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## **Convergence, Connection and Synthesis**

### **The Path to Developing My Practice**

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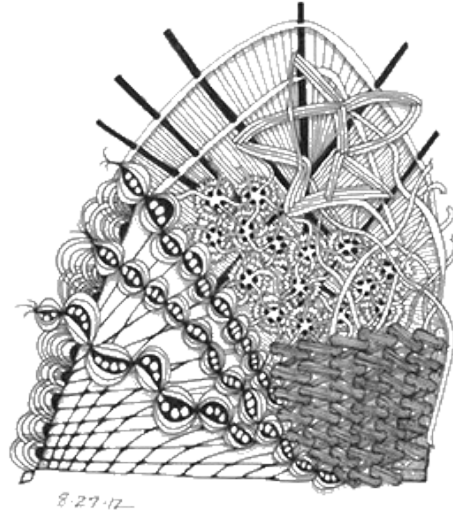
#### **The Starting Place**

As long as I can remember, I've enjoyed clear thinking, articulate communication, and vigorous debate. Ask my parents, they'll tell you. Early interests in science and medicine moved into a fascination with history and culture; my undergraduate and masters degrees are in anthropology.

I wanted to be an academic, a researcher and professor, a teacher and writer—to study deeply, read widely, and have things to say worth listening to. The university was one of the first places I felt at home, and I wanted to stay as a qualified, certified, approved member with full privileges.

Within the academy, disciplines were separate, roles well defined, and paths to achievement clearly specified. This view of intellectual and professional life felt balanced to me, a good mix of challenge and safety, breaking new ground and maintaining traditional structures.

As long as I can remember, there has been another side to my life. When I first read of Jung's idea of his first and second personalities, I felt a thrill of recognition that ended in a shiver. My secret, apparently, wasn't.



From earliest childhood, I suffered from intense nightmares. “Suffered from” might not be the best choice of phrase for a dream conference, but that’s what it felt like. Night after night, I was chased by evil men or vile monsters, or stood before closed doors or in dark hallways, not knowing where to go or what would happen. I hated going to sleep.

I also loved to read. Mysteries and fantasies were my favorites, with stories of other cultures and distant times mixed in. I could get lost in books, and often did.

In the outer world, I lived my first personality, as most of us do. I did well in school, worked hard, shouldered on through disappointments, and hoped for success. Finding myself in graduate school as academia began its series of downturns, I left anthropology for a more practical degree in education.

After a brief stint in the private sector, I returned to the academy where I worked as an educator supporting the faculty of a small medical school, combining many of my interests in a tidy package.

I continued in this role until the bottom fell out of my life. I developed acute rheumatoid arthritis, wound up flat on my back in bed for several months, made it through that phase, tried to keep

working, and finally had to admit my doctor was right: I could no longer maintain a demanding, full time professional career.

In the free fall that followed, my second personality came to the fore. Looking for alternative ways to cope with chronic pain, I learned shamanic journeying and discovered dreamwork. I explored women's ways of knowing and goddess spirituality. I reignited my love of myth and symbol, and learned the Tarot and astrology.

The way from there to here hasn't been clear-cut, tidy, planned, or at times especially welcome. While I have a fairly good idea what 'there' looked like, I'm not at all clear on 'here.' Standing with the PsiberDreaming community on the cusp of its second decade, contemplating the what-comes-next question of the 11th dimension, feels like a good time to examine where I am.

Knowing this second-personality life is not a diversion, not a sideline, not temporary, and not going away, I struggle to integrate my first and second selves. This paper explores where I am at this point in the process.



## Authority and Authenticity

An early allegiance to academia gave me a particular sense of authority. Basically, I fall into the ‘earned’ rather than ‘ascribed’ camp. I’m not interested in leaders because someone gave them a title or because they took it, but because of what they know and what they can do.

Shared markers are helpful: Academic rank, lists of publications, prestigious journals, respected departments, wide citations. Yes, I was involved in academia long enough to know none of these are perfect, but they were a start. Something to go on.

In my new communities, there seemed to be no benchmarks. Instead, conflict over legitimacy and recognition was rife.

In the world of contemporary shamanic practice, some pursue core shamanism as a culturally appropriate path for those of us whose indigenous traditions were lost long ago. Others believe strongly that only indigenous paths are legitimate; some believe those paths are only open to practitioners within the culture.

Dreams and dreamwork are open to everyone. Yet the understanding of dreams at their most basic—what they are—is still contested, sometimes hotly. Training and credentials for dreamworkers vary, with no clear way to distinguish levels of skill and insight without diving in and experiencing them.

The astrology and Tarot communities are much the same—with the added challenge that in some places, the practice of either or both is against the law.

What’s a responsible, rational person to do? Is it possible to develop an authentic practice in such confusing circumstances?



The answer to this conundrum lies in my discovery that authority and authenticity are not the same. Because of the similarity in spelling, I assumed these words derived from the same root—a mistake also made in the 1500s when the ‘t’ in the then-current version of *authority* was changed to a ‘th.’

In fact, authority and authenticity come from tellingly different roots.

Authority comes from the Latin *autor*, the father, and carries the sense of an original source or leader, the progenitor. Authority is derived from that first source and comes down through the proper lineage.

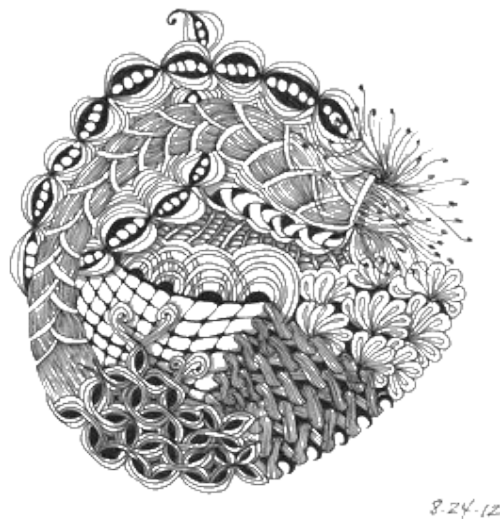
Authenticity comes from the Greek *authentikos*, also means original, but derives from *autos*, or self. We are most authentic when true to our original, genuine self, without worrying about what is conferred on us (or not) by others.

Both words refer to something original and genuine, differing in the model of transmission. For authority, we refer back to a source outside ourselves. For authenticity, we look within.

In a world of ancient, spiritual, intuitive, lost, hidden and rediscovered practices, there is no standard way up the ladder, no list of conferred titles and degrees. We’re all finding our own way.

This is also the heart of these movements; understanding we each have a path to walk, we each know something about the way without needing to claim we know The Way. This is a hallmark of “cultural creatives,” the phrase coined by Paul Ray and Sherry Ruth Anderson to describe active participants in the many-faceted, tough-to-pin-down cultural transformations we’re all living through.

It seems I needed, as Joseph Campbell advised, to give up the life I had planned so as to have the life that waited for me.



### **Cherry Picking and Spiritual Tourism**

Finding myself on a less traveled path, I nevertheless looked for something defined and consistent. My training in anthropology gave me a keen sense of cultural integrity. Truly understanding a practice, or a particular way of life, requires regular exposure and interaction, long study, and humility.

Finding a new discipline, I dove in eagerly. I wanted a kind of immersion leading to knowledge, skill, and hopefully wisdom. A PhD in shamanism, so to speak, or in dreamwork.

But instead of traveling deeper into a chosen practice, I experienced two kinds of events.

At some point, my inner experiences in one discipline would open doors into another. Sometimes these openings were subtle and sometimes direct. For example, in a shamanic journey at a dream workshop, the figure of Mercurius came to me and said, “You need to know me better,” which led to my becoming an astrologer.

At the same time, outer experiences blocked my ability to continue on a chosen path. Despite my being engaged and enthusiastic, a prominent dream teacher refused to allow me to take more workshops; an online training program in goddess spirituality declined to allow me to enroll in further courses; and opportunities to collaborate on workshops, or develop connections within organizations, evaporated mysteriously.

While my allies cajoled, enticed, and sometimes outright insisted that I explore new areas, my efforts to stick with one thing and make a go of it were just not working out.

This bothered me. It felt undisciplined and unfocused. It wasn't comfortable being an outlier, trying to find my way among communities that were already outliers in the wider culture of which I was still a member.

For years, I thought I was doing something wrong, or simply doing the wrong thing, as I continued to explore, learn and practice in the ways open to me. I seemed to be in some kind of holding pattern. I developed an intense aversion to the Hanged Man card in the Tarot, which I encountered with depressing regularity.

Why couldn't I stick with one discipline? Wasn't I just cherry picking? We in the West have a history of arrogance, a belief we can go somewhere, see something we like, and have it. Unwilling to accept the discipline of long practice, or the complexity of a system that includes Shadow as well as light, we pull out the plums and think we have the whole pie.

Cherry picking is a universal human failing, sometimes called the fallacy of incomplete evidence, in which we see only what supports the conclusion we've already reached. A form of

observer bias (and we are all observers), it's the reason for scientific protocols as well as the discipline to continue through dark nights of the soul.

As spiritual tourists, we can visit sacred sites in different lands, sample practices developed in different traditions, read books reflecting disparate world views, and wind up with something superficial, disrespectful and meaningless.

I understood the need for commitment and discipline. I tried to maintain them, but instead kept getting pushed off the path into prickly bushes.



### **Desperately Seeking Synthesis**

My first attempt to make peace with this complexity was to design separate, complementary practices. Musicians don't feel a need to limit themselves to one instrument. Writers explore different genres. Many practitioners of alternative healing and divination have training in multiple approaches and offer these choices to clients.

I realized I could develop a practice that offered different modalities, and advise clients on which practice best fit their needs. Initially, this approach seemed workable and successful: Astrology and the Tarot are familiar to many. The Tarot is easy, fairly quick, and well suited to exploring



focused questions about the near future. Astrology is a wonderful tool for personal exploration, good for looking at “big picture” questions, and able to go long term. Shamanic practice is a powerful healing modality, but strange enough to be uncomfortable for some. Dreamwork opens the door for those who remember their dreams, and remains opaque to those who do not.

As I explored these traditions, fishing in multiple streams, I realized they had much in common. Each is a symbolic language, a way of perceiving and understanding the world. Each comes from particular traditions, has unique methods, and is better suited to some needs than others, but all draw on the well of intuition and deep knowing that Jung represented as the collective unconscious and Henry Corbin called the Imaginal Realm.

Then the edges between my practices started to blur. From the beginning, what I learned in one tradition informed and supported my learning in another. Over time, though, they began to blend. I dreamt of shamanic allies, who appeared on Tarot cards. My journeys explored dream territory, and helped me understand astrological patterns. I began reading charts more intuitively, listening to allies who advised me where to look and what to say. The planetary archetypes themselves became allies.

In this rich and vibrant world, I sometimes feel like Alice in Wonderland. How do I navigate when I keep changing size and shape? And how on earth do I develop a practice?

The 2010 IASD Conference in Asheville proved to be a turning point. There, I found myself in ongoing discussions about this very issue. Friends gathered around a table the first evening, to discover we were all struggling with how to define ourselves and develop practices that included dreamwork and art, dreamwork and the Tarot, dreamwork and shamanic practice, in a context that made sense while offering something helpful.

The discussion continued throughout the conference and beyond it. If we didn’t arrive at definitive answers, we did find that articulating the questions was itself empowering. These conversations helped me notice I wasn’t alone with this issue in any of my communities. Astrology today includes several shamanic astrologers, exploring ways to combine these ancient

traditions. I now own shamanic Tarot decks, as well as astrological and alchemical ones. Contemporary shamanic practitioners include a wide range of modalities. Dreamwork, as we know, is always eclectic.

Slowly, I am accepting the idea that a synthesis of my various practices is possible, desirable, and inevitable. I admit freely that, at this time, I have no clear idea what that looks like. The fog is not comfortable but is becoming familiar.

The task before me is to continue to practice, including putting work before the public, even as I explore new ways to do what I do. My first personality self would much prefer to stay behind the scenes until everything is worked out, and proper credentials have been acquired. Personality two has a higher tolerance for ambiguity but is not nearly as organized.

In the interaction between my organized, rational self and my intuitive, dreaming self, something new is emerging. Each self asks the other tough questions; each eventually comes up with creative answers. I hope for the stamina to stay the course, and the skill to recognize the new thing when it shows up.

