

THREE STAGES OF INITIATION

There are 3 stages/steps of initiation and they can occur in either a healthy/conscious way or in a traumatic way. I believe there is also an intermediate realm that is neither fully conscious nor traumatic, which I am currently calling “incomplete initiation”.

It may be helpful to reflect on your own experiences of initiation, which may occur at any age/developmental life phase and may feel large or small for you. One of the major purposes of initiation is to test the soul and help it make an important transition. Think about your personal definition of “soul”.

Step I: Break from the Known World

Healthy/Conscious: A “yes” to step over the threshold, embark on the journey, includes a preparatory “pre-step”, the ceremony begins.

Traumatic: Intelligent fear arises because something is about to happen: an accident, behavior of a parent or stranger (hazing, abuse, assault, etc.). Fear arises and lets you know that everything is changing and to prepare for what is coming.

Step II: The Task or Ordeal that Changes the Initiate Forever

Healthy/Conscious: The walkabout, vision quest, reading from Torah, wedding, or any task or ritual the tribe/community creates to mark the transition from one life stage to another.

***Necessary elements: a) knowledge of a beginning and end, b) elders/a sacred circle, c) witness and containment

Traumatic: The moment of sexual abuse, an accident, a caretaker losing it: you have no control of the situation. Traumatic because there is no known ending, because there is no witness and you are on your own. Intuitive skills come forward and your soul does whatever it can to survive the ordeal.

Step III: End of the Ordeal, Completion and Welcoming Back

Healthy/Conscious: Initiate receives the message “I/we saw you, you are different, you have a gift, you have a place in the community, the profession, you now get to choose your place on the medicine wheel.” Also called “incorporation” which comes from the Latin *corpus*, body, meaning “to give substance or material form, to embody”.

Traumatic: In trauma there is no completion, no welcoming back. Part of the work of therapy is to witness, to create that ritual space where there is recognition that initiation has occurred.

Source

McLaren, Karla, *Energetic Boundaries* CD collection. McLaren credits Michael Meade’s work creating sacred ritual with prison youth with this formulation on the distinction between healthy and traumatic initiation.