to connect with **Younger Self** on many levels, to engage multiple sensory input transducers, and to reassure



Self that accepting **ritual reality** in place of **outer reality** for a time is safe and acceptable. **Inner reality** is well defended, and **Self** must feel safe releasing some of those defenses.

Within most spiritual, religious, and cultural traditions, **ritual** is supported by a lifetime of previous experiences, learning, and play. Deep within the resources of **inner reality** are memories of songs, poems, art, food and drink, interpersonal experiences, values, history and myth, physical experiences, and emotions. In constructing **ritual reality**, symbols are employed to invoke the memories consistent with the purpose of the **rite**.

Ritual reality is constructed from patterns established over time, both within an organized body of participants and within each individual **Self**. It includes a managed set of expectations of the **rite** and of the participants. These may include but are not limited to:

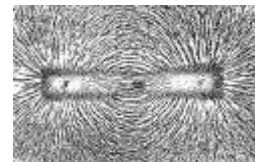
- Personal ethical, spiritual, and moral values;
- Personal and interpersonal behavior;
- Assumptions as to the values and behavior of the other participants; and
- Intent of all participants.

Cultures and long-established religions rely on **ritual reality** developed over long periods of time and thoroughly embedded in the inner and outer realities of **ritual** participants. In more adventuresome settings, constructing **ritual reality** must borrow from a common understanding and tailor its innovations with that worldview in mind.

An individual who converts from one long-embraced spiritual or religious tradition to another experiences a period of turmoil arising from the array of changes which must be accommodated to the information structure of **inner reality**. Undertaking a structured conversion may, however, be the most effective path to order in **inner reality** if incongruence among the three domains has left **inner reality** with an overwhelming abundance of loose ends and conflicts.

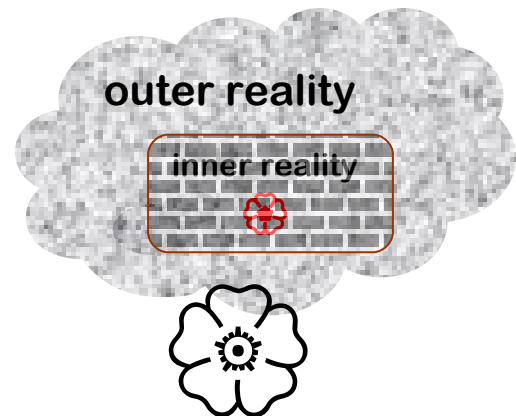
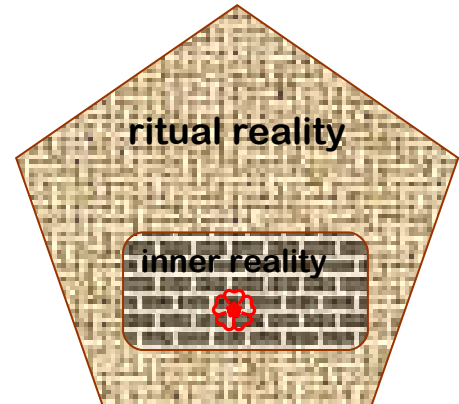
The Rite

Ritual reality is a worldview generating a strongly patterned field where the scattered fragments and loose ends of **inner reality** can be called into realignment and reconnection with that worldview, much as iron filings line up in the field of a magnet. **The rite** mediates **Self's** movement into and out of **ritual reality**.



The **ritual process** takes effect working inwardly through **Self's** concentric layers of connections. Step by step, as **Self** enters the **rite**, connections with **outer reality** are set aside and **inner reality** begins to resonate with **ritual reality**.

1. The outer layer includes connections between **inner reality** and **outer reality**: the connections maintained from day to day as **Talking Self** functions actively in the world;
2. **Self** actively and intentionally sets aside connections with **outer reality** and replaces them with sensory and conscious connections to **ritual reality**: **Younger Self** perceives the sights, sounds, smells, and ambience created for the rite; **Talking Self** takes a ritual role, and begins to act within the **ritual reality**;
3. Within the rite, **Talking Self** performs and **Younger Self** perceives **Self** performing as a manifestation of **inner reality**'s ideal of **Self**: the participant is the person the role defines **Self** to be;
4. In the most effective of **rites**, safe within **ritual reality**, **Younger Self** allows **inner reality** to resonate with the perceptions and understandings experienced as ideal **Self**, repatterning **inner reality** closer to that ideal, a change which will remain when the **rite** is ended;
5. Returning to **ritual reality**, **Talking Self** continues functioning in role as **Self** re-establishes the boundaries between **inner reality** and **ritual reality**; and
6. Concluding the **rite**, **Self** sets aside the connections to **ritual reality** and restores the connections to **outer reality**, boundaries with **inner reality** firmly in place.



One example of the effects of the ritual process might be:

1. On the drive to **ritual**, she notices a need for gasoline and plans to fill the tank after **ritual**. She drives somewhat aggressively, enjoying zipping along confident of her reflexes and braking ability.
2. Entering **ritual** space, she leaves her concern about refueling aside, along with other loose ends of daily life, as part of her usual grounding and centering practice.
3. The **rite** takes place in the context of Earth spirituality, where she participates in the role of one who is responsible and caring for resources.

4. She begins to see her **Self** as a valiant steward of the Earth, the hands of the Goddess, and a careful, caring person.
5. The careful, caring person returns her attention to the formalities of ending the **rite** and returning to center and ground.
6. She drives home much more responsibly, recalling her need for gas, refueling on the way, and acting in accordance with the new image of **Self**.

Self emerges from **the rite**, engaging **outer reality** once more with **inner reality** reflecting the pattern and order of **ritual reality**.



Deconstructing Ritual Reality

An analysis of **ritual reality** of a religious, spiritual, or cultural tradition, particularly one new to the analyst, begins with its outward manifestation: **the rite**. Each component of **the rite** can be examined for its overt purpose, its unspoken assumptions, and its collateral effects on the participant.

Deconstruction begins with identifying components and their relationships; it does not come to completion, as components have components within them and relationships among them, much as **information** begets **information**. The considerations which follow are not intended to be all-inclusive; they are offered as a starting point for orderly analysis.

Decomposing the Rite

The **ritual process** itself follows a logical sequence in constructing, making available, and then conducting **the rite**:

1. Given the distinct **ritual reality**, the overt intentions of the **rite**, and the expected participants in the **rite**:
 - a. Construct a **rite** within that **ritual reality** that should accomplish the overt intentions of the **rite** for the expected participants;
 - b. Bring all necessary components together at the specified place and time
2. Construct or complete construction of (invoke) **ritual reality**;
3. Engage participants in the rite within the domain of **ritual reality**;
4. Assist participants to disengage from **ritual reality** to return to **outer reality**;
5. Return all components to appropriate condition.

The rite itself engages the participants in moving into and out of **ritual reality**:

1. Establish safe space for participation within the boundaries of the space and time in which the **rite** is to be conducted;
2. Declare or clarify the purpose of conducting the **rite**;
3. Declare the prevalence of **ritual reality** over **outer reality** for the **rite**;
4. Engage **Talking Self** in actions within **ritual reality**;
5. Offer the opportunity and expectation of deliberate and intentional action within **ritual reality** for **Young Self**;
6. Offer the opportunity for solitary reflection, for **Younger Self** and **Deep Self** to explore **inner reality**;
7. Engage **Young Self** in actions relating **ritual reality** to **outer reality**; and
8. Engage **Talking Self** in actions returning to **outer reality**, retaining whatever benefits were gained from participation in the **rite**.

By relating the components of **the rite** to the steps and stages of the paradigm, elements of **ritual reality** emerge for examination.

Crossing the Interface

One of the premier ways of entraining **inner reality** in the field of **ritual reality** is to invoke and maintain a resonance between a stimulus in **ritual reality** and a presumably-pleasant or rewarding memory of a stimulus perceived by **inner reality**. Logic is no competition when **Younger Self** is drawn into the action. For example, drumming a heartbeat rhythm as a background for the rite can be reassuring to **Younger Self** that **ritual reality** is a safe place, like Mother's womb, and defenses may be lowered. In moving with the beat, **Younger Self** abandons passive observation for active participation. Active participation increases effectiveness of perception, drawing **Younger Self** deeper into **ritual reality**.

Repetition and deliberate assignment of meaning in **ritual reality**, employed with all sensory modes, allow a chosen stimulus to induce resonance of ever-increasing strength when employed over time. For example, in Muslim devotions, the five times daily repetition of the body movements of standing, bowing, kneeling, and prostrating reinforce the **inner reality** that *Muslim* means *slave of Allah*. The body will inform **inner reality** in a way that **outer reality** cannot.

Clothing carries a significance beyond protection from the elements; in donning particular attire – or removing all attire – for ritual purposes, **Younger Self** connects **inner reality** of identity, status, and intention with **ritual reality**'s prescribed role and expected behavior. Costuming for **ritual** helps cross the boundaries between **inner**

We'll emote, slit a goat's throat, and sing;
Then get dressed and drive back into town.
Leslie Fish, *The Stone Menhir Ring* (to the tune
of *The Old Rugged Cross*)

reality and ritual reality. Returning to mundane attire facilitates the return to outer reality.

Something for Everyone

Where a rite involves many participants, it is reasonable to assume that some components of the rite resonate with some of those involved and, at the same time, are as background noise to others. Inner reality being unique to each individual, an effective rite will incorporate a wide range of components in the hope that each participant will find enough resonance from the whole to be drawn into ritual reality.

Questions to Consider

- ☞ Where is the rite considered to be taking place; i.e., what does the rite presume (and what are the participants expected to presume) ritual reality to be in relation to outer reality?
- ☞ What symbols are prevalent within the rite? What special meanings are they assigned in ritual reality, and what meaning might they commonly convey in outer reality?
- ☞ What are the basic assumptions inherent in ritual reality? How do they differ from the common assumptions prevalent in outer reality for the participants?
- ☞ What overt changes are intended for participants in the rite; i.e., in a marriage rite, legal and social changes are made in outer reality while the people being married are expected to undergo specific changes of state in inner reality?
- ☞ What senses are engaged by the rite: sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, kinesthetic (body motion), special senses? Why?

In my earlier papers [Harris, 2009a] [Harris, 2009b], I offered examples of the effects of the ritual process in several ritual realities. Each example is open to decomposition and analysis. Their similarity is in the perception of the participant that the rite or ritual entered into effects a change in themselves, bringing order where there had been disorder.ⁱⁱⁱ

Usefulness of Deconstruction Using a Ritual Paradigm

Psychiatry pays close attention to aspects of human thought and behavior that can overlap with spiritual expression and may reflect peculiarities of a ritual reality, poorly-managed boundaries between inner reality and outer or ritual reality, or in complete distinction between outer reality and ritual reality. When studying ritual reality through

decomposing a rite, it is well to be aware of the possible impact of psychological disorders on the participants.

The manual for diagnosis of psychological disorders, DSM-IV-TR, includes a diagnosis category under *Additional Conditions That May Be a Focus of Clinical Attention*, V62.89 Religious or Spiritual Problem:

“This category can be used when the focus of clinical attention is a religious or spiritual problem. Examples include distressing experiences that involve loss or questioning of faith, problems associated with conversion to a new faith, or questioning of spiritual values that may not necessarily be related to an organized church or religious institution.” [DSM-IV-TR, 2000, p. 741]

Where psychiatry is uninformed, clergy or chaplains may be called upon to help discern elements of **ritual reality** from distortions of **outer reality** as perceived by **inner reality**. Problems arising through **ritual reality** may be resolved at that source.^{iv}

Appendix A

Summary of RedBird's Paradigm

The Universe is composed of **matter**, **energy**, and **information**. **Information** is conveyed through **matter** and **energy** but is not constrained by laws of conservation (*First Law of Thermodynamics*). On the contrary, it expands itself recursively – **information** includes **information** about **information**.

Self is composed of interconnected and interdependent **body**, **mind**, and **spirit**, functioning as **Younger Self**, **Talking Self**, and **Deep Self**.

Body is composed of matter and energy patterned by **information**; it functions as the primary interface between outer reality and inner reality;

Mind is composed primarily of **information** conveyed and maintained by matter and energy. **Mind** interprets **information** received through **body** and uses **body** to convey **information**;

Spirit is composed of **information**.

Younger Self experiences **outer reality** holistically and directly through all sensory modalities, informing **inner reality**.

Talking Self experiences **outer reality** in terms of language, reason, and linear time, through **inner reality** and perceptions mediated by **Younger Self**. **Talking Self** is the voice of **Self** to **outer reality**.

Deep Self experiences **outer reality** through **Younger Self** and through the collective unconscious.

Outer reality is the Universe – everything that is outside of **Self**.

Inner reality is unique to the individual, **Self's** view of the Universe and **Self**, based on all the **information** **Self** has perceived, evaluated, and incorporated from pre-birth awareness to date. **Outer reality** and daily life challenge **inner reality** with chaotic **information** acquisition (entropy).

Play is **Self** experimenting with **inner reality** in relation to hypothetical variations of **outer reality**, sometimes resulting in lasting changes to **inner reality**.

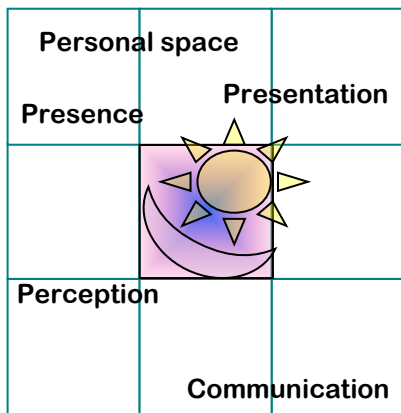
Ritual is one process – a special case of **play** – by which **Self** seeks to reduce its own level of entropy.

Ritual reality replaces **outer reality** for the ritual process.

The rite is a *structured unit of experience* which mediates **Self** moving **inner reality** from engagement with **outer reality** to engagement with **ritual reality**, then returning to re-engage with **outer reality**.

Daily Life and Inner Reality [Harris, 2009a]

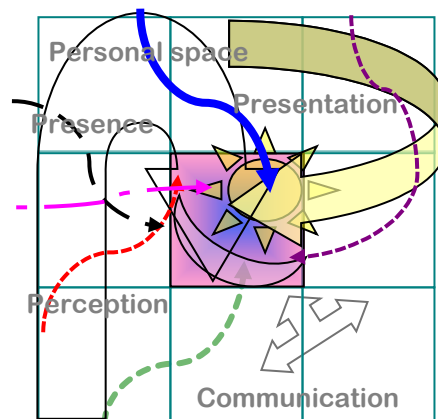
Inner reality -- the *psyche*, our personal worldview and body of knowledge, the operating system and data banks through which we process all that our senses perceive, assign meaning, and choose to take action -- is built layer by layer throughout life. It serves us well, until we are confronted one too many unresolved contradictions, ill-considered application of **The Rules** which we consider hard and fast, and the strident call to take some action which does not seem congruent with all that we hold to be true, or possibly incontrovertible fact that is at odds with our basic underlying assumptions of “the way things are”.



Imagine for a moment our orderly, competent selves, with the buffer zone between our **inner reality** and the outer reality orderly and at peace, ready for whatever life brings.

We:

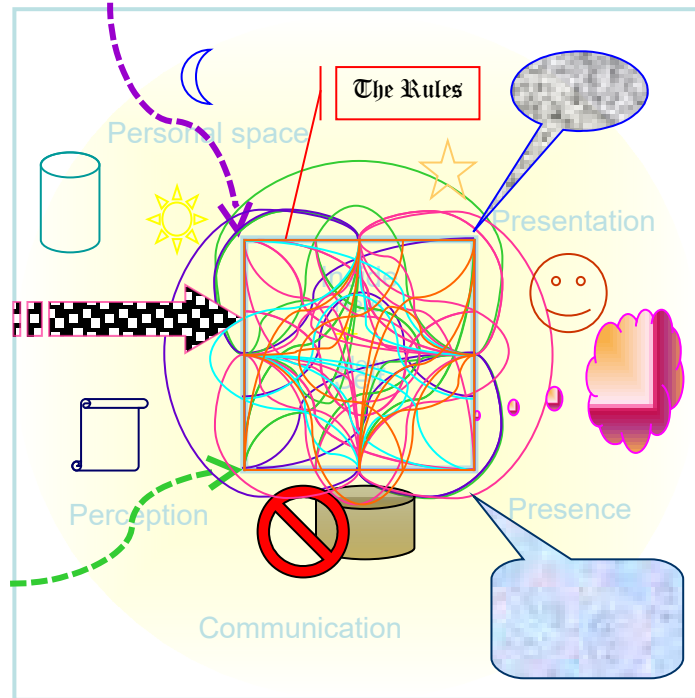
- ☞ Accept or deny
- ☞ Validate or discard
- ☞ Embrace or refute
- ☞ Assume
- ☞ Decide
- ☞ Express
- ☞ Act



Thoughts, knowledge, memory, concerns,
emotions, relationships – all active, busy, and intertwined -- complete with loose ends.

untested assumptions, hot buttons, tangles, plans and regrets, deadlines, unfulfilled needs, misguided intentions, core hurts, human frailties of all kinds, concerns for others.— accumulate and increase our internal discomfort and disorder.

Sooner or later, **Self** needs a way to realign, clean up, and reorder *inner reality*.



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Endnotes

ⁱ **Resonate:** I use this term and its related forms in a colloquial sense which builds on the various usages found in science and engineering. What these usages share is the concept that a patterned movement in one context can be induced in a related context. A useful starting point for understanding resonance is found at <http://www.answers.com/topic/resonance>. A daily life example that comes to my mind is my urge to hum or sing along with a vacuum cleaner: the 60-cycle hum induced in the vacuum cleaner motor by the frequency of household current, passing as sound waves, sets my vocal cords into vibration in the same or overtones of the same frequency. Resonance tends to amplify the generated vibrations in systems tuned to similar frequencies.

ⁱⁱ For at least 30 years, Clinical Pastoral Education at Saint Elizabeths (psychiatric) Hospital has relied on an article by Bruce Reed of the Grubb Institute, as reprinted by the Alban Institute: *The task of the Church and the role of its members* [Reed, 1975]. Relying on the work of Victor Turner, among others, and on the Tavistock conferences on group behavior, Reed offers the conclusion that *Self* oscillates between two states or modes of experience which he names **extra-dependence** and **intra-dependence**, respectively:

“One mode is characterised by man feeling weak in the face of difficulties and anxieties from within and without, in which condition he seeks to disengage himself from his normal social and working environment. ... In the second mode of experience man has a sense of wholeness and power which enables him to engage with some confidence in relations with the world and other people around him.” [Reed, (1975), p. 7]

Reed is specifically addressing the Church of England, and his choice of the language of dependence arises, I think from the authoritarian stance that accompanies the focus on sin and redemption common among the People of the Book. He portrays the role of the Church as providing a venue by which its members can surrender their independence for a finite duration, undergo a process of restructuring and refreshment through the offices of the Church, and return to the outside world ready to function dependent only upon themselves for a time.

While the language of dependence is not as applicable across the broadest range of cultures and needs, the paradigm of oscillation between daily life and a restoring process seems to me to be relevant to the overall role of Ritual.

ⁱⁱⁱ As this is being written, Cat Chapin-Bishop published a treatise in her blog, *Quaker Pagan Reflections*, illuminating her experiences in Meeting for Worship. [Chapin-Bishop, 2009] I commend it for analysis, along with the other Quaker examples.

Rather than trust in internet to maintain the text, I include it here in its entirety:

I need a rest. It feels like every day there is some new reminder of just how low my reserves have gotten; between the loss of our April vacation and the post-viral fatigue that weighed me down all year, I feel tired in a way that goes well beyond joints and muscles and even mental alertness. Teaching has worn me out this year. Living has worn me out. I feel spiritually tired.

I'm realizing this morning that I need not to go to meeting for worship today.

This will be the third week in a row I won't have made it to meeting. That is so not like me. When I think about that in terms of my relationship with my community, and especially with the fact of my serving on Ministry and Worship, I get a tight little knot in my belly.

But it's not changing anything for me, that little knot. I'm working very hard this year--I've had to work very hard this year--to learn the difference between being acting faithfully and allowing myself to be co-opted by gray-faced duty. I'm a past-master at convincing myself to take on and keep up with commitments. I suck at laying things down, largely because I have a terrible phobia about letting people down.

Caring for people is fine. Putting a concern for what they will think of you above honest discernment of what is and what is not my job... that's not so good.

Why do I go to meeting, anyway? So that people will think I'm All That? Surely not.

I know that part of what makes my spiritual life tick is my connection to other people, to members of my community. I find my link to Spirit, Pagan as well as Quaker, in the eyes and hands and faces of other human beings as often as not. God speaks to me in the intimate, loving connections I have with others, and I know it. So connecting with humans in honesty, in openness, in love, that connects me to what I most love and need that goes beyond the merely human.

More, I know that sometimes I can carry some of that Light with me; when I am open to Spirit and to a community at the same time, we all get fed. It's great. And it's what I've come to hope for on Sunday mornings, getting ready for meeting for worship.

But there's this other thing that I also need, and somehow it is, for me at least, more about being alone than with others. Peter used a phrase yesterday, *otium divina* I think he called it--divine idleness. And when he spoke those words, a spark passed into me, and I knew that those words fit what I need, what I'm lacking right now.

I am starved for divine idleness--for "unproductive" time spent alone, listening to rain run down a window pane or to leaves talking to themselves in the yard. I need to be empty for a little while, not filled with busy-ness or with community. Not even a spiritual community I love.

My tanks are on empty not so much for physical rest, though I need that, too, as for spiritual rest. I need to stop for a while.

I remember, two or three years ago, talking with J. H. at my meeting about how over-busy teaching sometimes made my life. The grading load on weekends, the feeling of being absolutely used-up at the end of each day... Sometimes I felt that attending meeting for worship was a luxury I didn't begin to have time for.

J. asked me what would happen if I just set aside a day and declared it to be Sabbath, and kept it.

Now, J. is someone I've heard called a "professional Quaker"--not in the sense of getting paid for it, so much as in the sense of someone who has given her spiritual life and leadings the kind of attention most Americans reserve for questions of secular career development. This is not to negate what I do--at the moment, teaching high school English--as my own spiritual leading. But she's someone who has a life well-arranged around her spiritual life and needs. I take her seriously, and I know she has worked a long, hard time to get where she is, where her life can be so well-ordered. And I take it that creating a life similarly ordered around spiritual leading is very much my business, too.

No, she doesn't have a stack of essays and exams to grade for Monday every week. No, she doesn't necessarily get it what the ebbs and flows of my own week and school year are. But that doesn't make her wrong.

What if I did keep a Sabbath? What would that be like?

Here's how the question is coming to me today. Today, I'm thinking less in terms of meeting attendance, important though that is, than I am of honoring what I'm sensing are my deep needs of the spirit this week.

As I said, I'm feeling most the need for that emptiness, that *otium divina*.

And I think that a real sabbath is one in which my spirit is open to the promptings of That Spirit, speaking to me. Unmediated by my expectations, narcissistic little worries, shoulds, oughts, or want-tos. What is God asking me to set aside for Her today?

Oddly enough, I don't think grading student papers will disrupt my sabbath. Oddly enough, though worship in my meeting is normally the clearest route I have in a week to communion with that Spirit, this week, I'm thinking that's not the case. This week, I think that true sabbath is about staying home and quietly, calmly, getting things done for the week--puttering my way back to another long week at work, rather than moving like clockwork through a First Day ordered for maximum efficiency in all things: worship, grading, prep.

I wish my life were simpler and quieter, or that I were somehow more energetic or efficient and could attend my meeting every week, year in, year out, without fail. I don't seem to have that life, though, and I don't see a way to get to it.

Sometimes, Sunday morning is the only day of the week I get to ask the question, "What is the Spirit of Life nudging me to do to honor my relationship with it?" It may not be the sabbath J. meant or I fantasize about, but asking that question and honoring the answer, week by week... that may be what it really means, to me, to keep the sabbath.

Right. So. No hurry to get to meeting, this morning. And probably, the kids will be getting their tests back tomorrow after all.

Delusion: A false belief based on incorrect inference about external reality that is firmly sustained despite what almost everyone else believes and despite what constitutes incontrovertible and obvious proof or evidence to the contrary. The belief is not one ordinarily accepted by other members of the person's culture or subculture (e.g., it is not an article of religious faith). When a false belief involves a value judgment, it is regarded as a delusion only when the judgment is so extreme as to defy credibility. Delusional conviction occurs on a continuum and can sometimes be inferred from an individual's behavior. It is often difficult to distinguish between a delusion and an *overvalued idea* (in which case the

individual has an unreasonable belief or idea but does not hold it as firmly as is the case with a delusion). [p. 821]

Delusion of reference: A delusion whose theme is that events, objects, or other persons in one's immediate environment have a particular and unusual significance. These delusions are usually of a negative or pejorative nature, but also may be grandiose in content. This differs from an *idea of reference* in which the false belief is not as firmly held nor as fully organized into a true belief. [p. 821-822]

Flight of ideas: A nearly continuous flow of accelerated speech with abrupt changes from topic to topic that are usually based on understandable associations, distracting stimuli, or plays on words. When severe, speech may be disorganized and incoherent. [p. 823]

Ideas of reference: The feeling that casual incidents and external events have a particular and unusual meaning that is specific to the person. This is to be distinguished from a *delusion of reference*, in which there is a belief that is held with delusional conviction. [p. 824]

Illusion: A misperception or misinterpretation of a real external stimulus, such as hearing the rustling of leaves as the sound of voices. [p. 824]

Magical thinking: The erroneous belief that one's thoughts, words, or actions will cause or prevent a specific outcome in some way that defies commonly understood laws of cause and effect. Magical thinking may be part of normal child development. [p. 825]

Overvalued idea: An unreasonable and sustained belief that is maintained with less than delusional intensity (i.e., the person is able to acknowledge that the possibility the belief may not be true). The belief is not one that is ordinarily accepted by other members of the person's culture or subculture. [p. 826]

Personality: Enduring patterns of perceiving, relating to, and thinking about the environment and oneself. Personality traits are prominent aspects of personality that are exhibited in a wide range of important social and personal contexts. Only where personality traits are inflexible and maladaptive and cause either significant functional impairment or subjective distress do they constitute a *Personality Disorder*. [p. 826]

<http://www.answers.com/topic/resonance>