

Maps and Modalities

We learn most of our society's culture by our direct immersion in it starting from our earliest experiences with parents and family. In order to participate and communicate with others, we eagerly embrace the imagery, metaphor and language from the stories of those who came before. When we journey out into the world and learn something new, we are strongly inclined to return to our family and "tribe" and tell the story. We seek to have our personal story known by those around us. When those around us listen, understand and remember our most significant stories, we feel deeply supported and connected. The telling of the story helps us integrate our own learning and offer that learning to the culture of the family and the tribe.

We seek to participate in an evolving, dynamic understanding of the world, ourselves and our community. There is a natural rhythm we seek in going out into the world to explore something new and returning always to a place called home. Joseph Campbell spoke about the myth of the Eternal Return. Going out into the world in various ways and returning home to tell the story is how we create identity and culture. When we tell ourselves or others the story of our experience, we make a map in our minds that makes sense of our experiences and integrates those experiences with what we already know.

Stories and maps arise co-creatively through our experiences. A map develops in a person's mind or a group mind as a visual representation to accompany a story or collection of stories (a verbal representation.) It provides imagery to give a sense of the whole and show the relationship between parts of the experience. It provides a framework for understanding some aspect of reality by making comparisons with more familiar things or events. **Every map arises to serve a purpose and so it reflects some particular set of assumptions, beliefs, values and choices. Certain things are included, others left out.** All of our story-maps, conscious and unconscious, enable us to perceive certain things at the same time that they block our awareness of other things.

Every map, in order to be understandable and useful, must contain certain deletions, distortions and generalizations. A map designed to show all the streets in your state is not easily combined with a map showing the location of old growth forests and individual trees of great beauty and age. A map of weather patterns would not be easily combined with a map showing the location of people who went hungry today.

On November 10, 1860, Thoreau lamented:

"How little there is on an ordinary map! How little, I mean, that concerns the walker and the lover of nature. Between those lines indicating roads is a plain blank space in the form of a square or triangle or polygon or segment of a circle, and there is naught to distinguish this from another area of similar size and form. Yet the one may be covered, in fact, with a primitive

oak wood, like that of Boxboro, waving and creaking in the wind, such as may have the reputation of a county, while the other is a stretching plane with scarcely a tree on it. The waving woods, the dells and glades and green banks and smiling fields, the huge boulders, etc., etc., are not on the map, nor to be inferred from the map."

In order to arrive at an understanding with another person, we each orient our thoughts in similar maps and communicate to bring those maps into alignment.

When we are able to create a conscious visual representation (picture/map/visual metaphor) and a verbal description (story/verbal metaphor) of something that exists in our minds, we probably believe that we understand it.

The way that I am using the word "map" is much more than just an orientation to a geographic territory. I'm using the word to mean a visual metaphor or model. For example, you probably have already have a conscious or unconscious "map" of your relationships with the significant people in your life. I bet you could easily make a diagram to show which people in your life are "closest" and which are most "distant."

Closely related, maps, models and metaphors, together create a World View or paradigm. The current paradigm resides largely outside of our awareness and simply passes for "**Reality**". We know that **in times past**, people assumed that the world was flat and that if you traveled far enough in any direction, you would come to the edge and fall off. The earth was seen as residing in the center of the universe with the Sun and other celestial bodies revolving around it. In our own Western culture, there has been a habit of thinking that divides the world into good and bad, and places things on a hierarchical map with good, God, and light at the top, in the sky, and over one's head; and evil, down low, at the bottom, in the base urges of the body and the dark caverns of the earth. But more on this later.

Science seems devoted to finding the ultimate map of reality, creating the best model to fit the observations available. The maps of Science, with a capital S, have risen to dominance in our society for a variety of reasons not the least of which is their undeniable usefulness. However, the maps of Science reflect the values and beliefs of science which currently include an extreme valuing of *objective over subjective* experience and an effort to exclude the influence of values and beliefs. This typically results in denial and ignorance about the values and beliefs which are in fact operating in the theories, models, imagery and stories that make up a scientific community. Fortunately, the same culture which so exalts Science, also values and encourages constructive criticism and independent thinking, at least in theory.

Science has helped us understand our world in rich and amazing ways. During the Renaissance, it helped pull us away from superstition and fear and the tight

grasp of a dogmatic and self-serving Church institution. It challenged the rigid patterns of scholasticism and valued the direct observations of individuals as a basis for knowledge; thus opening up the wide world to study and the possibility of understanding. But of course every new thesis triggers an antithesis in search of a new synthesis. So we do well to look at the limitations of our current world view to see how we can move toward a greater wholeness. For me, that **new synthesis should integrate those lost and injured elements from my childhood: feeling, imagination and mystery.**

Life itself seems always to slip away into **Mystery**. It seems to resist being contained in a single map, always offering up exceptions to any theory or model. Science unwittingly bumps up against a place of mystery in the soul of the subatomic particle or the vastness of infinite space. Whenever we make yet another discovery, expand a theory, or draw a map, something is always missing. Something important always seems to elude us.

In my writings and work I use a variety of maps and metaphors about the Self's connection with Source and the journey to Mystery, my own and the journeys of others that I have known and sometimes helped along the way. I will be making maps and metaphors and telling stories to try to convey complex experiences and ideas. They are all a means to an end. Each will have its limitations for communicating what I wish to share.



The Great Mystery will always elude our understanding and our grasp. There is a paradox that faces all who would write or teach about mystical experience. *The Tao that can be told is not the Tao*, said Lao Tsu. Yet, when we can have an **experience of Source**, even if it is brief and fleeting, our lives are greatly enriched. So, if the words and images of this book somehow guide you in a direction that enables you to have an experience of the Great Mystery, then I can know I have offered something of value.

Let us return to our ancestors gathering around the fire to tell their stories. Someone returns from a great adventure and begins to tell her tale. Those present listen and watch and create pictures in their minds, constructing the story mentally as best they can from familiar images. The story teller does something

else, besides choosing words or even drawing a picture. The storyteller dances the dance of her experience through reliving the feelings and moving expressively. She also sings the song of her experience through the rhythm and intonation of her speech. The power of her storytelling comes from much more than words and images. **Those present feel what she feels in their own bodies as they experience the energy of her expression.** Everyone around the fire unites in a feeling moment, joined together in song and dance with drums drumming. And if her tale is worthy, it will be **embodied in tribal memory and “retold” through dance and song as well as story and image.**

I worked as a speech therapist for 27 years. My work involved evaluating and treating people with communication problems, especially those that involve language, learning and interpersonal skills. I became intimately acquainted with the learning struggles of many students. So many have trouble listening to stories and making pictures in their minds to arrive at an understanding. It really helps to show a picture. But even this is often not enough. Many children just don't understand something until they get an experience into their bodies through touch and movement. They have to move and feel their way to learning. We call them kinesthetic learners and we recommend multi-sensory learning experiences that combine auditory, visual and kinesthetic input.

As a teacher of special needs students, it was essential to my work to understand each student's learning style and adapt teaching methods to best accommodate the individual's strengths and weaknesses. The best teaching and the deepest learning for all students integrates multiple ways of knowing and interacting with the world. **We come to understand our world best through exploration, direct experience, moments of creation and healing, and a combination of stories, pictures, maps, songs, and dances.**

Whenever we neglect any modality, we cut ourselves off from the whole. This is true of more than just learning reading, writing or math. This is true of the Soul's journey. We are more than just our story, even the total sum of all the stories. Stories use words arranged sequentially, linearly, the product of the linguistic-analytical mind in the left hemisphere of the brain. We are also the **pictures** of our lives, images: two-dimensional, defining space, with color and perspective, the whole gestalt, right-brained. We are also, and maybe more so the **dance, the song, the objects we craft with our hands, and the healing touch that we offer others:** rhythmic, musical, emotional, textured, multidimensional, here and now in time and space.

And so I draw one possible map of the Self and the journey to Source. Listening & talking (verbal) are on the left, looking & making (visual) are on the right, and feeling & moving (kinesthetic) are in the middle.

On my website, you can view a multi-modality model for connecting with Source: [Awareness and Action, A 3x4 model.](#)