

Offerings to God: My Personal Experience of a Modern Mystery School

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“The windows of the soul are infinite.
And it is through the eyes of the soul
that paradise is visioned.
If there are flaws in your paradise,
open more windows!”
~ Henry Miller

A number of years ago, I began a quest to investigate *how to open more windows*. My initial investigations uncovered that our culture lacks a wisdom-centered theory of consciousness, and therefore offers little guidance that informs the experience of being truly alive. I was disheartened, sometimes feeling stuck in systems of thought that seemed destined to diminish my sense of joy at the miracle of being a human on this planet.

I experienced that individuals too often interface with the world through their habitual patterns, organizing their conceptualized experiences and interpretations into thoughts that create their sense of “reality”. I sensed in myself the creation of my own ideas of

reality occurring at an automatic, sometimes habitual, unconscious default level of awareness and being.

Like many, I could gather my own dissatisfactions into a relatively small number of categories ~ the longing for deeper and more meaningful relationships with self and others, existential questions of meaning and purpose, and even a foreboding or denial of my own mortality. I was no exception to this soul-level seeking.

In my refusal to remain in a self-created “reality” too constrictive and soul-stifling, I deepened my explorations. I possessed an underlying instinct that through specific practices, I could radically transform how I perceive and respond to life ~ that I could find new tools and practices and a new world view which focused on differentiation within unity rather than isolation and separateness. I believed that I not only could, but was determined to, find my way into living more aware, more awake, and more kind. I set out to transform myself and thus transform the way I meet the world and life itself.

My explorations eventually led me to an experience that radically opened me, taught me, challenged me, inspired me, and yes invited me to not merely attempt to “change my world”, but rather to develop an interior environment in which my mind operates that would allow me to become a change agent and a purposeful human being. That experience was a mystery school.

Was it by accident or a coincidence or divinely orchestrated? I’m not sure. But one day, I found myself sitting in a School where people of all backgrounds and experience levels were gathered. It was a consortium of humanity, as diverse as one could find. Yet there seemed a unifying desire or energy that connected us. My mind was challenged until it recognized that my mental images of life and the world, of work, of being a husband and father, had to radically change for me to grow beyond my limited view of myself... beyond even my views of reality itself. Somehow, I was found because I was finding myself. And where was I... I was a student in the Nine Gates Mystery School.

Drawing inspiration from the ancient Greek and Roman Mystery Schools, the Nine Gates Mystery School is a modern take on spiritual transformation. What is necessary for spiritual transformation to take root? Individuals must embrace that the evolutionary-specific egoic default system we are baseline equipped with is inadequate for the task of navigating our human condition. As a result, we spend incredible amounts of time as a human collective either trying to escape or numb our everyday experiences. Yet threads have been left by different wisdom traditions throughout history, that when taught in a structured, coherent way, allow deep change to occur. Nine Gates

connected these threads for me and provided a sequential program of experiences curated from these wisdom lineages.

Mystery School offered me new abilities and skills to form deeper bonds with my wife, children, parents, and friends. It increased my resilience and capabilities to weather life's challenges and deepened my gratitude for life's graces. It expanded my appreciation for our natural world and revealed our essential connection to it. It changed the organizing principle of my life from a goal of perfection motivated by fear to the goal of creative realization governed by flow, faith, and humility. I eventually woke up and understood Walt Whitman's instruction: *make your own Bible*.

This is far from a passive approach to life. Rick Rubin, the famous music producer, spoke recently of it as "Aiming for greatness. Everything we make, we are making as an offering for God. If you are making an *offering to God*, you are not taking any shortcuts. You are not thinking what the radio station is going to think. You are doing the best you can in a universal way for something you don't even understand. It is a different head space."

Terence McKenna corrected the existentialist Sartre by pointing out obviously it is not nature which is mute, but humans who are deaf. There is meaning and connection all around us, but we are not trained to see and feel it. There exists a fourth drive that inspires human beings, an enlightenment drive, in addition to the survival, sex, and social imperatives described by Freud and others. This drive is an impulse to hear and see in a new way.

All of this relates back to Mystery School, to the vibrational field the teachers and staff created so I could initially feel, and then work on deepening, this recognition.

With continued practice, these positive perceptual transformations have opened many windows, creating an enhanced operating system upon which I am living an enriched and more fulfilling life. And as the aperture of my own self-realization opens, my heart moves towards a more compassionate view. I recognize that many humans are radically disappointed with their lives. I have gained a greater sense of other's traumas and their desired healing, their dissatisfactions with relationships, with themselves and others. I began to hear in them my own, now resolved, questions about the existential nature of meaning and purpose and mortality. The teachings and experiential perspectives offered in my Mystery School has manifested into a desire to serve from this place.

I graduated from Mystery School in early 2018 and continue to donate my time and energy as a staff member, as an outreach volunteer and as a member of its Board of Directors.

“Be on the watch,” wrote Charles Bukowski, “The gods will offer you chances. Know them. Take them...You are marvelous. The gods wait to delight in you.”

No other experience has had as deep and transformative an impact on my life, and I serve by counseling others that if called, consider taking your own chances. *The gods wait to delight in you.*

Erik Cetrulo, a volunteer member of Nine Gates' Board of Directors, currently resides in Montecito, CA.