

"THE GOD OF FLUIDS"

A Story of Transformation across
Four Continents:

From the Jewish community in
Holland after the Holocaust,

to Ashrams in India,

to Post-Apartheid South Africa

to the West Coast of America.

A Creative Writing Project Using Process Work Principles
To Explore "Life Myth" and "Death As An Ally"

A Contextual Essay to Accompany the Creative Writing Project

submitted by

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INTRODUCTION

Project Topic and Guiding Question

This contextual essay accompanies a creative writing piece that I chose to do for my final project in Process Work. The project itself consists of 34 chapters, which come together to tell the chronological story of my life and to reveal my life myth. Using my own narrative as the basis, I created a fictionalized memoir that describes both an inner and outer journey. The outer journey follows the literal landscape of my life thus far: the four continents I lived on or spent significant amounts of time in. The inner journey follows the experience of transformation I went through in those different places. Each continent is both an outer place as well as an inner place that I explore, and each becomes a part of my journey towards greater wholeness.

I set out to explore my life story through a creative writing lens that uses Process Work theory and applications to better understand the background spirit that moves us all. The questions that guided me through this project were how to unfold one's life myth, and how to discover and connect with the spirit that directs our lives and creates meaningful pathways amidst the whirlwind of life's mundane and chaotic experiences.

Inspiration, Purpose, and Goals

The idea for this project was born from my desire to connect with my deepest nature and with the spirit that moves and directs

us all. I feel that without a connection to this deeper force, life becomes barren and meaningless, so I decided to focus my final project on the pursuit of this topic. I decided to use my own life story to show how this guiding force is not an abstract concept but a real, living force that weaves itself through our lives and shows up in various life events, circumstances, body symptoms, inner experiences, and relationship dramas.

Discovering that there is a pattern to this mystery, a pattern underlying our symptoms, problems, and conflicts, is to me the most exciting and awesome discovery I could ever stumble upon. Not because it gives us control over our lives (thankfully that will never be possible), but because it allows us to listen to and hear the melody of the particular river that runs through our lives. It enables us to sing its song and dance to its rhythm.

One of my primary goals for doing this project was to create greater awareness of this meaningful life force. Becoming aware of it can change our perspective and connect us to the bigger picture of our lives, which gives coherence and meaning to all the individual events, so that they are no longer just "bits and pieces" swimming around in a meaningless sea. I used my own story as a mirror to explore the "river of meaning" that runs through life and to apply Process Work theories and applications to my life myth. I assumed that discovering the river of meaning within my own life would enable me to inspire or assist others to connect with it in theirs.

The other reason I chose to do a creative writing project was because it has been a long-term dream of mine to write a book. The flipside of this “high dream” is that writing is also one of my biggest edges. I knew that if I chose to do this project, it would both assist and push me to cross over this edge and turn it into a reality. I never really intended to have a finished “publishable book” by the end of this project (that would be unrealistic given the timeframe and the fact that I am a novice fiction writer), but it has provided me with a manuscript that can serve as a draft for a book.

Approach, Structure, and Unfolding

Although I did not choose to conduct a quantitative or qualitative research study for my final project, I nonetheless explored a specific topic (i.e., the life myth and background force that guides our lives), and I had to find a method for exploring that topic. I did not want to conduct an analytical study, but instead embarked on a creative process, a work of fiction, using my own life story as its basis. My aim, therefore, was to use myself as the object of my own study through the medium of storytelling, which I feel lends itself well to the exploration of myth and meaning.

I knew that discovering my life myth could not be an analytical process, and that I would have to jump *into* the river of my life by immersing myself in the writing itself and by noticing the currents that pulled me. Throughout the creative process, I more or

less let go of the analytical and linear parts of my topic and questions. They were there, as a kind of umbrella vision in the background, but I didn't set out to write from a place of "I'm going to prove that this background force exists" or "I'm going to write up my life myth."

In fact, attempts to prove or directly answer the questions that guided my project could never satisfy. They cannot be answered with a kind of "packaged solution" that says, "Here it is, this is who you are, why you're here, and the force that directs you." Instead, the answers are fluid and creative. By using creative writing to explore my topic, I allowed the invisible river itself to emerge, run through, and direct my life and my writing in mysterious and uncontrollable ways. Thus, I let the stories guide me. I followed the storylines that pulled me in the moment or asked to be written. Some stories I planned on including but others did not, and they appeared out of their own accord during the writing process.

The project involved delving into various eras of my life. Before I even started writing, I divided my life into four eras or sections: child, teenager, young woman, and woman. Then, when I began writing, I simply allowed myself to write the stories in a non-linear way depending on which "time zone" pulled me at a given moment. After I completed a story, I would then store it under the relevant era of my life. Finally, towards the end of the project, I

weaved all the stories and eras together so it became a chronological description of the entire journey. Once the pieces were put together, it was easier to see the patterns and explore the ways in which the “river of meaning” is flowing through my life and myth.

On a skills level, doing this project meant I had to develop my creative writing abilities. I had never really written a memoir before, so to ensure that the quality of my work would be “up to standard,” I employed a creative writing mentor who critiqued my work and gave me advice on where I could improve. This in itself was a big learning curve for me. He taught me a multitude of things including how to write dialogue and how to enliven a dialogue by weaving in descriptions of the physical environment and the emotional reactions of various characters.

My mentor also taught me how to really be *in* the story by writing it in “present time” instead of as an “objective outsider” looking back, and he helped me to “locate” stories so that the reader would know how old I am, where I am, what the environment looks and feels like, etc., all with the aim of bringing the reader into the living reality of the story. Much of our work together was focused on cutting out redundant descriptions and details so the individual chapters and overall story would be more intense and powerful.

But writing the story involved more than learning how to write fiction. It also meant I had to go on an inner journey. My Process Work training was an incredible aid in this process. I could not have written this piece of work prior to my Process Work studies and the inner process of transformation that it as encouraged in me. In a

later section of this contextual essay, I describe in detail the specific Process Work tools and paradigms that have helped me during this journey.

Intended Audience and Contribution To The Field

This project is intended for people in the Process Work community as well as anyone else who might be interested. It may be of special interest to Process Workers, therapists, or spiritual practitioners who are interested in exploring life myths, the relationship between creative writing and Process Work, or the background force that flows through life.

In fact, my hope is to turn the story into a publishable book so that these Process Work concepts can be made available and accessible to a larger audience of people. I feel that the medium of creative writing is well suited for this kind of outreach because people are naturally drawn to storytelling, and fiction can bring ideas and perspectives alive in a way that analytical writing cannot always achieve.

Other Process Workers have written about the concept of life myths (Mindell, 2007; Norgaard, 2009; Payne, 2005; Starbear, 2005) and the relationship between Process Work and creativity (Ayre, 1991; Kavanaugh, 2007; Mindell, 2005; Payne, 2005; Starbear, 2005), but few have used creative writing as their method (Menken, 2001; Skoczewska, 2010; Tanwar, 2007) and even fewer have combined them all together. Thus, my project adds to the growing body of work dedicated to exploring life myths and

demonstrating how Process Work skills and paradigms can support, inspire, and enable a creative process.

My project also contributes to the field by developing the relationship between creative writing and Process Work, which is still relatively new and may hold potential for outreach to larger or different types of audiences. By exploring the concept of personal life myth through the medium of creative writing, I tried to give “hands and feet” to relevant Process Work concepts by really studying how they show up throughout an entire life story. By offering this creative description of my real life journey, I wanted to demonstrate how discovering and opening up to life’s hidden patterns can lead to a sense of meaning, connectedness, and wholeness.

Limitations and Future Directions

There is an assumption in my work that there is an underlying force that guides us, and that we have the ability to attune to this force and uncover the messages it holds for us. This assumption can easily be questioned, and a limitation of my project is that I’m not attempting to prove that this force exists. With this project, I attempt to show *how* it exists but not *that* it exists. I feel that so much brilliant work has already been done in this field (especially all the books written by Arnold Mindell that connect quantum physics to shamanism and depth psychology), that this is not where my contribution lies.

As mentioned earlier, one future possibility for my story is to turn it into a publishable book and to have an introductory piece and appendix where I discuss the concepts of Process Work, life myth, and the "river of meaning" that flows through all things. I hope to thus inspire others to explore these themes in their own lives and to hear the music of their own being.

My project might also be used to inspire others to conduct research on life myths or on the relationship between Process Work and creative writing. As far as I know, no one has ever dedicated their research to exploring how Process Work theories and applications can be used to unfold a creative writing process.

PERSONAL LEARNINGS AND PROCESS WORK APPLICATIONS

Process Work skills, tools, and paradigms were an essential part of unfolding my creative process. In the sections below, I discuss the particular theories and methods that assisted and inspired me in accessing the creative spirit and the flow of writing.

Inner Work

Inner work is a Process Work method in which a person uses her or his awareness to follow inner experiences and to discover new meanings through these experiences. According to Mindell and Mindell (2011), inner work “focuses on following the flow of one’s own experiences by noticing the most obvious body movements and signals, as well as subtler dreamlike experiences, and the most subtle, almost ineffable feelings and tendencies occurring within and around us” (www.aamindell.net/blog/innerwork).

In general, because writing tends to be a solitary process, it demands a bit of “hermit mentality” and inner work. It requires an ability to be alone with oneself for long periods of time, and the practice of inner work helps develop that ability. My own inner work skills were invaluable when it came to the creative writing process, and they specifically aided me in the following areas: awareness of my inner experiences, valuing my inner experiences and diversity, and staying with the writing process.

Awareness Of My Inner Experiences

Going inside and doing inner work helped me to notice what I was thinking, feeling, and sensing as I ventured into the creative writing process. Being aware of fleeting thoughts, ideas, images, and “flirts” was essential to unfolding the process. Flirts are quick sensations, moods, and visual flickers that briefly catch our attention, and they are “the tail of a creative process in the midst of unfolding” (Mindell, 2005, p. 24).

Often, these flirts and fleeting thoughts came up at the weirdest moments: whilst cooking, walking, taking a shower, or just before falling asleep. I found it really useful to have little notepads everywhere (in my bathroom, kitchen, living room, car, next to my bed, in every handbag, and so forth) so that I could jot down flirts and ideas when they appeared. Fleeting ideas are like dreams: if you don’t write them down immediately, they’re gone. So even though catching them might mean having to switch the light on for the tenth time in the middle of the night, the idea or image needs to be written right away or you risk losing them forever. By staying open and close to my inner experiences, I was able to notice and document subtle things that I may not have noticed otherwise, and these little notepads became essential material to unfolding my creative process.

Valuing My Inner Experiences and Diversity

Inner work also supported my ability to honor even the weirdest, most absurd, or seemingly useless ideas that came up. It allowed me to honor and give voice to all the parts in me – from the saddest to the most joyous, from the wildest to the most sensitive. In order to create a story that is interesting and diverse, all the different parts need a chance to “have their say,” and all were food for the creative process.

Staying With The Writing Process

Most stories are not written as a “flash of lightning” in which the words just flow out in one seamless stream of inspiration. Instead, the muse needs to be enticed, seduced, nurtured, and listened to. More than anything, she demands endless devotion in the form of time, patience, endurance, and humility.

I had to learn to write pages and pages of “stuff” that I knew I would never use, just to satisfy the muse and hope that she would be willing to inspire me at last. In other words, the process demands a lot of writing, dreaming, re-writing, crafting, writing crap, writing more crap, letting go of the idea that it’s all crap, losing a sense of inspiration, finding one sentence in the midst of twenty pages that you kind of like, then suddenly getting inspired again, feeling elated because the flow is back and it feels as if God is talking to you, and then a day later feeling frustrated and utterly

despondent because the flow has left again. Obviously, it's not just a smooth and easy ride, and if you are a perfectionist (like I am), it can be hell sometimes.

Inner work helped me stay with this difficult journey, because, in the midst of working with all the different reactions and turmoil that the writing process evoked, it connected me with a deeper sense of self and offered some detachment. When my inner critic became too obstreperous, inner work slowed things down and helped me to recognize the qualities of the critic and how to work with it so I didn't get writer's block. Doing Inner Work also helped me to develop faith in the cycles of "divine inspiration" and the "dry spells" that inevitably keep on alternating like the seasons in a year.

Developing A Metacommunicator

For me, creative writing is both an extremely intimate and detached process. On the one hand, it takes really going into all the various experiences and talking *from* those voices and characters instead of just talking *about* them. Whatever the writer is experiencing while writing, the reader will likely experience too. If I feel sad, moved, thrilled, or excited whilst writing a certain piece, my reader will probably experience similar feelings. If I feel bored and uninvolved, my reader will likely feel disinterested as well. So I had to be able to really get intimate with my own story and be totally vulnerable to my characters and their experiences.

Paradoxically, I noticed that what enabled me to get that intimate with my story was a part of me that could stay somewhat “outside” of the whole process and watch it unfold. It’s that combination of being really intimately involved with the minute details of an experience and holding an outsider perspective at the same time that characterizes the metacommunicator. In Process Work, the term metacommunicator refers to the way in which a person can recognize and describe his or her process even while in the midst of it. According to Diamond and Jones (2004), a metacommunicator “is a self-reflective capacity to notice, organize, and report on one’s experiences. Sometimes it is also called a ‘witness,’ ‘observer,’ ‘narrator,’ or ‘inner facilitator’” (p. 28). Developing my metacommunicator was essential to my creative writing process, because it allowed me to be both “in and out” of my experience – to be in the midst of the process while communicating about it at the same time.

Going Over Personal Edges

In Process Work, the term “edge” refers to the boundary between one’s known and unknown experience.

Primary process refers to those experiences that are better known and closer to a person’s sense of identity. Secondary process refers to those experiences that are further from a person’s sense of identity. Primary and secondary processes are separated by an “edge.” The edge represents the limit of the known identity as well as a point of contact with unknown experiences or identities. An edge is often felt as discomfort,

nervousness, or excitement because it is an encounter with something new or unfamiliar. Diamond & Jones, 2004, p. 20

The concept of the edge was a great help in that it allowed me to recognize and acknowledge when I was at an edge and when new experiences or material might be trying to surface. Without an awareness of edges, I would have just felt blocked and not known what to do once I got stuck at an edge. Having that framework was vital because it allowed me to recognize and process edges, which then freed me up to write certain stories even if I felt “edged out” by them.

There were several ways in which I processed edges to support the creative flow of my project, including integrating the inner critic as an edge figure, accessing the dreaming process behind certain events, and de-pathologizing and overcoming mental health stigmas.

Integrating The Inner Critic As An Edge Figure

For me, integrating the inner critic within the context of my creative writing meant literally turning the critic into a character in the story. By personifying the edge figure right into the story, I could begin to fill it out and dialogue with it. Until I gave the edge figure an actual place in my story, I felt blocked and frozen by my inner judgments and was unable to write much of anything. Writing this figure into the story was similar to having a dialogue with an

inner critic in a therapy session, except the voice become an actual character with a name, a face, and particular characteristics. This took the heaviness out of the critic's attack on me, and it also allowed the inner critic to evolve into a more humane character that I could influence and that was receptive to change.

For example, in the chapter "Red," which describes my third abortion, I felt totally blocked and edged out to write about it because I was harassed by an inner figure that said something like, "Really Niyati, normal people have maybe one or two abortions at most. To have three abortions is ridiculous. Why were you not more careful? It's not like we don't have contraception methods in this day and age. You were careless and stupid."

I integrated this critical voice into the story, in the form of the character of Lorraine in the chapter "Red." Lorraine developed into an imaginary woman who works at an abortion clinic in Amsterdam and whose opening statement when I walk into the clinic is, "Let's talk about contraception." Lorraine then questions me about each and every contraception method available. We have an in-depth and detailed dialogue in which I explain to her (i.e. explain to my inner critic) why I discard all of them. By animating this critical voice and allowing the dialogue with Lorraine to unfold onto the page, I was extremely relieved and my inner critic was silenced after that. As the story progressed, it was also interesting to discover that Lorraine turned out to be quite cheerful and

pragmatic, and I managed eventually to get her on my side and even made her laugh.

My inner critic evolved through turning her into a real character with a bright summer dress and rosy cheeks (which is very different from how the voice first appeared in my head) and through influencing her with counter arguments and bringing in a sense of humor.

Accessing The Dreaming Process Behind Certain Events

As touched on above, I was edged out to write about certain stories because I was filled with judgment and shame about them. In addition to the normal resistances that occur at the edge, it is virtually impossible to write from a place of judgment because it creates an artificial separation between me and the story that wants to be told. My judgments get in the way, and the story can't breathe and "tell itself" until the judge is gone.

It was only after processing the deeper dreaming process behind those events, that I was able to write those stories. In Process Work, dreaming refers to the belief that all things have a "river of meaning" that runs through them. According to Mindell (2005):

Dreaming exists *prior* to the material world and gives rise to it . . . The very basis of process-oriented psychology lies in the idea that this dreaming is *always* there, we just have to notice its subtle pull and, with a loving focus, allow it to unfold and enhance our lives. p. 4

In some cases, when I was able to understand and feel into the dreaming process behind one of my edges, the shift was so strong that after weeks of being totally blocked, the flow of the story would suddenly surge through me and keep me up for most of the night as I wrote down my ideas and thoughts.

An example of how finding the dreaming process helped me to cross an edge can be found in my experience of writing the chapter called "Fear," which describes when I was physically attacked by an ex-partner. I had so much shame about this experience, and I felt "stupid" for having been with him in the first place, for staying in the relationship for as long as I did, and for allowing it to escalate to that point. In addition to his external attack, my internal attackers went wild with their accusations saying things like, "It's your own fault! How could you sink that low and get yourself into an abusive relationship? You were weak."

It took a number of therapy sessions focused on these inner and outer attackers before I could get to the deeper dreaming behind it. Then, one day, I suddenly got it! What I got was far beyond insights about how he was my secondary process for accessing my own power. Instead, there was a spiritual process in the background dreaming.

As much as I condemn the physical attack on a consensus reality level, what I recognized on a dreaming level was that the attack was sort of like a "Zen whack," in that it shook me to my

core. I was literally shaken out of all the supposed spiritual belief systems that I had clung to until that point, and I was forced to “wake up.” It was such a visceral, unavoidable experience that I couldn’t use a spiritual practice to make sense of it or separate myself from it by meditating on overcoming my fears of death, which had been my inner practice in the relationship until that point.

Paradoxically, the experience did end up being a spiritual process in that it awakened me from a certain kind of spiritual identity that was artificial and based on concepts that equated enlightenment with overcoming the fear of death as opposed to focusing on the free flow and immediacy of the moment. That insight freed me of my judgments towards myself as well as the judgments I held towards the event itself. The attack lost the charge of being a “personal assault” once I could see it from the much bigger and more meaningful dreaming perspective. After getting that insight, the chapter flowed freely through me, and I could write it from a much deeper and more loving place.

De-pathologizing and Overcoming Mental Health Stigmas

Mental health stigmas can create edges due to the fact that they create an artificial division between so-called ‘healthy people’ and so-called ‘sick people’. Most often, this leads to a painful experience of loss of social rank for the person who has been

diagnosed as 'suffering from a mental health problem'. In general, I feel that the "de-pathologizing" nature of Process Work is one of its most powerful and liberating features. This is especially true when it comes to the area of mental health. Similar to any kind of inner judge, an "inner pathologizer" (i.e., an inner voice that says something is wrong with you, that you are "sick" and diagnosable) can interfere with writing about experiences that are linked to mental health diagnoses.

For example, in the chapter "One of Us", I experienced a very strong edge when it came to whether or not I was going to write about my experiences of cutting myself. This is not something I speak about freely, and I was carrying a lot of shame and stigma around it. While trying to make the decision, my "inner stigmatizer" came out in full force with warnings such as, "People will think you're Borderline. They won't take you seriously. They'll read your story and think, oh, she's just another Borderline describing her self-mutilation, her inability to hold down a stable relationship, and her terror of being abandoned. Look! You've got all the traits and symptoms. You're just lucky that you got away with it and no one locked you up. Don't talk about it! Keep it our little secret."

Again, I had to process the deeper dreaming behind the cutting in order to get past these judgments, cross the edge, and write about my experiences. In a Process Work session focused on

this edge, my therapist spoke about Shamanic traditions in which people deliberately cut themselves when they were injured, so that the injuring force was no longer only “external” and could be integrated more fully. Hearing this perspective was in itself hugely liberating.

In addition, understanding how the process of cutting was an instinctive “channel change” was also very helpful. In Process Work, sensory channels are “signal vehicles, which convey intended and unintended communication. A channel may be ‘occupied’ or ‘unoccupied’” (Diamond & Jones, 2004, p. 64). The channels identified in Process Work are visual, auditory, proprioceptive, kinesthetic, relationship, and world, and a process or pattern can find expression through various channels.

When I view the cutting from a channels perspective, it seems clear that I was spontaneously switching channels: I went from the proprioceptive channel (i.e., feeling my internal pain and drowning in it), to the kinesthetic channel (i.e., actually cutting and physically feeling that pain and power) and to the visual channel (i.e., being able to visually see my pain and distance myself from it). This was a great insight that enabled me to cross my edge and describe the channel changes viscerally in the story, from within the experience itself.

Processing the dreaming behind the cutting also re-connecting to my blood (i.e. to my inner life force), which also helped to take

the stigma away and really allowed me to describe the depth and liberation of doing something that seems so destructive and negative.

Once I had processed my personal edges around the cutting, the whole thing turned around and I suddenly felt compelled to write about it precisely *because* these experiences are so marginalized and stigmatized and carry so much shame in the culture. So I wanted to break the taboo of shame and really describe it from within, which I was only able to do after I had processed the edge.

Entering Into The Dreaming

Entering into the dreaming realm was essential to writing large chunks of the book. One aspect of this is an ability to enter into various characters and “become” them. Another aspect is to enter into different psychic spaces within me in order to write directly *from* that part, instead of writing *about* that part.

Before writing the book, I created a structure by distinguishing between different segments of my life: child, teenager, young woman, and woman. In order to make the chapters come alive and be “real,” I had to enter into the psychic space of these four “eras” or parts of me, and each era had a different dreaming quality. The “child space” was distinctly different from the “teenager space” and so forth. Each era had a different

voice, a different way of expressing itself, a different mindset and awareness, and different longings, concerns, needs, and troubles.

For example, the title of the chapter "How long forever is" was written from a child's perspective. If it had been written from an adult perspective, the title may have relied on correct English grammar and asked: "How long is forever?" But in this story, the young child questions the father about her mother's death and how long her mother will be gone for. She says: "I wanted to know how long forever is," and this became the title of the chapter.

For me, entering into the dreaming realm of the child was one of the most powerful experiences of writing the book. I literally had to get 99% of my information for the story from the dreaming realm, for the simple reason that I have virtually no conscious recollections or memories of my mother or her death since I was only three years old when she died. The entire chapter was written from a place of dreaming into visiting her in the hospital as she was dying, dreaming into her funeral, dreaming into her shiva, and most of all, dreaming into the relationship I developed with her as she was dying and even beyond her death.

I talked with her in my head at night, and I talked to her framed photograph on my grandmother's desk. These ways of relating with my mother seemed to come out of "nowhere," and I have no conscious memory of ever doing this in 'real life'. Writing these pieces was an incredibly moving experience for me. It was

like existing in a place where it was possible, easy, and totally feasible to reconnect with my dead mother. From the “child space” within me, death was such a fluid experience, and it was definitely not the end.

On the one hand, the psychic realm of the child was quite literal and local. I describe how my mother is going to the “place of the dead people,” and I imagine her leaving her body and literally flying off to God. At some point in the story, I say to my mother, “You have been flying for many hours already, and you must have reached the place of the dead people by now, and maybe you’ve even met with God.” I imagine her alive but in a different place, surrounded by other dead people, and one day, “when I’m also dead like her,” I will visit her there.

At the same time, the child’s perspective of her mother’s death is quite fluid and un-dramatic. I talk to her about her funeral and what it was like. I tell her about the shiva, how much cake we ate, and which cakes I liked and didn’t like. These aspects of the child’s experience are very mundane and down to earth; they just are what they are. It was a healing, deeply emotional, and refreshing experience to write these pieces. I connected with a part of me that is able to relate to death as just another phase, which was an amazing experience, and it all came from entering the “Dreaming realm”.

Just after I had written this piece, I had an amazing synchronistic experience. For the first time, my older sister told me about her experience of visiting my mother in the hospital as she was dying (my sister was 11 at the time.) What she described was exactly the scene I wrote about in my story, which I had unconsciously accessed by going into dreaming. My mother was already in a coma and was unable to respond to my sister, so she never got to say good-bye. I had no prior knowledge of this, and it was a profound experience for my sister and I to talk about this for the first time in our lives. Somehow, writing the story also had a non-local impact on my own family scene.

Deep Democracy

Of all the Process Work paradigms, deep democracy was the one that most influenced my writing. According to Menken (2001), deep democracy “addresses the perennial conflict of marginalization by emphasizing the value of all viewpoints and the necessity for them each to find expression” (p. 14). When I refer to deep democracy in the context of the creative writing process, I am alluding to the notion that all experiences are equally valuable; that different levels of experience (i.e., consensus reality, dreamland and the essence level) exist and are important; and that I possess all of these experiences, levels, and parts as well.

All Experiences Are Equally Valuable

One of the most liberating features of Process Work for me, is the way that so-called “negative emotions” are embraced and unfolded as doorways into a secondary process. These “dream doors,” or avenues into the dreaming, provide access to hidden powers and marginalized states of being, which can empower and enrich one’s life when they are unfolded with care and curiosity.

For example, jealousy and envy are emotions that most people normally try to hide from themselves and others because of all the judgments associated with them. In addition to mainstream judgments about these “negative” emotions, most spiritual circles and counter cultures view envy and jealousy as feelings to overcome or get rid of. However, working with jealousy as a “dream door” was a total revelation for me and hugely liberating.

To discover that a really difficult and potentially destructive emotion such as jealousy can *itself* be a path to connecting more deeply to and discovering your own true nature is, in my opinion, the essence of what Tantric philosophies have always stood for: that everything in life can be used as fertilizer for your awakening, nothing needs to be excluded and everything is the divine. I therefore see Process Work not only as a psychological and therapeutic modality, but also as a radical path to awakening, because it gives hands and feet to these concepts through practical

tools and ways of including and unfolding the entire range of human experiences, from the most sublime to the most profane.

In terms of the writing process, valuing all of my experiences equally impacted me on several levels. It totally took the sting out of writing about my own so-called “negative” experiences. In fact, I took great pleasure in writing about my moments of jealousies, rage, hatred, and revenge, because I am no longer against those feelings and experiences and can see how they offered valuable information. I especially loved contrasting the titles of chapters dealing with those emotions with the content of the stories. For example, “Free Love” is all about lust, jealousy, and revenge, and “Golden Light” describes my murderous impulses during an imaginary seminar called the “Enlightenment Intensive”.

The concept of deep democracy was in the background of all the chapters describing my spiritual search and pursuits. No state is permanent, regardless of how blissful or joyous it may be. There is no such thing as an “Enlightened State” or an “End State” that a person can finally reach. As soon as you land in a state and think, “This is finally it!” something will happen to interrupt and disturb that state. The divine is found in the fluid movement itself, which includes all states and excludes none.

What I want to draw attention to is that “state-oriented” ways of thinking view enlightenment as a particular state or way of being, which creates a kind of “hierarchy of being” that will always

backfire. My experiences with being a Sannyasin clearly demonstrate this type of hierarchical thinking.

For example, in the Sannyasin movement, there was an inherent 'hierarchy of behavior' that looked something like this:

BEHAVIOR	RATING
Full body hug, including chest, tummy and pelvis	Excellent, highly advanced on spiritual path
Full body hug, excluding pelvis	Has potential, send to pelvic release workshop
Kisses on cheek but no hug	Needs Dynamic Meditation
Shakes hand	Spiritually backwards

In terms of relationships, the 'relational hierarchy table' in the Sannyasin community might look as follows:

BEHAVIOR	RATING
Shares partner freely from place of deep love for all beings	Highly evolved on spiritual path, close to Enlightenment
Has reactions but works on jealousy through for instance watching partner have sex with third party	Great spiritual potential
Clings to one partner	Lags behind; send to Primal Release workshop
Defends institution of marriage and monogamy	Beyond repair; try again in the next life

What these hierarchies create is a primary process that says, "In order to be spiritual enough to qualify for the Grand Prize of Enlightenment, I should be x (e.g. loving, free, and without any feelings of jealousy or possessiveness), and that I should *not* be y (e.g. jealous, hateful, spiteful, dependent, clinging, etc.)." This

primary process ends up becoming the figure in charge of the spiritual search, and the feelings and reactions that are marginalized to secondary status must find their way in through a backdoor. The interesting phenomenon is that even though the Sannyasin culture and its 'hierarchical ratings' are different from a lot of other spiritual movements (where for instance monogamy or even celibacy would get you 'high ratings' on the spiritual ladder), the principle stays the same: There is an idea about what a spiritual person feels like, looks like, behaves like, etc., which creates a "spiritual identity" that splits off any feelings, reactions, and impulses that don't belong to the definition.

For example, in the chapter, "Golden Light," all of my attempts to transcend my "lower impulses" through Buddhist meditation ultimately result in me threatening another female Sannyasin, who I'm really jealous of. Even though the threat comes out of *my* mouth, I split off from this emotion and can't own it as my own impulse, because it's just too "bad" and too far away from my primary process definition of what it means to be on the path of enlightenment. Hence, in the story, I claim that some "dark demonic force used my voice as its mouthpiece." In other words, the threat was *not me* and had nothing to do with me, it just happened to momentarily take possession of my voice box.

A similar process happens in the chapter "G Spot Model," in which I lie to the workshop leader about my prowess in achieving

“third eye orgasms.” In the story, it’s impossible for my primary identity to admit that I have never in fact had a third eye orgasm, because such a confession would relegate me to the realm of the “spiritually un-evolved.”

While writing these chapters, I held the notion of deep democracy in the back of my mind as a contrast, and used myself as the object of my own satire. I wanted to show the inner split and process of marginalization that gets created when experiences are not valued equally and when certain emotions and states are viewed as “unspiritual” or “bad,” while other states are considered “spiritual” or “good.”

Convergence and Merging of The Various Levels of Reality

Process Work identifies three levels of reality: consensus reality, dreamland, and the essence level.

Consensus Reality refers to the everyday reality that most people consent upon, the *doings* of our world, the agreed upon names of objects, etc. It also includes the typical way we identify ourselves . . . Dreamland includes dreamlike experiences, figures, and images from our dreams, as well as our subjective experiences. Dreamland is also dualistic in the sense that we can speak about separable parts. It is, however, a *nonconsensual* realm . . . The Essence realm is also a nonconsensual level of experience. It is the realm of subtle tendencies that occur *before* they can be verbalized, such as the *tendency* to move before moving . . . Experiences here are subtle and fleeting. We often call them *sentient* experiences. Mindell, 2005, p. 20

The awareness that different realities exist at the same time in any given process strongly influenced my writing, and this concept was a constant companion as I wrote the chapters. At times it would determine if I incorporated a specific story, not only because of its consensus reality content, but also because of its dreamland and essence components.

For example, in the chapter, "Black and Light," the consensus reality content of the story describes the physical body symptom of having prolapsed discs. Simultaneously, the story also describes the dreaming process of the collapsed discs, which has to do with "God eroding me from the inside out." Eventually, the consensus reality and dreaming levels collapse into one, so that the doctor's voice telling me to "lie still and not move" also becomes God's voice giving me the same message but for different reasons.

In this same chapter, I fly into Hitler's bedroom, which is a scene that I took from a dreaming process that I unfolded when working on my insomnia around the time my back had collapsed.

I Am All Of The Experiences, Levels, and Parts

One of the challenges of creating a fictionalized memoir is that each character needs to have its own distinct voice, personality, worldview, etc. I really needed to embody the different characters and express them through various channels; I needed to speak like them, feel like them, move like them, etc. An important deep democracy concept is to find yourself in “the other,” to discover how you are the same as the person you think is different from you. Thus, being able to access how my characters were also parts of myself was essential to the process of crawling into their skins and “becoming” them.

For example, in the chapter, “One Of Us,” the character of Rose was the object of my unwavering admiration, love, and envy. I wanted to *be* her, so when Rose “entered” the story, I had to describe her in ways that warranted my admiration. I gave her an outfit that fit her role: a brown fur coat and a woolen creamy shawl wrapped around her neck. As I wrote about Rose, I noticed that I sat up straight in my chair with my head pointed upwards and my chin in the air.

At one point in the chapter, she steps out in front of me and holds her arm out to me. This action fit her character, as she would not have waited for me or considered us to be on “equal footing” – it would not be congruent with her character or our relationship dynamic. She also greets me with “Bonjour,” because she is not

someone who would just say “hello” or “nice to see you,” the “Bonjour” adds to the flair of her character. In unfolding Rose’s character, I had to get in touch with a part of me that is “above everyone else,” is really superior, is full of self-confidence, and is quite narcissistic.

While writing this chapter, I had to go back and forth between “me” (i.e., the primary one who gets hurt and rejected and feels so inferior) and “her” (i.e., the secondary one who is a “woman of the world” and demands the attention of the entire room the minute she walks into it). The mere act of zigzagging between these roles during the creative writing process created fluidity between these parts in myself. I had to switch back and forth between the depth of “my” feelings, hurt, and self-degradation, and the self-assuredness with which “she” faced her surroundings. I do know both of these parts within me, and moving back and forth between them helped me to become the “third” figure: the one who is *both* people at the same time, and who is watching the dance between them.

Accessing Ghost Roles

Writing As A Shamanic Process

In Process Work, ghost roles are experiences in the field that are somehow marginalized but nonetheless present and effecting the atmosphere. In other words, ghost roles are “events or people who are mentioned but who are not present – and you name and represent them as an actor might do, then play out or explain their role” (Mindell, 2002, p. 37).

In the context of creative writing, ghost roles can come up in a variety of ways, including voices that are “present through their absence.” For example, dead people, whose voices have never been fully heard or have never had a chance to express themselves, may play a big role in the unfolding of a story. Another example might be when a role is “missing” and there is an emotional gap in the story that needs to be filled, so an imaginary character rises up to fill that gap.

Dreaming into and accessing the spirit, message, or essence of “ghosts” is a big part of Process Work. Whether the ghost role is a reference to a dead person, to something in the past, to something in the future, or to a “third party,” Process Work teaches you to embody the ghost as a “here and now” reality. In the context of group facilitation and two-party conflict, identifying and acting out ghost roles can facilitate and speed up the resolution of a situation that is stuck or cycling. In the context of individual work,

accessing the spirit of a dead person can make a huge difference in the grieving process and even transform or elevate the relationship with the dead person.

In the writing process, accessing ghosts with openness and fluidity is essential for developing the story beyond just the consensus reality level and description of events and into the dreaming levels. Bringing in the Ghost Roles turns writing into a Shamanic process for the following reasons:

- The writer becomes a medium for the dead to express themselves through the writer's voice.
- The story becomes a medium for hidden and inexpressible worlds such as family secrets, conversations that should have happened but never did, subtle atmospheres, background relationship dynamics, etc.
- The storyteller can bring relief to the collective field of a family system or culture by inventing and embodying characters and missing roles that the collective needs.
- The storyteller becomes a channel for the resolution or completion of inter-generational stories (e.g. traumatic patterns that repeat from one generation to the other).

When writing about experiences related to the Holocaust, we immediately enter the realm of ghosts and ghost roles. They are present in the dead themselves, the stories that are never spoken

about, the experiences that can never be shared, and the atmosphere of grief, loss, and devastation that is always present but can never be directly dealt with. For instance, the other day my sister and I were having a conversation about our childhood and the pervasive atmosphere of the Holocaust, when she said, "You just *knew* not to talk about certain things and not to ask questions." No one had to instruct us on this rule, we just knew. That instruction was in the atmosphere, in the field, in the silent fabric of secrets that pervaded everything.

Because my personal experience is related to the Holocaust, I will largely focus on these particular ghosts, but I want to mention that this phenomenon is true of all war experiences. Wars create ghosts. Whether it's on the side of the "victim" or the "perpetrator," the ghosts are there and remain there, often for generations. War creates experiences that are too painful, shameful, and devastating to talk about, but they haunt us still.

The Holocaust data in Holland is as follows: Holland had an estimated Jewish population of 140,000 people before the war, but by 1945, only about 35,000 were still alive. Some 75% of the Dutch-Jewish population perished (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Jews_in_the_Netherlands#The_Holocaust). As a "second generation child," entering into this environment was like being born into an open wound – one that was never spoken about. The Holocaust was a ghost in the family system, influencing

relationships, feelings, and atmospheres but never brought out into the open and dealt with. It was too painful to deal with, and it was also the "spirit of the time" to just move on, to not dwell on past experiences, and to not bring things out into the open to be resolved.

My mother was also a ghost in the family. After her death, she was never spoken about again in the home where I grew up. My father remarried, had two more children, and started a "new" family. It was not until I was 42 years old that I got to see photographs of my biological mother (other than the one on my grandmother's desk). When I finally saw these photos, I was overwhelmed by the strange sensation that this person, my mother, had really lived. It was sort of shocking that she really existed, had a family, and that I was one of her children. That's how abstract my mother had always been for me, a true ghost.

Creating The Missing Role

In the chapter, "Green Numbers," I dialogue with my dead mother's photograph about the Holocaust and her war experiences. My conversation with her is based on discussions I have with my father in the story in which I asked him questions about the Holocaust and he answers. The entire chapter is a sort of "ghost story" because, in the consensus reality realm, my father never spoke about anything. I never asked him questions, and he never

initiated personal conversations with me about anything that might touch upon personal feelings, so all of these conversations came from the dreaming realm.

I allowed this story to fill in the “emotional gap” created by two missing roles of the father figure and the Holocaust itself. The missing father figure took on the role of being emotionally available, responding to questions, explaining what happened during the war in language that a child could understand, talking about his own experiences as well as those of my mother’s, and so forth. The mere idea of talking openly about “why people have green numbers on their arms” would have been absolutely unthinkable in that day and age, and there’s no way that I would have asked that question nor that anyone would have given me an answer.

This is one of the incredible powers of creative writing and storytelling: history can be reinvented, emotional gaps can be filled in, and missing roles and ghosts can be brought to life. I can’t begin to explain how relieving it was to finally have these conversations. Just to be able to name things, to bring them out into the open, to ask questions and get answers, to dialogue about my feelings and reactions – all of that was missing for the “second generation”¹ and only became accessible late into adulthood, if at all.

¹ I am aware that the opposite experience is also true for many “second generation children” in that the topic of the Holocaust would have dominated every conversation in their childhood homes. In both cases however, whether through ‘absence’ or through ‘overwhelming presence’, the Holocaust experiences and the ‘ghosts of the dead’ pervaded the atmosphere.

Speaking To The Dead

Whilst writing the first part of the book, which deals a lot with the Holocaust, I often had the strong feeling that the dead were “looking over my shoulder.” As if this was their opportunity too, to make their voices heard. The strongest experience I had around accessing the ghost role was when I was writing the chapter, “The Last Boat,” which deals with my grandmother’s Holocaust experiences and her separation from her daughter (my mother). The story of my grandmother fleeing to England while my mother and grandfather stayed behind in Holland had always been a ghost in our family.

I never intended to write this story, but it *demand*ed to be written. This demand started showing up in different ways as I wrote about the Holocaust. There is too much detail to describe all of the ways that this demand manifested, but I want to mention one event in particular. During the period when I was writing about the Holocaust, out of the blue, letters that my mother had written to my father during the 1950s suddenly appeared from underneath an old pile of documents in my father’s attic. After reading the letters, I realized that my mother had never forgiven her own mother for leaving her during the war. Around that same time, I had a conversation with a friend who knew about my grandmother’s story, and he said that the choice my grandmother had to make was like a “Sophie’s choice.” Hearing someone take my

grandmother's side in this way was new – no one in my family had ever taken her side or questioned how the situation might have been for her. I realized that my grandmother had never been able to tell her side story to anyone. It wasn't a time in history when women voiced their experiences, especially about something she likely felt guilt-ridden about and utterly alone with.

I also saw how an inter-generational drama was playing itself out: my mother was abandoned by her mother at a time where she really needed her (in Nazi-occupied Holland), and I in turn was abandoned by my mother at an age where I still needed her (as a toddler). It was like the entire story of this inter-generational drama was seeking some kind of completion or resolution, and I felt that telling my grandmother's story was key to that. In a kind of weird way, I felt that by "channeling" and writing down my grandmother's story, I was somehow acting as a mediator between her and her daughter, and by helping them to find resolution with each other, it also helped me to find piece with the situation.

In writing her story, I literally felt my grandmother speaking through me. It was an incredibly powerful experience; like I momentarily left my own identity and became her. I felt her pain, her agony, her guilt, her longing to re-connect with her daughter, her impotence, and, most of all, her intense desire to tell her side of the story for the first time. After typing the last words, I felt this incredible sense of relief. Like some huge weight had lifted off me

and like my grandmother was able to let go of this big burden she had been carrying. I could feel her smiling happily from the other side.

Exploring My Life Myth

What Is A Life Myth?

In Process Work, a life myth is the archetypal pattern behind a person's life, and it "frames the personal growth journey in an impersonal way, allowing for wider perspectives and new meaning to emerge. It not only locates personal history in the context of a broader archetypal drama, but also adds a spiritual dimension to self-exploration" (Diamond & Jones, 2004, pp. 148-149).

In his seminar, "Great Transformations" (2010), Max Schupbach described the concept of life myth as "a time and space invariant basic organizing principle present in our lives" (personal notes). As Schupbach explained, Jung originally developed the concept of life myth and childhood dreams. He noticed that early in life children frequently have repetitive dreams that are ominous. Meaning they are like an omen that foretells what's to come. Mindell (1982) further developed this concept with his theory of the *dreambody*, which suggests that chronic symptoms mirror the same pattern found in the childhood dream. Our chronic relationship issues (i.e., the relationship issues we encounter again and again) are similarly connected to our life myth.

Schupbach (2010) emphasizes that a life myth is not the same as a Jungian archetype because it is not a static entity. Instead, a life myth is a process that has direction and is moving somewhere. In his book, *ProcessMind* (2010), Mindell refers to this “invisible direction” and guiding force as processmind:

The processmind tends to pull you in a specific overall direction in life (the U), though at any given moment, it allows you go to in as many directions as possible or as you would like – as long as they add up to your overall direction . . . This direction corresponds to your deepest self, which in dreams may appear as your first memorable childhood memory, where it represents your personal myth. That our childhood dreams tend to point out the overall direction of our lives is a remarkable fact and, I believe, also a mystery. Perhaps the processmind that organizes basic dream patterns and our overall direction is timeless. pp. 30-31

Why Explore A Life Myth?

I am fascinated by the concept that as humans, we have two or three main patterns or themes that we struggle with throughout our lives. It is not so much that we choose our life themes, but instead that *they* choose us. For instance, in my case, the theme of death plays a huge role in my life myth. I didn't consciously choose that theme. It chose me. Even before I was born, death was with me in the form of my mother's cancer, which was growing next to me in her tummy.

As fate would have it, my life journey became a kind of “host” for this particular theme, in which again and again I had to wrestle with “the angel of death” – both literally and symbolically. All of us

have one or two of these major life themes, which keep on recurring in different forms, and they become mythical tasks that ask us to live, understand, integrate, and transform them.

The sections that follow demonstrate the ways in which the background theme of my life myth influenced my writing.

Symbolic Thinking

Having the background knowledge that the same mythic theme or energy will come up in many different areas (e.g. in body symptoms, dreams, addictions, relationship struggles, etc.) enabled me to recognize when those themes and patterns were emerging. It helped me to develop an "eye" for symbolic thinking and notice when thematic clusters or patterns were present.

For example, I noticed that many of my stories had the recurring theme of "irreverence" and "searching for an ecstatic state." Merely recognizing this as a mythic theme made me suddenly see it everywhere: in my early teenager experiences (see "Majsha's Secret Book" and "Sticky and Wet"), in all the drugs I experimented with (see "Free Love" and "Ecstasy"), in all the outrageous workshops I have done (see "Poona" and "G-spot model"), in the highly unconventional guru's I picked (see "Poona" and "Clitoral Betrayal"), in the relationship channel (see "Blue"), and in the dreaming process of my body symptom that was an experience of "making love to God" (see "Black and Light").

Childhood Dream

Knowing that the polarity in a childhood dream often displays the essential pattern of a person's life has helped me to see where these patterns have appeared in my own life story. For example, in my childhood dream, I crash into a wall (the symbol and dreaming of "the wall" will be discussed in more detail in a later section). Just possessing the knowledge of the importance of this dream symbol enabled me to recognize other "wall" themes in my life story. This was not intentional, but the very first chapter of the book ended up with the title, "Words On My Wall." I could recognize this story as significant because it centers on the same symbol as the one in my childhood dream and because it had a numinous quality to it (see the section below). This numinous quality felt as if a divine presence was causing the "words on the wall" to come alive and create pictures in my head.

Numinous Childhood Memories

According to the Encarta World English Dictionary (1999), the term numen or numinous is defined as follows: "Having a mysterious power that suggests the presence of a spirit or god . . . filled with inextricable associations with God . . . relating to numina, the spirits or gods believed in some cultures to inhabit places or things."

One example of a numinous experience is when we are in nature and have a sense of a divine or “bigger” presence, but numinous experiences can also be found in memories from our childhood. Certain childhood memories contain a presence or experience, which extends beyond linear events or rationality. Something else was present, which gives the memory an “out of the ordinary” quality. According to Schupbach (2010), these particular childhood memories have a quality similar to that of repetitive childhood dreams, and they point us to the quality of our song and our unique life myth.

Learning about this allowed me to recognize which of my own early childhood memories had this numinous feel to them, and they inspired me to write certain stories that I otherwise would not have written. Exploring these memories also helped me to recognize the ways in which particular themes and patterns have emerged throughout my life in meaningful ways. For example, the chapter “Big Love” describes a numinous experience that I had as a little girl whilst in the synagogue cuddled under my brother’s prayer shawl. I felt that, *“Suddenly there is this big love all around me and inside me. And I know that God is with us, in the colours and the smells, the movements and the sounds.”*

Peak Experiences

Our most intense experiences of happiness, joy, ecstasy, or fulfillment also point to our life myth since these are moments when we feel closest to ourselves and to the forces that move and pull us. Knowing this made me value these “peak experiences” and see them as more than just “fun times” but also as deeply important and meaningful. This awareness also enabled me to write about my ecstatic moments from a perspective that really valued the essential quality that was present in them.

For example, the chapter “G-spot model” describes how I felt as though I had discovered my “raison d’être” after assisting in a Tantric Workshop when I was about 22 years old. Even though the story is funny and satirical, it is also true that one of my “reasons for being” is in fact to bring the worlds of sexuality and spirituality together. In my mind, this is the essence of what Tantra stands for, and I still feel deeply aligned with it even if I no longer use the actual Tantric Techniques I learnt at the time.

The Ally

In his book, *The Shaman’s Body* (1993), Arnold Mindell describes the ally as a teacher and “symbol or expression of an altered state of consciousness” (p. 95). The ally is a force that wounds us and awakens us at the same time; it is both an

opponent (e.g. an inflictor of a great wound) as well as a potential doorway into a greater consciousness.

Allies may appear in dreams, fantasies and body symptoms. Or they may appear first after an attack from a friend or in the midst of a difficult crisis. The most powerful allies impinge upon you. You want life to go in one direction, but unconscious energies go in another. Mindell, 1993, p. 97

The ally is an essential part of our life myth. It appears as our nemesis, and part of our life journey is turning our nemesis into our ally. In wrestling with the ally, with our opponent, we become this figure and gain its powers; we *integrate* the ally.

It is important to battle with the ally. Don Juan recommends that, when facing the ally, you gather all your courage and grab the ally before it demolishes you, go after it before it hunts you. You must continue this chase until you connect and the struggle begins. Then you must "wrestle the spirit to the ground" and hold it there until it gives you power. Mindell, 1993, p. 114

In a later section of this paper, I describe in more detail how the ally has appeared throughout my own life story, and the different shapes and forms it has taken on. But in a more general way, the concepts of the ally and of wrestling with the ally had a huge influence on my writings about death and the Holocaust. The devastation and deep grief of those experiences were not the only angle from which I wrote those stories. In fact, I was *unable* to write only from a place of grief, because in the background I also

felt the ally pulling me and connecting me with the dead and with the Divine Presence that never dies.

I could write about my own story from any of the angles mentioned above to illustrate the concept of the life myth, but because the ally, in particular “death as an ally,” played such a crucial role in my life story, I will use that as my entry point into describing how I see “the river of meaning” as it appears throughout my life.

Death As An Ally

In this section, I will explore how the ally appeared in my life as an awakening force, and describe the many different ways in which the ally manifested as a secondary force in my life.

What Is The Ally?

If my story were a river with many different streams flowing into a central channel, this main channel would be named, “Luminous River of Death.” Death is the biggest theme of my life, and the central question of my childhood. It has defined the intensity of my life’s search for meaning and instilled in me a burning desire to return “home” – a longing that has colored and shaped every aspect of my life.

Death has been my ruler; an inflictor of great pain and loss, like a swordsman who cuts all the branches off of a tree until all

that remains is the stem itself. And ultimately, death is my mother and the Great Mother of all; the one who catches us in her wide embrace once we let out that final breath (hence, the first part of the book is titled, "In the womb of death"). In other words, death has always been my ally, my biggest opponent, my teacher, and my awakener.

From a Process-oriented viewpoint, death is not only a literal event; it also has a dreaming component to it. On a dreaming level, death may mean many different things. It could be an immovable presence, a symbolic death of a certain identity, or a radical power that interrupts, changes, redirects, and awakens.

When death is viewed from this dreaming perspective, it's easy to see how it appeared as an ally in my early childhood repetitive dreams. In my first dream, the ally appeared in the form of a wall. I was happily cycling along when suddenly, out of the blue, a huge wall appeared in front of me. It was so quick and so sudden that I had no time to break, and I crashed into the wall. I awoke at the moment of impact. In the second dream, I was walking along a path, when all of a sudden the path ended and there was a steep cliff in front of me, so steep that I can't even see the bottom of it. Again, I woke up just before falling off of the cliff.

In both dreams, the path that I am on and that I'm navigating through personal will (either by cycling or walking) gets radically interrupted and stopped by a bigger force. At the moment of impact

(i.e., the crash or the fall), there is an awakening (literally, waking up) that happens.

The ally – symbolized by the wall in my first dream – is a radical and interrupting force that shows up in my life in the form of shocking events centered around the theme of death. On the one hand, the death of my mother at a young age “interrupted” our human relationship and our mother/child bond, but, on the other hand, her death also opened me up to a bigger dimension that is beyond life and death. Thus, the story, “How Long Forever Is,” describes both the sadness of my loss as well as the fluidity of our relationship, which continues even after her physical death.

Death is a force that is absolute, sudden, and interrupts “the normal path,” not only in the sense of ending a life (i.e., especially if the death occurs “prematurely” or before old age), but also in the sense of disregarding any human sense of fairness or justice. For example, in the chapter titled, “The Theory of Relativity,” I describe the impact of finding out that my cousin died suddenly in an accident. At one point in the story, I say that my cousin can’t be dead, “because he is only 17 years old” and “God would never do this to my aunt because she lost her entire family in the Holocaust.” At the end of the story, I try to pray to God, but I can’t. God, in the traditional sense of the word, had died for me along with my cousin. My religious worldview of God as a protector and as someone I can bargain with to do the right thing – a worldview that had been

sacred to me up until that point and shaped my identity – gets interrupted and destroyed. This experience had the same intensity and immediacy as the impact of crashing into the wall in my childhood dream.

The ally also appeared as the “Annihilator” in the form of the ghost of the Holocaust, which looms over everything and pervades the atmosphere of my childhood.

Wrestling With The Ally

According to Mindell (1993):

The dreamingbody is an ally that does not always give its message or power without a courageous encounter. Shamans find the ally’s secrets during vision quests in lonely, abandoned places in nature or in other-worldly visions. This means that you can find the ally in the wilderness, in inaccessible and remote spots, or in the deeply unconscious and secondary processes in your life. p. 113

In my story, I also describe how the ally appears in different forms such as dreams, life events, relationship struggles, and body symptoms. For example, in the chapter, “Meeting An Old Friend,” I describe how the ally manifested in a dream that I had about a lion. In this dream, I had to overcome my fear and “look the lion in the eye,” which was a way of facing off with my ally.

In the relationship channel, my ally surfaced when I married someone who at times filled the role of “my persecutor.” Darryl and I shared a strong war history: I had a Holocaust background and he

had been a soldier for the South African Apartheid government fighting in Angola. It was one of those fateful, unavoidable, magnetic attractions that could not be denied. Throughout the marriage, the ally appeared as the “annihilator” in the relationship, a force I wrestled with but could not yet face head on, could not yet “look in the eye” as per the lion dream. However, during the course of the marriage, I eventually did face the ally, and I “became Darryl” in the sense that I integrated his power, and towards the end of the marriage I was even able to take on the persecutor without fear.

Two weeks into my marriage, the ally also appeared through the world channel as a car accident in which I literally crashed into a mountain wall. In this circumstance, my childhood dream surfaced as an actual event. Both the mountain and the jolting impact of the crash were secondary forces that wanted to be more fully integrated.

One of the most painful ways that the ally appeared was through a direct opponent, through my ex-partner’s physical attack. At the time, I certainly could not see this event as the force of the ally manifesting in my life. It’s only now, after almost ten years and after writing these stories and unfolding the deeper dreaming levels, that I can see this event as the ally appearing.

A few years later, the ally appeared again in the form of a body symptom, specifically in the form of a back injury. This injury

was a force that literally threw me down onto my back, and it forced me to surrender to a power that was greater than my personal will (see the chapter, "Black and Light"). This was definitely one of my more powerful and direct experiences of being "interrupted" by something bigger than me. Whenever I have worked on the dreaming process behind my back symptoms, the process is about becoming a wild, tiger-like animal that catches and holds down its prey with huge claws. It's about a force that wants to destroy all that is "false" and wants to get to the "truth" of things.

Big Life Edges

Life myths are connected to our biggest edges, which are the parts of ourselves that we find most difficult to access, face, integrate, and transform. "Long-term edges are seen as opportunities for learning the central lessons of a person's life – of discovering the life myth, the basic blueprint behind life's meandering path" (Diamond & Jones, 2004, p. 147).

Over the last four years of my Process Work studies, I have worked on crossing my long-term edges and integrating the force of the ally. Some of the main aspects of this work were related to inner and outer jealousies, processing trauma, picking up the energy of the "annihilator," and befriending death.

The theme of inner and outer jealousies frequently arose when I felt that I had “stood out” in any way or shown my skills in public. After “exposing” myself in this way, I would often have nighttime dreams about being annihilated. I would freeze, dissociate, and even have panic attacks throughout the night. The inner jealousy would manifest as a voice in my head that warned me, instructed me to hide myself, and told me that I “could get away with it once, but that I must not do that again.” The outer jealousy surfaced as fears about how “others” would respond to me if I showed myself.

I worked through this edge in different ways: by learning to defend myself against these jealousies and by befriending the state of dissociation and learning how I could still function in the world and relate to others. Especially powerful were the moments when I processed trauma in the public domain (e.g., in front of my cohort members, whom I perceived in the moment as my “annihilators”), and then faced them afterwards and saw love in their eyes.

Another long-term edge had to do with picking up the energy and essence of the annihilator. I worked with this theme on many different occasions, and it often involved a sense that something was “watching me” and wanted to “get me.” Unfolding and becoming this “watching eye” led me to an essence of inner power that “sees everything exactly as it is,” similar to the Buddhist description of the essence level as a “mirror that reflects

everything." At other times, this process came up as a fear of being followed by something "evil" that wanted to annihilate me. But by becoming the "one who follows and annihilates" and by processing this role down to its essence level, I discovered a Sun God figure – an experience of being a God-like, brightly shining sun, and feeling indestructible.

Befriending death was also a long-term edge that I worked with, which took me further *into* the experience of death as opposed to trying to avoid or deny it. On many occasions, especially during much of my inner work, I entered into the space of "being annihilated" and surrendered to "dying". This led to a sense of total freedom, joy, and a deep connection with the "dead spirits" surrounding me.

CONCLUSION

Integrating The Power Of The Ally and Life Myth

Wrestling with "death as an ally" is something that all humans must face simply because death is a secondary force in everyone's life: it happens *to us* and ultimately, and we have no control over it.

According to Mindell (1993):

The shaman in you lives daily with the sense of death, while the rest of you fights the depressing thought that life will soon be over. I think it is as the shamans say: only the sense of imminent death shakes you loose from your momentary attachments and fears, from your interest in the programs you have set up. p. 157

As described above, the ally can appear in very difficult, shocking, and painful ways as a secondary force in one's life. However, the same force, when wrestled with and unfolded on a dreaming and essence level, can take on very different dimensions:

With each battle, you come closer to something eternal, and dropping your personal history becomes easier. The ally demands not only momentary change, but a total reappraisal of your personal identity and worldview. Your gods and goddesses demand that you accept your mythical nature and undertake feats that you think should be left to the gods. Mindell, 1993, p. 119

After having wrestled with the ally throughout my life and used my awareness to work with its force and energy, I can clearly see how some of my more "mythical tasks" were embedded in the wrestle itself.

Among other things, the struggle helped me to bring out the wholeness of everything. Wholeness is a radical concept. It includes everything: blood, sweat, urine, tears, and sperm – all of which feature extensively throughout the book (hence the title of the book: “The God of Fluids”). Paradoxically, having “death as an ally” puts me in touch with an irreverent and ecstatic quality of being fully alive, of seeing the divine in everything – in the sacred and in the profane.

This irreverent quality was always present in my life. It was one of the mythic threads that first appeared when I sensed the divine in my brother’s sweat whilst we were in the synagogue. It appeared again, as a teenager, when the “irreverent” appeared in the mist of “reverent moments,” like when my cousin showed me his penis on Shabbath and when my religious friend gave me her porn magazine to read because “it makes your tummy go funny.” I also felt this irreverence in me while writing the book, both in the topics themselves and in the explicit style with which I wrote about the various topics.

I feel that this particular mythic style is most related to the “crazy wisdom” traditions, in which, for instance, a Zen Master is asked by a disciple what the Buddha is, and the teacher replies: “Dry shit.” This type of “crazy wisdom” force appeared in my childhood dream as a “jolter,” as something sudden that appears out of nowhere. It’s unpredictable, radical, and has an awakening

quality. When I work with the ally on a processmind level, it literally comes up as an awakener, a "destroyer of unconsciousness." I experience the "jolter" as a radical force in me that wants to bring all of the hidden and forbidden stuff out into the light and make it visible. It wants to wake myself and others up from the dream of unconsciousness. The presence of the "jolter" was strongly present during my writing process. I had an irrepressible urge to bring out the truth and write about the things that are normally taboo: sex, death, love, darkness, God, extreme states, and so forth.

The wall in my childhood dream is a "jolter" and "interrupter," but when it is unfolded on an essence level, it is also a force of immovability, something that is indestructible and impersonal. It is a presence outside the "space-time continuum," something that is bigger than my personal will or my consensus reality self. This force ensures that when I am leading my life too much through my primary identity or personal will power, something bigger will interrupt this flow (e.g., when the body symptom of my back injury changed the life direction I was on). Integrating this force means connecting with this immovable, unchangeable presence and being led by its invisible guidance in whatever I do and wherever I am.

Integrating the ally has also meant becoming a bridge between the "world of the dead" and the "world of the living." Being born in "the womb of death" points to the mythic task of bringing

the invisible and visible worlds together, and of being connected to death even whilst in the midst of living.

This particular mythic task reminds me of a dream I had just after completing my final exams in Process Work. In the dream, Amy Mindell appeared as a bright being with intense, shining eyes. She examined me about what my "real calling" is as a Process Worker. I tried to be clever and talk about the individuation process and all kinds of psychological concepts, but Amy interrupted me and said, "No Niyati, people come to you to learn how to die."

For me, the dream summarizes my mythic task of having death as an ally, both in terms of my work in the world as well as my inner work. It is my task to die whilst still alive, to die to my personal history and my identity as "Niyati." In many ways, this project has largely been about dying to my history and identity. Writing up my personal history in the form of a story and putting it out into the public domain and world channel means that it is no longer "my" story. Once it is written, it's "out there" for anyone to see, and I can no longer own it, hide it, or protect it.

In a strange kind of way that is difficult to explain, I feel as though I had no real choice about writing the book. I didn't exactly choose to write the book, it chose me. I even remember talking with the book itself and saying that it was as if we had been having these loose flings (i.e., short stories that I wrote here and there and that were gathering dust in my laptop archive), but then, all of a

sudden, the book wanted a commitment. It wanted to marry me, and something in me had to say, "Yes."

It felt as though I had to write the book for me but also for something that was bigger than me. Making myself visible and exposed in this way – from the most beautiful and profound moments, to the most secret and darkest corners – is my biggest life edge. In addition to being personal, it is also a collective edge that frequently accompanies histories of persecution. It is an edge to be visible to the world and to no longer hide.

While writing the book, I continually felt my ancestors behind me, urging me, and even pushing me to come out, to no longer "hide my light under bushel," and to write this book. We live, not only for ourselves, but also for the dead that preceded us. I know that in crossing this edge, I am giving myself the right to exist. This most primal and basic of rights was brutally taken away from my ancestors and was never restored during their remaining time on this earth. My hope is that in some non-local way, I am crossing this edge not just for me, but also for them.

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