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PARTNER-CENTERED LEADERSHIP™ - ACHIEVING BUSINESS EXCELLENCE - A PROVEN, COMPLEX ADAPTIVE SYSTEMS LEADERSHIP APPROACH

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INTRODUCTION

In this paper ideas and insights from John Bennett's Systematics (1996) are combined and blended with insights and discoveries developed in my studies of chaos and complexity theory. In about 1990 I discovered that Systematics provided the models and language for working in the new sciences of chaos and complexity. When two independent bodies of knowledge come together I pay very close attention. I am also intensely focused on the practical applications of this work and have developed ways to work with the people who want to move their organizations to levels of business excellence and build better safety performance, as well as more humane, considerate, productive workplaces at the same time.

I have worked in several hundred organizations using this work; the results are impressive and sustainable. These ideas focus on how people have decided to work together, and not on the specific kinds of work that they do. Therefore they apply to all sorts of organizations ranging from children's homes, to city government, to chemical plants, to sugar mills, steel mills, for-profit and not-for-profit organizations. These ideas also work effectively across cultures revealing the deeper patterns and processes that seem to be common to just about everyone. They work in China, Malaysia, Australia, New Zealand, the US, the UK, Italy and in parts of Africa.

Total business performance requires many dimensions of expertise: finance, sales, marketing, customer service, IT, research and produce innovation, manufacturing, human resources, shipping and distribution, and workplace safety and health are some examples. All of these areas are in constant flux and change. Whenever people come together to accomplish something there are complex interactions and dynamics. All organizations are Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS) in that all are experiencing these dynamics, learning and adapting as they go. They behave as if they are living systems. This is not recognized by most people, who believe that their organizations are more like machines that must be forced, directed and controlled from the top. When we learn to engage together as if we are in a living system, everything gets easier and makes more sense.

The Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS) approach applies to all these areas of work through openly sharing information, building trust and interdependence, and helping people to see how important their work is to the success of the entire business venture. This paper is focused on just one area, workplace safety and health, in order to provide more clarity to this new approach to leading. However it is very easy to broaden one's focus to all the other areas of work and to effectively apply this way of leading to all the other challenges facing the people in their organizations. The basic fundamentals of working with people developed in this paper apply to all aspects of their work, because the principles, relationships, and agreements they make about how to work together are consistent across the board.

SAFETY IS A COMPLEX ADAPTIVE SYSTEM:

Occupational safety, occupational health, and process safety management procedures and processes constantly interact with people. There are constantly changing demands of management, customers, competitors, the environment, and the community as a whole, along with all of the new regulations flowing from the state and federal regulators. These make safety a **Complex Adaptive System**. Our thinking needs to shift from seeing the world as linear, or a step-by-step system, where we believe we can establish clear cause-and-effect relationships, to seeing the world as it actually is with all of its dynamic, interacting networks and webs---seeing it as a CAS where simple cause/effect relationships don't apply. (in the bibliography is a list of a few references about organizations as complex adaptive systems).

The issues of accountability, responsibility, trust, and compliance swirl around chaotically. The use of more traditional training and consultants, more manuals, admonitions, and threats will not achieve the goal of reaching safety excellence. Pushing these things relentlessly only gets the people to compliance. But that is not nearly good enough! Too many people are still getting hurt. For example, in 2013, 4,585 people were killed at work and over 4,000,000 were hurt too seriously to return to work the next day. Process upsets such as fires, explosions, and occupational health exposures are still prevalent throughout organizations as well. Traditionally, everyone expected the plant manager to have all the answers regarding these safety issues, as well as knowing how to improve the faulty processes. If employees would just follow directions, then these processes would no longer pose a safety risk or problem. But, as the plant manager, I did not possess the tools to improve processes beyond compliance given the current business literature and practices at the time!

Realizing that the organization was a CAS, with everything connected to everything else and changing all the time provided a new way to think about things. Either/or thinking was inadequate—both/and thinking was needed. The old cause/effect analyses like root cause and the multiple layers of protection approaches are simply inadequate to helping the people in the organization to make lasting, positive improvements and changes. Opening up the deeper patterns and processes below these cause/effect models enables the people to make more fundamental, sustainable improvements in safety, production, and all other aspects of their business. Opening up this deeper analysis is the purpose of this paper.

I was first confronted with this complexity and the need for new thinking years ago when we had a fire in our plant. The way people worked changed instantly. They put down all the old, dysfunctional behavior and became a high-performance team that worked quickly, effectively, and well. It was beautiful to watch. People worked hard, accomplished a lot, and felt very good about their performance as we brought the plant back into production. But when normal operations resumed, their collaborative behavior shifted back to the dysfunctional individual and group behaviors, including cliques and bullying, us vs. them, change resistance, and the avoidance of responsibility and accountability. But the crisis showed us what was possible if only we had the courage to open up and the willingness to change.

When we learned to work together as a CAS it made a huge difference. We shifted from doing things to people and learned to work with each other in a new, more productive, healthier way. People were working for the good of the whole organization. My thinking has evolved and developed to where I call this way of working and leading **Partner-Centered Leadership™**.

We began to open up the flow of communication so that everyone knew what was going on and how important their part was in achieving safety excellence. Things began to improve quickly. When we began to get to know the people in the plant better and to treat them with respect and

dignity, to listen to them, to learn together, and to give their ideas serious consideration, trust improved and things got even better. When we encouraged people to take the lead in developing their ideas and thoughts, things got better yet. People gave their gift of what I call “discretionary energy”. This is the energy that people can give over and above the minimum required just to keep their job. Our change to a new culture was not a linear, step-by-step process; we did all these at the same time!

PARTNER-CENTERED LEADERSHIP™

Partner-Centered Leadership is the best way to achieve sustainable safety excellence in occupational safety, occupational health, and process safety management. I base this assertion on my experiences of living, working and learning in many aspects of safety over the last 55 years in manufacturing, research, offices, and construction, as well as consulting globally. My range of experience includes leading, managing, observing, auditing, being audited, emergency response, struggling through fires and injuries, community awareness, writing papers and bestselling books, and delivering conference presentations. I have lived and breathed safety. I have spent many years listening, learning, and talking with people about all aspects of safety.

The traditional, top-down systems and processes can get us to levels of compliance, but only rarely to levels of excellence. It is very hard to push injury rates down below a Total Recordable Injury Rate (TRIR) of one and sustain it for years, let alone drive occupational illnesses, waste, emissions, and process upsets towards zero as well. I define performance below a TRIR of one to be in the level of excellence. TRIR is a standard OSHA safety metric based on the number of employees and their work-related exposure hours over the course of a year. A TRIR of less than one means that fewer than one person in about 100 is injured in a year. The top-down processes like behavioral based safety, with roots in F. W. Taylor’s Principles of Scientific Management (1911), and B. J. Skinner’s (1974) behavioral psychology and operant conditioning, have greatly reduced injury rates, but we seem to have plateaued at the level of compliance (TRIRs in the range of one to five). Very few companies have achieved sustainable safety excellence with TRIRs well below one. In my own experience, when we did get close to excellence in facilities that I managed, it was very hard to sustain and we found it necessary to drive people constantly. Unfortunately, there were several serious injuries on my watch; I can assure you that you never want to experience this sort of failure.

But over the years I learned that through partnering with people, sustainable excellence could be achieved. We did it together! Everything we do in safety leadership and management is done through people. Safety excellence requires a very high level of commitment and responsibility by everyone involved giving his or her gift of discretionary energy. I could not achieve this by driving from the top. I know because I spent years trying and never got to safety excellence that way. In a culture that drives people, discretionary energy is withheld. The more I pushed, the more people held back.

THE THREE ELEMENTS OF PARTNER-CENTERED LEADERSHIP

Partner-Centered Leadership is a robust, proven way to bring people together to achieve sustainable levels of safety excellence. The first of the three elements consists of deeply held, shared, co-created beliefs and values such as:

- People want to be treated as people.
- People want to be treated fairly.

- Most people have good minds and can think quite well.
- Most people want to know what is going on.
- Most people want to be successful and want to work safely.
- Most people love their kids and want to go home safely, every day.
- Most people want to participate, to come together as partners to co-create their shared future in a structured, focused, intense, disciplined dialogue (I use the Process Enneagram™, a tool of complexity, to accomplish the aforementioned participation attributes).
 - People self-organize all the time, openly and freely sharing information, building relationships of trust and interdependence through their agreements about how they are willing to work together and create meaning in their work.
 - People want to be heard, listened to, valued, and respected.

These kinds of beliefs and values are critical in helping people resolve the conflicts of either/or thinking.

Many of the challenges in business are set up as either/or dyads like production or safety, quality or cost, quality or speed, customer service or speed. Dyads push people apart, producing conflict as the proponents of one side or the other defend their positions. These are “settled” usually by compromise or power, with the resulting decisions being less than the best.

Dyads are related like two ends of a stick. When people move away from either/or positions to both/and positions, then both ends of the stick can come into dialogue together, new information is discovered, and solutions to their dilemmas emerge. These decisions are usually far stronger than those coming out of compromise and power. Openly sharing information, respecting each other, and telling the truth as best you can enables these dyadic discussions to find creative, new, emergent solutions.

The dyad of safety and production encompasses the two ends of the same stick. We have to make product to sell and do it safely. Both safety and production are in all the discussions when it is set up as both/and, not either/or. When production is running smoothly, the discussions are more about production. If there is a process upset, the discussions are more about safety. Anyone can stop the process if he or she sees a safety problem, and then the people come together to get it straightened out and running again. It is critical for both safety and production to avoid injuries, fires, and explosions.

Everyone at all levels in the organization contributes from their unique roles and perspectives realizing that we are in this together. *Working with people* in partnership is fundamentally different from *doing stuff to people*, as is the case with most of the current approaches to safety, including many aspects of the transformational leadership processes. Since organizations are complex adaptive systems, the best way to work with them is from the complexity perspective. People, the internal and external environments, the technology, etc. are all evolving and interacting all the time. Nothing is sitting still. Every day is really a new day.

THE PROCESS ENNEAGRAM™; A COMPLEXITY TOOL

The best tool to work in this environment is the Process Enneagram (Knowles 2002) It provides the missing link between complexity theory and practical application, guiding an intense, focused dialogue on an important safety question by looking deeply at nine separate, but inter-related aspects of an organization (McCarter and White 2012). This dialogue takes place in a Safety Excellence Workshop with a cross-section of people in the organization who co-create their agreements about the “who” and “what” they are, and the “how” and “why” things work the way

they do. Everyone participates and, as the dialogue develops in these Safety Excellence Workshops, the whole of the organization, the parts, and the interaction among the parts open up. Individual and organizational transformations occur. The people are amazed at what they see and learn. Through this process they are able to co-create a living Strategic Safety Plan. Opportunities for change and new potentials become clear. This enables them to solve complex problems, make the personal connections they need to do the work, and release the emotional energy and commitment for the work to happen quickly and well, all at the same time.

The Process Enneagram, Figure 1, guides and informs the conversations that are needed to move towards safety excellence. A breakthrough in developing the Process Enneagram was in my discovery that Bennett's systems could be placed around the circumference of the figure.

- Point 1 The Monad renamed as "Intention"
- Point 2 The Dyad renamed as "Issues and Ambiguities"
- Point 4 The Triad renamed as "Principles and Standards"
- Point 5 The Tetrad renamed as "Work" (the actual, physical things going on)
- Point 7 The Pentad renamed as "Learning and Potential"
- Point 8 The Hexad renamed for "Structure" (the internal structure of the organization) and "Context" (the external environment in which the organization exists.)

Points 0, 3 and 6 renamed from Function, Being and Will to "Identity, Relationship and Information", the three elements required for self-organization. While these are tenuously related to Function, Being and Will, they work as their visible manifestation.

The Process Enneagram is all about patterns and processes. It has no relationship to the enneagram of personality.

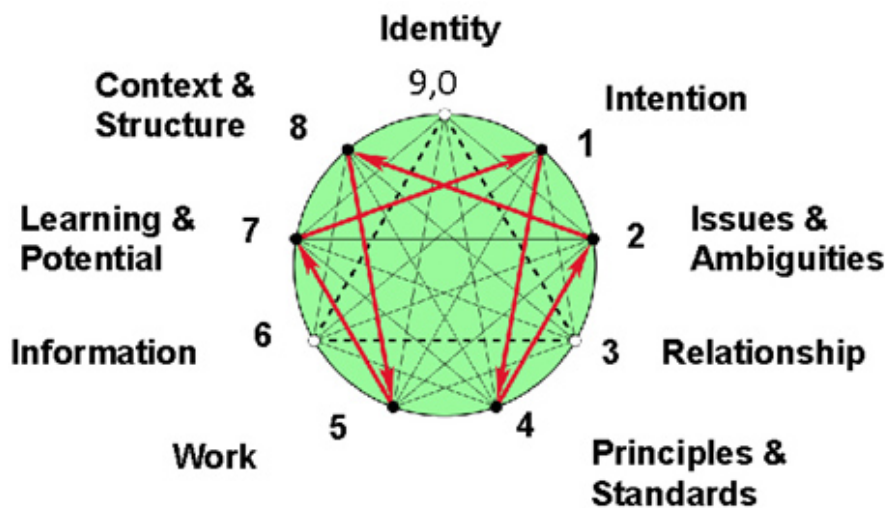


Figure 1 The Process Enneagram ©

This Safety Excellence Workshop begins when the leaders and other people are confronted with a complex problem and want to do something about it. This could be any serious issue, but for the purposes of this paper, the focus is reducing the number of workplace injuries and incidents. People from all levels and parts of the organization come together who are involved in some way with this safety problem. These constitute the system and need to be a part of creating the

solution. These people are managers, supervisors and front line workers from all parts of the organization including out-spoken critics and union members as well. The people themselves decide who should be invited to participate.

These people engage in The Safety Excellence Workshop, which begins with a question of importance that those who are participating have decided best describes what they want to work on. For example, it could be “How do we achieve a sustainable level of safety excellence?” It is best to have an experienced Process Enneagram facilitator lead the workshop because things can get quite heated as people open up. The meeting room is arranged with the chairs in a circle and big chart of the Process Enneagram posted on the wall. The facilitator or scribe keeps track of the dialogue placing the comments being made at the appropriate points. The facilitator ensures that everyone participates and no one dominates. Since there is a power gradient in the room having people from all levels engaged, opening up the dialogue is a challenge. A good way to open things is for several people to tell compelling stories about a close friend or relative being seriously injured or killed in the workplace. After 3-4 stories people see that they have come together as concerned people about improving safety. The top-level person is also asked to stay quiet for an hour or so. This also helps to make the room safe enough for people to be open and honest. The facilitator asks questions of the people to help them to explore for the best solutions, pushing to deepen the dialogue, but refraining from offering solutions. Each point is then discussed in depth, with the comments written onto the developing map. Thoughts and ideas emerge and are written down, forming a collage at each point. Everyone can see their own contribution posted on the big Process Enneagram map and that they have been heard. When all the points have been discussed, the people see who and what they are as a whole for the first time as they move their focus around the perimeter of the figure. They are often astonished at what they know as a group. The opening question has kept the group focused.

The discussion then moves to the pattern of the inner lines where they discover how and why things are happening as they do. In moving through the triad of 1, 4, 2 where the people have great value for their Intention at point 1 and move to 4 where their values for their Intention show up in tangible ways as their Principles and Standards, and then applying these as they move to point 2 where the Issues and Ambiguities are placed they discover personal transformation. Most of the issues and ambiguities show up as dyads. They discover this process for personal transformation as they make individual agreements (their Principles and Standards) as to how they will work together in a more positive way at point 4. In looking at the Issues and Ambiguities at point 2 from the perspective of new ways of working identified at point 4 like being respectful, listening, learning, etc. many of the dyads are resolved and they also learn to live in the ambiguity of those that can't be resolved like production and safety; new information emerges.

In moving through the triad 8, 5 and 7 they experience the transformation of the organization as they imagine a new way to organize themselves at point 8, do the work at point 5 and learn to work together in new ways becoming more self-organizing and flexible as they learn. They can begin to see the problems, and thus can act to correct them, beginning their journey to safety excellence. This Process Enneagram map is their living, Strategic Safety Plan. It is open for all to see, share and improve. It is usually posted in their meeting room and discussed each time they meet to reinforce it and modify it as conditions change continually responding to the changing environment, upgrading their Process Enneagram map and keeping the process alive. In the Safety Excellence Workshop, people are able to make the genuine connections with those with whom they need to work, and this allows real commitment to emerge and the release of positive emotional energy. They begin to give their gift of discretionary energy. In this process of working together, people co-create their future, and resistance to change virtually disappears.

The second element of Partner-Centered Leadership relates to the culture in which everyone works and in using their co-created Safety Strategic Plan. This culture is extremely complex: ideas, conditions, people, outside influences, etc. interact and change all the time. Every decision is made in these complex situations, yet no one has all the information, or can see everything. No one has his or her mind totally focused on the specific task at hand. These issues are opened up in the Safety Excellence Workshops so information flows more freely, a broader picture of the whole is seen, and people learn to help and support each other so that the best decisions are made in the moment of taking action. Trust and interdependence build; a new, healthier culture emerges. The organization is full of feedback, learning and dreaming of new opportunities opening up for them.

The third element of Partner-Centered Leadership is also created in the Safety Excellence Workshops. As people co-create their shared future, their vision, mission, principles of behavior, standards of performance, they are co-creating an important dimension of their culture, a container (an attractor) that holds the organization together. I call this the Bowl. The Bowl is an open system so energy and information flow freely in and out of it. The Bowl provides order, focus and coherence for the organization holding it together so that the people within the Bowl, those closest to the work, can self-organize and have the freedom to make the best decisions possible. A major responsibility of the leaders and managers is to help everyone understand and maintain the integrity of the Bowl through continuous conversations about their Strategic Safety Plan and modifying it as conditions changed to keep it alive. One of my messages to strengthen the Bowl was "I don't have a right to make my living where it is okay for someone to get hurt!" While we build on the positive, if someone becomes a problem by not working this way or by violating the integrity of the Bowl, management must address and deal with the situation. The Bowl is a strange attractor for the organization. Everyone has a responsibility to work within the Bowl, and everyone, including management, must be accountable to each other for living up to their shared agreements.

AN EXAMPLE

Partner-Centered Leadership is what we did when I was the Plant Manager from early 1987 to early 1995 at the DuPont Belle, WV Plant. The people cut the TRIR from about 5.8 to below 0.3 in less than three years and then sustained this level of performance for 16 years. From 1992 to 1995 (I was reassigned to another position after this), earnings rose 300%, emissions dropped 87%, and productivity rose 45%. Similar improvements have also been achieved with many organizations during my consulting work over the last 20 years.

The people learned to make the products effectively and efficiently and to work safely at the same time. Setting safety up as #1, which is the traditional position in the safety community, put it into opposition to production and created needless arguments. Seeing safety and production as two ends of the same stick enabled people to come together, partnering for excellence in both safety and production. Depending on the particular situation, sometimes production dominated the discussions and sometimes safety dominated the discussions. However, both production and safety were in all discussions.

The same Safety Excellence Workshop design and process has been used successfully to address important problems in a variety of organizations and cultures as diverse as governments, schools, not-for-profit organizations, children's homes, businesses, and manufacturing in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, China, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. The fundamental work in these Excellence Workshops is about who and what the organization is and

how and why things happen as they do. With this foundation, the people can co-create their agreements about how they will live and work together.

Figure 2 is a graph of the DuPont Belle Plant TRIR for 1983-2006. It shows the 1987-1990 results of the harsh, top-down management process I used to get to the level of compliance, and then the shift to safety excellence in 1991-2007 using the Partner-Centered Leadership approach. The technical basis for developing this data was consistent throughout 1983-2007. After 2006 the leadership processes began to drift back to the top-down approach and the safety performance fell apart in 2010. This curve provides the basic data to support the DuPont Bradley Curve.

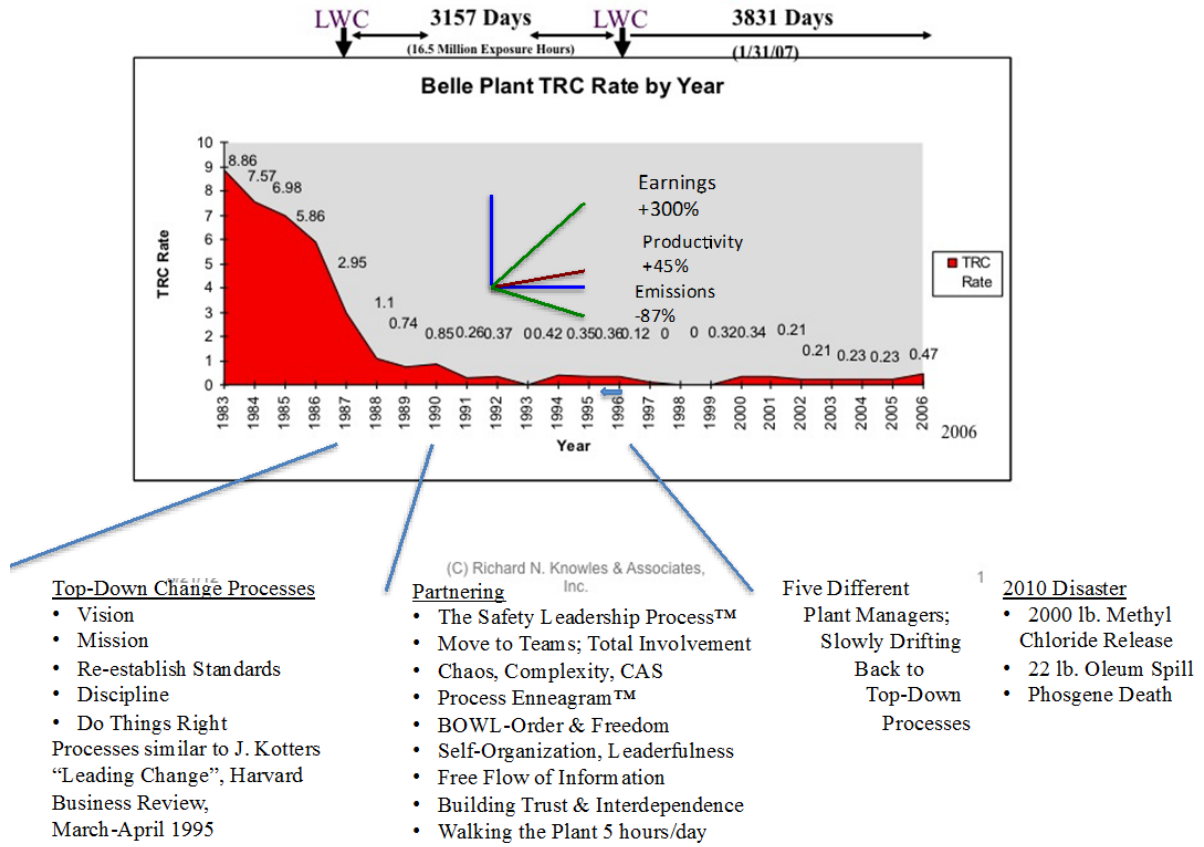


Figure 2 Results are a Function of the Leadership Process

Partner-Centered Leadership builds trust and interdependence. People know what is going on and they see the important role that they play in the total success of the organization. Most people like to live this way. While this may sound soft, I can assure you that there is a very hard side to this. Businesses have to provide high-quality, affordable products and services at competitive costs to survive. The safety, health, and environmental training and standards of performance must be maintained. High levels of integrity are required. Managers and supervisors must have the courage and commitment to go into their organizations to talk with, listen to, learn from each other, and develop better ways to do things with people. This is not a spectator sport. During the Safety Excellence Workshops, participants, from top to bottom, become sharply focused on their safety intention and co-create their Principles of Behavior and Standards of

Performance so that they all know what is expected and required. They hold each other accountable to live up to these agreements. This requires an on-going dialogue to keep the work active, relevant, and constantly adapting to the changing environment. This is the 1, 4, 2 triad of personal transformation coming to life. The people learn to work in more self-organized ways in a flatter structure as the 8, 5, 7 triad of organizational transformation coming to life. The managers set the overall direction for the organization. In these Safety Excellence Workshops, all the participants create a large Process Enneagram™ map that is then posted on the wall of their meeting room and is reviewed each time they get together. They talk about how they are doing and whether changes to the map are needed. Revisions and upgrades are made as they go and written right onto the Process Enneagram™ map so this continues to be a living Strategic Safety Plan. People talk about the safety in their morning toolbox meeting. This enables them to work and live in the dynamic complexities of their day-to-day experiences and achieve sustainable levels of excellence. Walking around, talking, listening, learning, sharing, and being authentic are part of the process of building the Bowl. The Bowl is a metaphorical container consisting of our mission, vision, principles and standards and expectations. This container holds the self-organizing processes together providing order and focus as well as the space for people close to the work to make the best decisions possible within the Bowl. As long as people worked within the Bowl I did not need to know the details of what was happening. For 5 years I was helping to build the Bowl and its understanding as I walked the Plant interacting with the people; I did this for 5 hours a day, everyday.

Ideally, those at the top of the corporation support, engage in, and provide the resources for this work to happen. Total safety performance is a key part of everyone's performance appraisal and pay. At the very least, the people at the top need to support this work, provide the resources to those at the sites, and build this into the performance appraisal and pay systems. People from marketing, sales, research, product development, etc. are included along with those in the manufacturing line.

STORIES

As we learned to work this way, many people in the organization began to step forward and take the lead in working more safely and productively. The organization became 'leaderful'. When people saw that something needed to be done, they stepped forward without having to be told and took the lead to fix things. They talked with people and made important decisions. It was through these initiatives that much of our performance improved and was then sustained for 16 years.

Story 1 One day as I walked the plant (I did this for five hours a day for five years, but refrained from making decisions in the field so as to not undermine the line organization) an operator told me that he, on his own, had shut down one of our units to fix a small leak at the 150-foot level of a distillation column. He didn't wait until we had a major release. He was working within the Bowl, saw what needed to be done, and simply did it. It was thrilling to see a person empower himself, step forward, make a sound decision, and do the right thing. Having done this he helped us to avoid a future environmental incident. As he shared this event, I thanked him and encouraged him to keep it up. In creating an environment of openness, mutual respect, and trust and interdependence, the Bowl, these sorts of things happen.

Story 2 On another day, a mechanic who was assigned to watch over a group of contractors told me that he, on his own initiative, had sent them off the plant because they were not following

our safety procedures properly. As we shared the experience we both felt good. This person was working within the Bowl, saw what needed to be done, and did it.

Story 3 During the first part of my years at the Belle Plant, we had a chronic demurrage problem with vendor's trucks parked all around the plant. Demurrage is the rent that is paid to a vendor for keeping their truck or other container on the plant after it has been unloaded. While I complained each time when the quarterly report came out showing almost \$200,000 in demurrage expenses, nothing much happened. But when we had moved to more self-managed teams and had reassigned first-line supervisors away from the shifts, the operators decided that we should get the trucks off the plant because of the congestion they caused. Within six months they had driven our demurrage costs down by over 85%. The operators and I had a good time, sharing this story in the rain one afternoon as I was walking the plant and they were fixing a drainage problem. These operators were working within the Bowl, saw what needed to be done, and did it.

Story 4 One morning, an operator who was on the site environmental team, called me to complain about what she had heard as she drove in for her 6 am shift. Two guys on a radio talk show were discussing presumed pollution from our plant. The night was clear, the moon was shining, and the steam plumes were bright white. The talk-show guys thought it was chemical pollution, but the operator knew it was only water vapor. Then she told me that she had called them up and invited them to come to the plant the following Monday afternoon for a visit. She instructed me that I was to talk about plant-wide issues during the first hour. Then she took care of the remaining two hours. Here was the plant manager following the instructions of a shift person who took the lead on a public affairs issue. It was one of the best visits we ever experienced. These same two guys talked for the next three weeks (on the radio talk show) about all the good people they had met at the plant and the good work we were doing. This operator was working within the Bowl, saw what needed to be done, and got it done without leadership approval or supervision. We both felt good as we talked together about this event.

CONCLUSIONS:

With the Partner-Centered Leadership approach, all aspects of the safety performance improved, and then this attitude and desire for improvement flowed into all the rest of our organization's work. The more that we worked together this way, the better we became.

This paper shows the dynamical interaction of the ideas of Systematics with those of chaos and complexity. Organizations behave as if they are living systems and this is the most effective way to engage together. All through these experiences, trust and interdependence built and people learned how to sustain the work themselves.

Partner-Centered Leadership is the pathway to sustainable business excellence.

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METAPHYSICAL TESTAMENT

Metaphysical Testament (translated by Harold Saurat) is on page 311 of the collection *Early Earth* (George A Vanderburgh)

Philosophy in particular, and Logic, do not establish any serious proof of the soul's immortality. They only present very vague indications which need to be helped along by sentiment before they can be found to be convincing.

Thus, as impending death comes closer, *nothing* remains of personality, consciousness disappears without realization of such a brutal shock. Psychology is of no use, no element of personality can strengthen a reasoned belief in its permanency.

Like the knowledge of God, the knowledge of immortality must come from outside, by revelation, by experiencing events originating outside personality. This can be compared to a man going bankrupt, losing capital, income, dwelling, credit, etc....Nothing is left over, but he may be saved by assistance from outside. This is concentrated in the celebrated words spoken on behalf of humanity: "My Father, I entrust my spirit into thine hands." Everything must be entrusted into his hands. Even self-belief must be abandoned: return to nothingness. It is God who saves us from this nothingness. It is not an element of our self which is permanent, it is a redeeming and a resurrection. Why?

The worry about salvation is itself but quintessential selfishness. We must give up the ego and entrust everything to God, even, especially, consciousness of one's self. There will only remain that part of us which God will keep.

As a counterpart to this state of mind, there is Hope, the second virtue: to die, to cease completely, to abandon everything, but with the full hope that God will return it to us: to give oneself up to total annihilation, but within the hands of God. To be nothing and to consent to it, and thus to prove that one trusts the promise: "Tonight thou shalt be with me."

Denis Saurat, April-May 1958

THE BIRTH OF DEATH: THE ORIGINS OF ART IN THE CAVES OF FRANCE

by J.M. White



“Works of art are not bare reproductions of things seen but expressions of the principles from which nature itself derives.” Plotinus



THE VEZERE VALLEY

The Vezere Valley in the Dordogne region in the south of France has been called the cradle of humanity. This small river valley has the greatest density of Paleolithic caves and rock shelters in Western Europe. (1) Where the river flows through the small town of Les Eyzies-de-Tayoc it creates a series of spectacular cliff faces with rock shelters at their bases. These rock shelters made ideal habitation sites and were used for tens of thousands of years. Many of the cliffs reach a height of two hundred feet. There are over one hundred and fifty rock shelters along the river basin.

The Vezere Valley is the birthplace of the first great cultural flowering of humanity. This began about 40,000 years ago and continued for nearly 30,000 years. Even during the height of the Ice Age the Vezere Valley was not overrun by glaciers and the climate was mild. Along with the rock shelters there are twenty-four caves with Paleolithic paintings and engravings. It was here that Paleolithic art was first recognized and documented. Fifteen of the Paleolithic sites have been put on the World Heritage List.

The village of Eyzies has less than a thousand people yet this small French village is at the geographic center of the birth of art and has one of the greatest Paleolithic museums in the world. A ten mile radius around Eyzies would include some of the most remarkable Paleolithic sites anywhere in the world. Scholars estimate that the Paleolithic population around Eyzies was never more than 300 to 400 people. But this has to be taken in the context that the entire population of Europe at that time was probably about 3,000 people. In these circumstances Eyzies would have been the metropolis of its day with about a tenth of the total population of Europe living under these rock shelters.

CAP BLANC

The most famous of all the rock shelters in the area is Cap Blanc. It is off the main road a few miles outside Eyzies along a winding country lane. The museum on the site has some artifacts found in the excavations done in 1910-1911. There are several Venus statues along with some flint tools and some jewelry.



The bas reliefs that make it so famous are now enclosed in the museum. It is a startling experience, a jarring step back in time, to step from the modern architecture of the museum through a door directly into the rock shelter. The guide has a laser pointer she uses to outline each of figures sculpted out of the limestone on the back wall of the overhang. The excavators in 1910 were looking for portable artworks and it came as a surprise when they finally recognized they were uncovering a series of bas relief sculptures. By the time they understood what they were seeing they had destroyed some of the figures.

The guide points out where the ancients carved holes in the leading edge of the overhang to make loops where they could run a rope to hold a hide curtain that covered the front of the overhang.



Studies have shown that the back wall was painted red and the sculpted figures were painted white, so it must have made a very dramatic presentation. The rock shelter is about fifty feet long and twenty feet deep and the rock face in the back is covered with figures carved out of the limestone. Some of the figures are easily discernible, however without the laser pointer much of what the guide was showing us would have been invisible to our untrained eyes. The sculptures have been dated to about 15,000 BP.

The first of the great figures is a large horse facing right with another horse beside it. The whole back wall is covered with animals, as the guide's laser pointer outlines them, the designs pop out.

There is a deer, a small depiction of a human hand, then two bison facing left. At the end of the frieze is a small indentation in the wall and inside it they discovered a human burial. The skeleton was sold to the Field Museum of Chicago but they have a rather macabre reproduction of it in situ. It is a woman's skeleton, perhaps the matriarch of the clan that produced the frieze. Research indicates the sculptor was left-handed and the musculature of the skeleton indicates she was left-handed, opening the possibility that she created the frieze. The skeleton gives the place a funerary atmosphere and I feel a sense of awe standing in front of the first example of Ice Age art we have seen on the trip. It is magnificent and I feel that the horses on the frieze are psychopomps which accompany the woman buried there on her journey into the afterlife. I hate to leave when the guide motions for everyone to go back into the museum.

This rock shelter is part of a larger complex and I ask the guide about the possibility of seeing Laussel which is the next in the line of rock shelters that are nestled against the ridge line. She says it is not open to the public but is only a few hundred yards from where we are now. The most important find from Laussel is the famous Venus holding a bison horn with thirteen stripes. It has been removed and is on display at the prehistoric museum in Bordeaux.

We leave Cap Blanc with a feeling of fulfillment. There are very few surviving bas relief sculptures from Paleolithic times and it is a privilege to get to stand in front of one of them. The sense of mystery surrounding it is palpable and gives us a sense of relatedness to the first great flowering of the artistic impulse that still resonates across this great time span.

BERNIFAL



There are three world famous caves in Eyzies: Font-de-Gaume and Combarelles are right in town, the third, Bernifal, is just east of town. The owner of Bernifal is a ninety year old man who leaves little hand written signs announcing the next tour at a small parking lot beside the road. Bernifal is the only cave on our itinerary that has not been modified for the tourist trade. It has no electric lights, no handrails, no concrete steps and the floor of the cave has not been dug out to create paved walkways. It is exciting to think that we get to see a cave that is substantially the way it was left by the Paleolithic people who used it as a sanctuary. We walk back the path with another couple who are from Belgium. He speaks both French and English so that is really nice. It is a beautiful walk along the little creek that leads back to the cave. The woods are filled with ferns and a deep bed of moss covers the rocks, the ground and the tree trunks so the whole place looks like an enchanted forest. We arrive at the entrance to the cave and it isn't long before another couple walk up. They are from Spain.

Then in a few minutes a car comes up the path, I am surprised since it is a narrow path but there is Gilbert Pemendrant getting out of a little French car. He is white haired and hunched over with age, his face a bit flushed, his old tattered jacket looks as old as he is.

Gilbert tells us the cave has been in his family since its discovery. The date seems to vary according to the sources. The guidebook I read said the cave was discovered in 1902. However

Gilbert tells us it was first discovered by his grandparents in 1898. He says Abbe Henri Breuil was living in the area and he came to them and asked if they knew of any caves. They told him about a place where cool air came out of a crevasse and took him to see. They dug it out and were looking down from the roof of a cavern. They had to use a ladder to get in and Breuil immediately knew what he had found. They used the ladder up until 1933 when they figured out where the original entrance was located. He says Henri Breuil documented twenty-six figures when he first explored the cave.

He pulls out his keys and opens the iron door and we feel a rush of cool air come out of the cave. Gilbert has a large flashlight in one hand and a red laser pointer in the other. He says there are 120 documented figures and more are discovered each year. He says the art work is over 30,000 years old, making it among the oldest discovered anywhere. Later I noted the guidebooks say it is 14,000 BP so it makes me wonder.



We gather just inside the door and as my eyes adjust to the light I see a red circle painted on a white drapery of stone that cascades down from the ceiling. Then Gilbert points his laser light at the red circle and says it is the eye of a buffalo. I had been looking right at it and all I could see was the red circle, now almost magically a three dimensional image of a bison's head appears. It was masterful how they had depicted the buffalo so realistically with so few brush strokes using the natural contours of the rock face.



Then just a couple of feet to the right of the bison head I see a human face. It looks ghostly, shadowy and is looking right at us. It is not realistic at all, but spooky, dark and mysterious.

There are stalagmites growing up from the cave floor and beautiful rock flows covering the walls. There are human hand prints although they look very small, perhaps those of a child. He shows us a horse, a bison, a mammoth and then a star design that is very unusual. He leads us into another chamber and has us get down on our hands and knees to show us a panel at ground level covered with engravings. At another place he points the light at the ceiling and shows us a mammoth on one of the highest places in the cavern. It would have required elaborate scaffolding to paint at that height.

He says the entire cave is 250 feet long. He leads us back further and the chamber narrows and he shows us a series of black dots on one wall next to a barbed sign. He says there are about sixty painted images and sixty engraved images all together. He points out a tectiform and says scientists have taken pictures of it with infrared cameras that show it is made of 130 small dots in a design like a house with a slanted roof and a central beam.



In one place he shines the light on a little niche high up on one wall and we see a flint blade that was stored there by the ancient artists who designed the engravings.

Being here conveys the sublime consolation of art, its silent solace reaching across the immensity of time. It has a natural candor and a dream-like improbability. It feels like a mineshaft into a different dimension. The art is a projection of a precocious imagination, of a will too powerful, too deliberate, too intimate to be ignored. It is as if the artist were possessed by an insatiable desire to communicate experiences which far transcend the range of thought or cognition. Words could only debauch the experience, even the splendors of poetry can only pollute the purity of the experience. The artist has captured something inherent in the human spirit and sealed it with a lambence that fatigues abstract thought and renders it impotent. The art has a deep melodious sense of concentrated insight into something buried in the pre-conscious. There is much to be learned here, but what it is is still a mystery. It is a mirror which when looked upon reflects a different time, a different place, a different face. There is a haunting illumination unbound by time or mental categories. It is outside the typical order imposed by the mind and leaves us befuddled with an anguished curiosity and sensual wonder far greater than the order of any self-knowledge. It is a powerful blow which is stunning. It is a mighty draught as if time has been fermenting in this underground cauldron. It is a mystery play for which we are uninitiated.

Once we are outside the cave he locks the door and collects his fees. Gilbert lives nearby and his family has been in the area for countless generations. His house is actually tucked up under a large rock shelter. It is amazing to think that this old guy is a troglodyte still living under a rock shelter.

THE HISTORY OF PREHISTORY

In 1865 Edouard Lartet (1801–1871) came to a rock shelter in the Vezere Valley looking for Paleolithic artifacts. He was one of the first scholars to use the word prehistory and to make it a recognized branch of science. During his dig he discovered a plaque of ivory engraved with the figure of the mammoth. At that time the paradigm of history was the biblical story of creation. The image of this mammoth, obviously drawn by a human hand at a time when humans and mammoths co-existed, shattered the paradigm of biblical history. Here was the first definitive proof that ancient humans were contemporaneous with extinct mammoths. The biblical paradigm was broken and once broken could not be put back together. This discovery caused a seismic shift in awareness to a new vision of history.

The earliest reference to cave art is from 1458 when Pope Calixtus III, who was from northern Spain, condemned the villagers in the area for performing ceremonies in what he called, “the cave with the horse pictures”. (2) This led to speculation that a remnant of ancient religion survived to the middle of the fifteenth century. Other caves have graffiti that indicates they were visited as far back as 1660. From 1850 on evidence began to mount regarding the antiquity of humans in Europe. In 1856 the first Neanderthal skull was found in Germany.

The cave called Altamira is on the northern coast of Spain in an area that has seventeen decorated caves. In 1868 a man hunting with his dog saw a rabbit run down a hole under a rock. The dog tried to dig it out and when the man examined the hole he could feel cool air coming out of the ground. He notified the land owner, Marcelino de Sautuola, who was interested in prehistory. Sautuola had the cave opened and started excavating the floor. He attended the 1878 conference in Paris where Paleolithic artifacts were on display. These had been dug out of the cave floors and rock shelters in France and Germany and he was anxious to see if he could find anything similar in Spain. Before long he was turning up artifacts similar to what he had seen at the Paris exhibition. Then in 1879 he happened to take his eight year old daughter with him. When he was digging Maria happened to look up and when she did she saw animals painted in bright colors all over the ceiling. She called out, "Look Papa, oxen." He looked up to discover that, while he was looking down at the dirt, one of the masterpieces of Paleolithic art was just above his head.



In 1880 Sautuola published a report speculating that the paintings were made by the same Paleolithic peoples who created the artifacts found in the floor of the cave. He went to the next International Congress of Prehistoric Archaeology and to his dismay the leading French prehistorian actually got up and walked out during the presentation. All the leading authorities declared the paintings were faked by Sautuola. It would be two decades before the tide of opinion would shift. However, publicity about the statuary and tools on display created an onslaught of people digging the floors of caves looking for valuable artifacts. In this flurry of activity people uncovered engravings buried under deep layers of sediment and by 1902 numerous other painted caves had surfaced. The evidence indicating the paintings were made by the same Paleolithic peoples who created the carved bones and stone tools had become overwhelming. The man who had walked out of the presentation in Lisbon now wrote a paper admitting his mistake. It was unfortunately too late for Sautuola who died in 1888.

In 1901 a school teacher in Eyzies discovered both Font-de-Gaume and Combarelles in the immediate vicinity of the village. Both caves were filled with hundreds of engravings and paintings. In 1906 Henri Breuil, who was to lead the next generation of scholars, published the first major study of cave art. By 1920 they had installed electric lights at Font-de-Gaume and opened it to the public.

Until 1940 the little town of Montignac was a quiet farming community on the banks of the Vezere River. During that summer four local teenagers looking for adventure went hiking on a hill just outside town near the ruins of a 15th century chateau. The boys, led by Marcel Ravidat and his dog Robot, stumbled upon a depression and Robot started digging in the bottom of the hole. Ravidat saw the dog had created an opening about six inches across. The next day Ravidat and his ragtag buddies took a shovel and lights back to the cave. It took an hour of digging to open a hole large enough to crawl into. When they entered a long corridor one of the boys lifted a lamp to see

how high the ceiling was and saw an amazing array of bulls and horses painted on the walls. The boys knew they had found something amazing, they got extremely excited and started dancing around. The boys went to the teacher at the local school and he went out to have a look. Once inside he reported that he felt nearly mad with the excitement of seeing the painting which looked fresh and bright. In a small town the news spread quickly and everyone wanted to see. Ravidat set up a tent by the entrance to the cave and within a few weeks hundreds of people had come to see the cave.

By a strange coincidence Henri Breuil was staying fifteen miles away. The boys enlarged the entrance so the 63 year old “Pope of Prehistory” could make his way into the cave. Once inside he looked at the paintings and declared the boys had found the Sistine Chapel of Paleolithic art. When Lascaux was officially opened to the public in 1948 Ravidat was the first tour guide. The hall of bulls has some of the most magnificent Paleolithic paintings ever discovered, the largest is over eighteen feet long. Lascaux was closed to the public in 1963.



There are over 360 caves with Paleolithic paintings or engravings in Europe. New caves are discovered almost every year. The cave at Chauvet was discovered in 1994 and has been the subject of a popular documentary by Werner Herzog called *The Cave of Forgotten Dreams*. It was completely undisturbed and has some of the greatest examples of Paleolithic art ever discovered.

THEORIES ABOUT PALEOLITHIC ART

From the time of their first discovery a number of theories have evolved to explain the meaning of Paleolithic art. The first was, “art for art’s sake”, speculating the original artists were producing art work for their own creative gratification. Then came the idea, propagated by Henri Breuil, that the images were a form of sympathetic magic so the hunters would have success in the hunt. This was based on ethnological research with existing hunter gatherer tribes that were making rock art into the late 19th century. Archaeologists quickly pointed out that the animals the Paleolithic people were eating were not the same animals depicted on the cave walls.

The next theory was based on the structuralist approach founded by Claude Levi-Strauss. They assumed the animals were mythic totems. However, with no record of the myths there was no way to confirm that this is the case and the structuralists were not able to find a convincing interpretation that indicated a mythic structure that was represented by the images. By 1950 this interpretation had been supplanted by a theory that ethnological information from modern hunter gatherer cultures should not be applied to the Paleolithic artworks. Instead interpretation should be based solely on the archaeological information from the caves. A new breed of archaeologist, led by Andre Leroi-Gorham, relied on the positioning of the paintings and their placement in relation to one another and the frequency of their appearance. They inventoried all the images, and drew what conclusions they could glean from their findings. However, as new caves continued to be found, their findings didn’t hold up as additional data became available.

In the past decade, the theory has arisen that the art is shamanistic. This is a return to ethnographic data from shamanistic cultures which made rock art related to shamanistic rites. Following this lead the researchers attempted to apply this data to the cave art and see if the images on the cave walls could be illustrative of shamanistic rituals. David Lewis-Williams, an expert on the rock art of South Africa, used ethnographic data from informants who reported that rock art was part of a shamanistic tradition. Lewis-Williams joined forces with Jean Clottes, who is the outstanding Paleolithic scholar in France today, and they wrote a book called *The Shamans of Prehistory: Trance and Magic in the Painted Caves*. They believe the artwork was a reflection of trance states induced by psychotropics along with dancing, drumming and fasting. This is currently the predominant theory although the case has not been made in a definitive manner and the mystery of the cave art still remains.

HUNTER GATHERER BANDS

It is impossible to understand cave art without some understanding of the society and culture from which it arises. The people who created the art were semi-nomadic hunter gatherers who lived in bands that numbered between fifteen to thirty people. The ethnological data from hunter gatherer cultures has provided a rich resource from which to surmise how Paleolithic hunter gatherers structured their reality. The hunter gatherer band is the oldest known human social organization. There are still hunter gatherer bands, but precious few, and many of them are threatened with assimilation. However, hundreds of examples have been studied in the past century. The scholars have found that hunter gatherers live a life of economic, political and social egalitarianism. All food and property was shared.

Anthropological research indicates that at the band level all members have the same political status and all are equal. This has been termed acephalous and in these societies there are no headmen or chiefs. Political hierarchy doesn't come into play until society moves from bands to tribes to chiefdoms. In nomadic bands there is a natural prohibition on accumulation of material goods based on what you can carry. There is an uncentralized system for distribution of goods, especially of meat. The band has built-in social devices that mitigate against bullying or selfishness. In Christopher Boehm's *Hierarchy in the Forest: The Evolution of Egalitarian Behavior* (3) he says, "This egalitarian approach appears to be universal for foragers who live in small bands that remain nomadic, suggesting considerable antiquity for political egalitarianism."

In the paradigm of the ancient world view the cosmos was divided into three realms; an upper world occupied by the sun, the moon, and the stars; the middle world occupied by humans and animals; and the lower world occupied by subterranean creatures. They believed a person could enter a trance and travel in the upper and lower realms and could intervene to heal illnesses, to see into the past and future and to help the dead on their journey to the afterlife.

In Paleolithic times many of our most fundamental values, things like ownership and private property, did not exist. There were no chiefs, no bosses, no headmen, no police. There was no money. Kinship was matriarchal. It was long before monotheism. These values were nurtured in a world that may well have antedated shamanism, an era in which priestesses represented the

mysterious forces of the cosmos. Finally the animals were more sacred than humans. They were exalted beings who acted on intuition without having to think about what to do.

CAVE ART

Forty thousand years ago something happened in the evolution of consciousness. The capacity for symbolic expression reached some threshold and art was born. People began to paint, to sculpt and to wear ornaments. To delve into this mystery requires an ability to explore the prehistory of the mind, to trace the stages of the evolution that lead up to the creation of symbolic thinking. Standing in front of Paleolithic cave paintings transports the mind back in time to the birth of art deep underground on the walls and ceilings of subterranean galleries. These visionary temples are shrines to the mysteries of inspiration, illuminating the first myths to emerge as enduring art in labyrinthine grottoes. This tradition of cave art would last for over 25,000 years before art came out of the caves as the practice of agriculture and domestication of animals changed everything.

Certain motifs appear over and over in different caves across this time span. These include: animals, especially horses and bison, handprints, dots, stylized vulvas, tectiforms, meanders, grids and abstract signs. In all of cave art there is not one realistic depiction of a full human body. This perhaps reflects some taboo or cultural restriction regarding the depiction of humans. Males are often depicted like cartoon figures. Women are more prominently represented with the famous Venus statues that emphasize fecundity, their breasts, bellies and hips swollen in deformed idealization. Other portable art included horses and other animals, sculpted antler atlants, batons and phalliforms. There are also bones with patterns of notches that imply they were keeping track of something, possibly the phases of the moon.

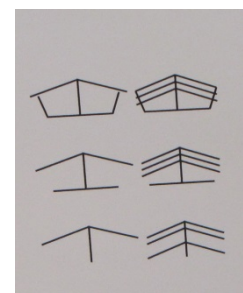
ANIMALS



The great scholar Andre Leroi-Gourhan (4) inventoried the figures in 66 caves. He counted 2,188 separate figures that included 610 horses, 510 bison, 205 mammoths, 176 ibexes, 137 aurochs, 135 hinds, 112 stags, 84 reindeer, 36 bears, 29 lions and 16 rhinos and some composite imaginary beings. The animals were portrayed almost entirely without background, sometimes they appear to be almost floating with their hooves dangling as if they are not touching the ground.

TECTIFORMS

Tectiforms occur in many of the caves. They have the appearance of a hut, often with a central pole, sometimes with walls and a sloping roof. At first tectiforms were taken to be Paleolithic houses but archaeological information has contradicted this and no structures resembling tectiforms have been found in habitation sites. There are ethnological analogies to similar figures where the design is a



spirit trap created to hold the spirit of the dead. They are sometimes homes for the spirits of the ancestors. So they appear to serve a funerary purpose.

THE GREAT GODDESS

The imagery of the Great Goddess reaches back to the earliest Paleolithic sculptures of bone, ivory and stone and the concomitant symbols; the vulvas, triangles, chevrons, zig-zags, meanders and cupmarks. The theme of the Goddess is the mystery of birth and death. She is the regeneratrix represented with images of fertility and fecundity. The cave is the womb of the Goddess. She is represented by the coiled snake along with multi-lined nested circles, spirals, cup shapes and whirling parallel lines. Marija Gimbutas, in her book *The Language of the Goddess*, indicated that hands imprinted on cave walls are the touch of the goddess imparting her presence apotropaically, to avert negative influences. (5) The Goddess represented the source of all life, its primordial unity found in water from which all life emerged.

Many of the amazing Goddess statues have enormous breasts and buttocks with no facial features and no feet. The Goddess is fertility incarnate. The ancients recognized that all forms of life are born from the earth, nourished by its bounty and returned to it after death. Even during the Neolithic period women were the heads of clans and priestesses until about 4000 years ago when the patriarchy of the Proto-Indo-Europeans appeared from the east.

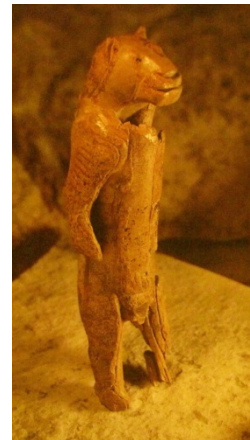
Paleolithic symbology represents the deity as the woman's body with exaggerated characteristics associated with birth and nourishment of the young. The iconology of the Goddess was abstracted into the triangle, the diamond, the V, the breast shape, the cup, and the circle which represent epiphanies of regeneration. These geometric motifs are symbolic design elements, not simply aesthetic decorations. These symbols are hieroglyphs of the life force of creation. The pubic triangle, the delta repeated in the chevron is the shorthand for the Goddess. The zig-zag is the earliest iconic design symbolizing the vulva and the water wherein we all begin inside the womb. The meander is the wave on the water and the snake slithering across the earth. These meandroid designs which cover large sections of the cave walls are symbols of beginning and becoming.



The image of the vulva is one of the most reoccurring motifs in Paleolithic art and has been found in artwork that dates from the earliest examples of cave art to the end of the Paleolithic era about 10,000 BP. It is found deep underground in the caves and on the walls of the rock shelters and on portable art. The vulva is the place of generation, the place of fecundity and the place of pleasure for both the female and the male.

THERIANTHROPE

Therianthropes are composite human and animal figures. Only a very few have been found, all of them in deep hidden recesses. One has a human body with a bison head, tail and hooves; another from the same cave has a human body with an owl face and antlers. Several are in similar postures with one leg raised in what appears to be a dance posture. These have horned animal heads on human bodies with their sexual organs prominent, often ithyphallic. Another example, found in the shaft at Lascaux, has a human body with a bird head. There is also an ivory statue of a lionman.



These mysterious envoys have been regarded as masked shamans or as divine animal masters, as totems, as personifications of the forces of nature, and as archetypes of the ancestors that reach back before humans were separated from the animals.

Therioanthropes are at the chiasma that links the human with the spectrum of nature. They are technicians of the sacred in an atemporal beyond at the cosmic threshold that unites animals and humans in a return to origins where they dwell in a psychoidic realm of instinctual mythic archetypes. These chimeric beings gave humans a link to the time when we were as yet undifferentiated from the powers of nature. The caves served as conduits, as portals, and passageways to these archetypal realms. They were a timeless unchanging underworld out of which this world emerged as an autosymbolic phylogenetic projection. They show that the loss of innocence had already been felt, for there could be no return to that which you had not left. Only the feeling of alienation from this primordial immediacy could drive rituals of return. When consciousness became self-consciousness the human spirit was separated from the animal spirit and came face to face with the fact of death.



THE AESTHETICS OF ANCIENT ART

The study of Paleolithic art requires a multi-disciplinary approach that includes not only archaeology and ethnography but also cognitive archaeology, paleoethnography, anthropology, aesthetics, linguistic archaeology, and the evolutionary sciences. In the ancient world they believed that the image of a thing was fecund with power. Paintings of animals were the

prototype of the thing itself and functioned for it with equal or more power than the animals themselves. The paintings are mythic beings which can carry you to other realms. Images are closer to the creationtime archetypes than are the physical beings. They represent the essential templates that inform their descendants. The living beings are caught in time, bound to the cycles of birth and death. The archetypal images bear the stamp of eternity, reconnecting to the source of life itself where ontogeny and ontology merge. In cave art time is spatialized and space is temporalized. Viewing the images is a form of communication between this world and the otherworlds, the images are portals to the spiritual. The caves were spiritualized by the imagery found therein.

It was people in Paleolithic times who first discovered the essence of art and were able to express it. Their expression established the model for what makes art art. Art is not what sells in galleries or hangs on museum walls. Art is that which conveys the mysterious, unfathomable, captivating, resonance of beauty and inspiration to the limit of each person's capability. It is the transformative initiation to the inner source of the plenitude of creationtime. It is a luminous portal, a form generating fecundity, where the essence emerges from the particular with the inward shape of shapes.

The cave paintings, like all great art, have a captivating presence that excites the senses and assails the imagination with the fascination and wonder of the epiphany of beauty. With the birth of art something happened in human evolution that was essential to what it now means to be human. It was the first intimation of the powers of the imagination. The birth of art is a conduit to the transpersonal connection with the autogenous experience of this natural, primeval, oneiric, unconscious, instinctive experience of nature.

The Vezere Valley was the heartland of this great tradition. It was here that millennia of quantitative changes precipitated a qualitative difference. It was here humans stepped away from the immediate animal presence and gained apperception, to see ourselves seeing. Here they created the first great paintings and as we stand in their presence they have a natural intensity that is both joyful and frightening. They have a crystal clarity that is perfectly lucid, it has an immediate deep familiarity that is immensely pleasing.

The power to symbolize pulled humanity out of the immediacy of animal life into reflective life that is aware of past, present and future. Once this step is made death looms on the horizon. We are suddenly struck with death and in response religion springs out of the psyche as a reflex reaction, a protective mechanism. It was the simultaneous birth of religion and art, when one happened it called forth the other, the same powers of cognification bring forth art and religion as compliments to one another. The philosopher Bataille said the paintings, "imply a desire to restore the sacred character of existence". (6) To be in their presence invokes awe, reverence and splendor. It opens a space where we commune with the ancient world. There is a playfulness about the art, yet at the same time a seriousness that speaks to death. It has magnificent grandeur and retains the power of a living ritual.

The art on the cave walls speaks, it draws the spectator in and transports you into a symbolic universe that takes you away from the physicality of the moment, opening a window to a different dimension. Beauty is the nearness of a form's expression of the universal genus in that particular.

The more the particular embodies the universal the greater the sense of beauty. A work of art is a numinosum embodying the essence in a particular expression. Beauty is the degree to which a typical thing embodies the prototypical ideal of the thing it represents.



A blotch of paint on a cave wall represents a horse. What is it really? In the physical world it is a pigment of a certain hue, in the world of the observer it is a horse. The fact that a line on a cave wall represents a horse only takes place in the light of human awareness. To see the line as a horse is a huge step in symbolic awareness. The universal is unconcealed in the presentation of the particular. Something shines out from the presentation allowing the universal to bring forth identity. The

essence is concealed in each presentation of a particular, art is the work of unconcealing the essence and letting it shine.

When the line reveals the horse it is an expression of truth and beauty which are equiprimordial components of art. Truth is the open space in awareness wherein a particular is revealed as a representative of a universal and thereby has identity. Beauty is measured by the degree to which the universal shines out in the particular. The greater the radiance, the greater the beauty. Art is truth conjoined with beauty. Truth allows things to become useful, to be used as equipment; beauty goes beyond usefulness and allows the thing to stand in possession of its own being without regard for how it can be used.

Entering the painted caves is like going into an underground cathedral, a sacred sanctuary of great religious significance. The monumental frescos communicate across vast expanses of time. To witness this art is to enter their world in a dizzying leap across millennia that brings us abruptly into their presence with art as striking, as clear, as lucid, as beautiful, as sensitive, as delicate, as captivating, as aesthetically pleasing, as wonderful, as rich and as dazzling as any created by our own generations.

THE PSYCHOPOMP

In the Tibetan plateau ancient funerary traditions were preserved into historical times, especially in areas above 14,000 feet. In the 7th century C.E. writing came to this area and among the first things written was instructions for funeral rituals. One of these texts, *The Transport Horse Ritual*, outlines a funeral ritual. The leading scholar in this field, John Vincent Bellezza reports, “It appears that the early historic-period Tibetans were among the last people in Eurasia to systematically record funerary materials that do not bear the mark of modern religions.” (7)

These rituals divine the cause of death and deal with the problems that caused your demise. This involves bringing your spirit back from the underworld and sending you on your way to an afterlife with the ancestors. The transport horse ritual deals with getting your spirit from the underworld to the afterlife in the stars. There are obstacles between the earth and the sky that can toss you back into the underworld. You need all the help you can muster and, in particular, you need a good strong horse to ride.

In this ancient eschatology the dead are immediately set upon by a variety of chthonic beings who pull them into the underworld. The priest must retrieve the deceased from the underworld with ransom offerings. The ritualist has to prepare a tabernacle for the deceased, a receptacle, like a tectiform, to attract and hold the consciousness of the departed so they can recover from the traumas of the underworld. During this time the soul can be provided the necessary assistance by a spirit animal which will help make the final journey.

The transport animals act as guides and protectors to help the deceased traverse the postmortem terrain. The horses are outfitted with the proper ritual equipment to assure they reach the celestial empyrean. Mircea Eliade in his book *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* indicates the horse is, "Pre-eminently the funerary animal and psychopomp employed by the shaman, in various contexts, as a means of achieving ecstasy, that makes the mystical journey possible...The dominant aspect of the mythology of the horse is not infernal but funerary; the horse is a mythical image...incorporated into the ideologies and techniques of the passage from this world to other worlds." As a "Psychopomp and funerary animal, the horse facilitated the ecstatic flight of the soul to forbidden regions." (8) However, horses were not the only psychopomps, animal helpers can include bison, deer, sheep, ibex, gazelle and antelope which all serve equally well as psychopomps.

CONCLUSION

There is no consensus among scholars as to what cave paintings mean or why they were painted. What stands out is their beauty, their repetitiveness and their one dimensionality. The cave painters used a convention that conveyed dignity, grace, strength and clarity. This held sway over 25,000 years and sustained their belief structures and social systems. The animals on the cave walls were depictions of higher, more mysterious beings which could help on the journey after death. The pictorial script on the cave walls told the story of the psychopomps. The horses and bison and deer could have served as envoys and guides to the other world of the ancestors. They were animal helpers who aided humans in their journeys in the higher and lower realms. The birth of art was not as a reproduction of the natural world, but a means of return to the creationtime of the ancestors. These artistic creations embody the formative powers out of which we were created. These powers are symbolized by the animal helpers, the Great Mother and the therioanthropes. These mythograms illustrated the legends and cosmology of their culture. Herein is the source of vision, of symbol and of art which comes, unsummoned, with salvific power.

Cave walls were a thin veil separating the observer from the underworld. These deeply mysterious intrauterine darkened passageways create conditions of sensory deprivation. They were filled with awe as the womb of all creation. Herein the inherent powers of the cosmos were portrayed as exquisite animal spirits suspended, almost floating, numinous embodiments of the plentitude of life. These conditions were expressed abstractly in hypersymbolic designs with red and black dots, grids, parallel lines, ovals, triangles and nested cups.

Each age has its overarching myth. For many centuries the Christian god and the plan of salvation has been the central myth. In previous ages it was sacrifice and the ethics of revenge. Now in our modernity it is money and the frame of money is possessiveness. These archetypal myths are suprahistorical, neither invented nor consciously accepted but rather incorporated in the very structure of awareness, created by a process independent of personal thought or individual will. They are the undeniable reality that defines our consciousness. They arise from our innermost being and imprint themselves with a necessity that brooks no doubt. The myth that defines the late Paleolithic was the belief in an afterlife. This was the first urge of self-awareness when it became cognizant of its own mortality. This was an attempt to give expression to the newborn hope that this inner life would outlive the outer life of the body.

When Homo sapiens gained the advantage of thought, self awareness became the distinguishing mark of humanity and was reflected outwardly as art. The consciousness of death that dawned in awareness was reflected outwardly in the dioramas of the caverns of France. With the dawning of self-consciousness we became aware that we live in time and are ruled by time, that we have a past and a future, and that, just as there was a time when we did not exist in the past, so to, at some time in that future, we will no longer exist. We have emerged from nothingness and will merge back into it. When this becomes apparent it is a cause of anxiety, even horror. There have been a myriad of immortality scams: in the Paleolithic era humans envisioned an afterlife journey, riding a transport animal, to the realm of the ancestors. The ancient Egyptians postulated the Western Lands where you needed a mummy to survive, Christianity brought with it the idea of heaven and hell and in the East they generated the notion of reincarnation. When consciousness first confronted the inevitable realization of its own demise the fear of death was birth to religion.

Footnotes

1. Susan McDonald and I arrived in the south of France in mid-September 2014. We have been traveling the world together for over a decade and have been to Tibet, Peru, the ancient sites in Mexico, the standing stones of Carnac and Avebury and to ancient sites throughout the United States. We spent two weeks touring in the vicinity of the Vezere Valley and visited six of the decorated caves, numerous rock shelters and the three prehistoric museums in the area.
2. *The Cave Painters: Probing the Mysteries of the World's First Artists*, Gregory Curtis, Anchor Books. New York. 2007. p. 47.
3. *Hierarchy in the Forest: The Evolution of Egalitarian Behavior*, Christopher Boehm, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts. 1999. p. 69, 31, 90.
4. *Treasures of Prehistoric Art*, by A. Leroi-Courhan. Harry N. Abrams, Inc. New York, 1967.
5. *The Language of the Goddess*, Marija Gimbutas, Thames and Hudson, London, 1989. p. 305.
6. *The Cradle of Humanity: Prehistoric Art and Culture*, Georges Bataille, Zone Books, New York, 2005, p. 32.
7. *The Dawn of Tibet: The Ancient Civilization on the Roof of the World*, John Vincent Bellezza, Rowman & Littlefield, London, 2014, p. 255.
8. *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, Mircea Eliade, Bollingen Series LXXVI, Princeton University Press, 1964, p. 467, 469 and 470.

BEYOND BELIEFS (We are not who we think we are)

ELEANOR KEYES

Extract from her book 'Beyond Beliefs – We Are Not Who We Think We Are

<http://www.lulu.com/shop/eleanor-keyes/beyond-beliefs-we-are-not-who-we-think-we-are/paperback/product-22283955.html>

Chapter Ten: The Purging.

On my first attempt at meditation, I sat for about an hour. It was pleasant and I felt very relaxed, during and afterwards for the rest of that day. The second time was about a week later. This time was not pleasant for me at all. I spent the whole hour "arguing with myself in my head". It was ridiculous.

Thoughts kept arising in me, thoughts such as- "what are you trying to achieve here"? or "You're wasting your time", "this is stupid", "It's not working, nothing is happening"... It was useless telling my own thoughts to "Shut Up"! How utterly stupid... especially when another thought answered with "Who are You even talking to"? The situation was hilarious when I look at it now, but at the time it was very, very Annoying, so I stopped and didn't return to it again for about a month or so.

During this time I read an article on a type of meditation where, you don't try to empty your mind or stop your thoughts, nor use a "Mantra" or an object of focus, you simply had to "Allow" what arises and observe it passively, without engaging it. Be it a thought, a memory or a mental-picture etc. Just simply allowing it to come in and be "noticed", without rejection. Recognizing their content and intensity and, whether they were accompanied by an emotion, or if they "gave rise to" an emotion.

I decided that this might be the right type of meditation for me, as I found it very difficult to "stop my thoughts" for any decent length of time, and therefore None of the "focus-oriented" styles were likely to work for me. I decided to try out this "Allowing" type of meditation and hope for the best.

This next sitting was for me, without a doubt, the first Real Success at reaching a proper meditative state. After about ten minutes into the session, I was finally able to get comfortable with Not trying to stop thoughts when they arose. Then I began to look at the nature and quality of what "Was" arising. This got very interesting, very fast.

These thoughts were actually informing me of what was buried in my subconscious, (or so it seemed) coming to the surface of my everyday consciousness, in this meditative state. They were not "new" thoughts, far from it, in fact they were old repetitive thoughts that I had learned to ignore, because I found them "annoying". Annoying they were, which is why I never gave them any "Real attention" before, until now. Instead, I would usually busy myself with something to distract my attention away from them. I'd read a book, watch a film, go online and chat to some friends etc. But now, here I was sitting in silence with my eyes closed, giving them my Full Attention for the first time ever.

This was Intense, this was just me alone with my thoughts, "Intentionally" for the first time ever, this was me looking to "Myself" for guidance. After another ten minutes or so, into this session, I found myself "sobbing uncontrollably". I had no idea why I was sobbing, and I had no idea how to make it stop.

I still had my eyes closed and, behind them, in my "mind's eye", I could see myself as a child of about five or six years old, crying in the same way, uncontrollably sobbing. I could also feel "her" sadness, mixed with fear and anguish. This made me cry even harder. I wanted to reach out and touch her, comfort her somehow, tell her that everything was going to be okay. But, all I seemed to be able to do was to allow Myself to be with these feelings, and let them be recognized by me in this moment, from this point in my here and now.

Some thoughts also began to arise in me, and I was quite surprised by their content. They were concerned with events in my past, which I was certain that I had "gotten over" and moved past, but it seemed to me now, that I hadn't. They were thoughts of anger towards people who had hurt me in the past. I had thought that I had forgiven these people and got on with my life, but now here I was "vividly remembering" how they made me feel, and feeling very angry at the memories, which I thought I had put behind me. It seemed I had simply "buried" these feelings in my subconscious, where they had festered and were wreaking havoc in my life, and in my "inner-world" of emotional and mental well-being.

What choice did I have now, but to look at them and Try to deal with the issues they had created in my psyche, But, How? How indeed. I'd had all the psychotherapy I could get, from doctors and therapists in the past, and now this "abyss" had opened up in me, with a whole new set of "old issues" that I thought I had worked through years ago. What was I going to do to get through all of this?

It seemed like a hopeless situation to find myself in, and I had no idea how to deal with it. I'd never felt so alone and overwhelmed. I knew that nobody could do this for me, I would have to do it on my own. It seemed I had two choices, Choice one- Hold on to these memories and associated psychological suffering that came with them, or choice two- Recognize them for what they are, and in doing so, I would be allowing them to be seen in the light of my life Today, hopefully transforming them, in the knowledge that they are "from the past" and cannot harm me today. I chose Choice number two.

As I was allowing and transforming old memories, during this time of Purging, I found that I could "go back into" selected memories, actually "revisit" the chosen memory from right here in my Present Moment.

This was nothing like ordinary remembering, this was as if I was an "invisible witness" to the event replaying before me. I was watching it happening and noticing things that I wasn't aware of at the time of the event. It was like rewinding a film to catch something that you'd missed before. This newfound skill blew my mind and I found it impossible to relate it to anybody properly. Every time I tried to explain it, people just thought I was describing an experience of "vivid memory", but No, this was not that.

This was like a form of "time-travel of consciousness" in a way, my consciousness, Me Now, going into the memory somehow. My efforts to explain it didn't do justice to the enormity of this discovery, and nobody seemed to know what I was talking about. Maybe this won't make sense to you either? Unless of course, you've had a similar experience?

I initially began this experiment with "remembering with Feeling" by choosing a strong memory from my past. I sat in quiet meditation and emptied my thought-space of everything Except that memory. I allowed it to play out before me in my mind's eye and gave it my full attention, and "Felt" it as strongly as I could in order to get in synch with how I felt back then.

The first time it happened was during a memory of the time I invited my older sister to come with me to our local roller skating arena. At that time I was addicted to roller-skating and went skating a few nights a week. I was quite good on skates back then, and I felt really good about the prospect of teaching my big sister to skate. Being older than me, it was usually her teaching me stuff.

My "Usual" memory of this event consisted of her being bored and wishing she hadn't agreed to come with me, she seemed quite annoyed at not being able to get the hang of skating and saw it as foolish anyway. But Now, during this experiment of "Remembering with Feeling", everything in the memory seemed different to me.

As I watched myself in the memory, from the perspective of a "silent, invisible witness" to the event, I saw myself skating past her as she held tightly onto the wooden rail around the skating rink, too nervous to let go, as the skates would slide along of their own accord every time she did let go. I saw myself go round and round the edge of the circular rink, glancing at her every time I whizzed past at speed. As I watched I remembered how, at the time I thought she was bored and wished we could just leave and go home, but I wanted to stay and enjoy the fun of skating. But now I was looking at this from a whole different perspective.

Now I noticed a look of admiration on her face as she watched me. I also "felt" a sense of pride for her little sister emanating from her. I noticed a slightly nervous smile on her face and a sense of her feeling "I wish I could do that". I noticed how she would let go of the rail every couple of minutes, trying to get up the nerve to try it for herself. Then she would grab it again as soon as the skates went this way and that, on the highly polished wooden floor. I noticed that she was wearing a lilac coloured blouse that she'd borrowed from me that evening, which really suited her with her long black hair. I noticed how much my big sister loved me in that moment, and I remembered how much I loved her, then and now. This experience made me cry for the next couple of days.

These things I'd noticed Now, in that "memory" were Not in my "previous memory" of that event, and they were not obvious to me at the time of the event. Now the details in that memory seemed New to me, but how can a memory be "New"? This was extremely puzzling to me and it still is to this day. I have no idea how this type of remembering is possible, but it Is. The second time I went into this, I chose my earliest memory, which was my fifth birthday. I may have earlier memories in which I'm not aware of my age, but I know I was five in this one because I'm holding my birthday card, and it has the number five on it. Previously all I remembered of this day was

that birthday card, which had a cartoon-picture of an elephant on it, whose trunk was in the shape of the number five, and I remembered the birthday present that came with it, a red-plastic tea-set. Both were from my favourite aunt on the day I turned five.

I sat in silence and went into that memory, just as I had done last time. I allowed it to play out before me, in my mind's eye, using Feeling to connect strongly with my feelings back then. Again I was viewing things happening in front of me from the perspective of a "silent, invisible witness" just as before. But, what I noticed during this experiment was even more astounding than the last time.

The very first thing that struck me was how I "felt" at the time. I was five years old and I felt "exactly the same" as I do Now. I did not Feel five years old, or at least how I'd imagine a five year old feels. I felt like Me. Me Now. No difference.

The very same Presence/Awareness that was sitting here doing this exercise of remembering with feeling, was also sitting on the kitchen floor, decades ago, pouring cold tap-water from a red plastic tea-pot into tiny plastic cups, making "tea" for my mother and my favourite auntie, who were sitting at the table chatting.

It felt as though I was watching this scene from somewhere above it in the room. Then, suddenly I was "In" my five-year-old Self, "Feeling her Feelings" at the time. I felt my efforts not to "spill the tea" I was pouring. I felt my anticipation of their delight upon receiving a "nice cup of tea", and my own pleasure on seeing them drink it and enjoy it. But, most of all, I felt my Absolute Love for them both.

This Feeling of Love inside of my five-year-old Self was overwhelming to me Now, and it was so Pure. It was an all-encompassing love, and it filled her and radiated on to everything around her, and infused it with this pure Love. She was like a "warm stove" that filled the room with Love. The Beauty and Purity of this Love made my "heart hurt", it was so powerful. It made me weep for remembering it, and how it seemed to have "died in me" somewhere along the way in my life.

I had completely forgotten how I used to Feel as a child, and I did not even "notice" it slipping away. I had forgotten how it felt to Love without fear of rejection. I had forgotten how "Wise" I was then. Much wiser than I am now. I had forgotten how brave I was then. Much braver than I am now. I had forgotten what it Felt like to be Me, Freely and Openly. Vulnerable without Fear. Fearless and Loving. Without "censorship". I had no "inner critic" back then. Just a Loving space and appreciation for life. I Loved Myself back then. I had forgotten that I once "Loved Myself".

When I came back into my "present moment" after this exercise, I took my five-year-old "Self" back with me. I took her into my Heart. I Realized that "She Was My Heart". She was and Is the Best part of me. I knew Now, that she had Never left me. I had just stopped "Noticing" her. I had stopped "Feeling" My Own Heart. She is Now my Courage, my Patience, my kindness, my generosity, my Joy. My Love. Over the next few months I would burst into tears at random moments, for what seemed like "no apparent reason". I could be talking to someone and I would just start weeping, making them think that they had said something that upset me. It could even be my local shop-keeper as I paid for my shopping.

This made life quite difficult for me, I began to avoid people whenever possible. Even answering my phone became something I avoided whenever possible, as it would even happen during a phone conversation, leaving the caller feeling bewildered. Thank goodness I had an amazing partner, who would deal with the shopping and visitors etc. during these months, or I don't know how I would have coped with it all. I was completely incapable of dealing with other people during this time. This went on for what turned out to be over a year, by the end of which I had shed most of my old ideas about myself and the world, along with "a small river of tears". I had come to accept myself exactly as I was, "warts and all", and even more importantly, I had come to Love myself Unconditionally. Now I actually enjoyed the practice of observing myself, it was no longer a chore, it was a Joy. It felt like watching a "beloved child" at play. I felt a great sense of love and admiration towards myself, and even a little pride at how far I'd come. At how I had not become Bitter and Cynical as a result of the circumstances I'd lived through. I was getting to Know Myself all over again only Now "I" was Choosing how I wished to "Be" in the world, instead of being told how I "Should Be". I was feeling Joy just for the sake of it. Choosing to "feel joyous", instead of waiting for the right conditions to arise, that would "bring Joy to me". I simply chose to feel joy in the everyday things all around me, and I felt great.

I realized, from all of this exploration and experimentation with the realm of thought, that If something that happened to me in the past, was still hurting me today, then it was "The Thought" of it that was hurting me. As soon as I saw this, my Healing began.

The Body of Christ

Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022)

We awaken in Christ's body
as Christ awakens our bodies,
and my poor hand is Christ. He enters
my foot, and is infinitely me.

I move my hand, and wonderfully
my hand becomes Christ, becomes all of Him
(for God is indivisibly
whole, seamless in his Godhood).

I move my foot, and at once
he appears like a flash of lightning.
Do my words seem blasphemous? — Then
open your heart to Him.

and let yourself receive the one
who is opening to you so deeply.
For if we genuinely love Him,
we wake up inside Christ's body

where all our body, all over
every most hidden part of it,
is realized in joy as Him,
and He makes us utterly real,

and everything that is hurt, everything
that seemed to us dark, harsh, shameful,
maimed, ugly, irreparably
damaged, is in Him transformed

and recognized as whole, as lovely,
and radiant in His light.
We awaken as the Beloved
in every part of our body.