

Phase 1: Seed

Great innovations never come from above; they come invariably from below, as the trees don't grow from the sky downward, but upward from the earth.

—Carl Gustav Jung

Far beneath the surface of your awareness is a new you that, like a seed, is just waiting to burst forth, grow roots, and sprout. This seed is the new, transformed you—but in a dormant form. It is your potential—what you have always wanted to become and, more accurately, who you *know* yourself to be in your clearest and most loving moments. Keep in mind that you will undergo *multiple* transformations in your life, and each one brings you closer to the *true* self you were born to be.

You can get a peek at the seed in you when a situation makes you think, “This is me.” “This” may refer to an activity that makes you feel most like yourself, such as climbing a mountain, making a holiday meal for your family, singing in the shower, volunteering to support people affected by a particular disease, or praying with your religious or spiritual community. You may get a sense of your latent potential when gazing proudly at your beautiful home, giggling with your children in the park, lingering in the embrace of your beloved, socializing with friends, watching waves lap the shore of a pristine lake, or relishing a job well done. When you feel your essence, you have glimpsed your wholeness.

The difference between *glimpsing* wholeness and *living* wholeness is the difference between the first phase of transformation, called Seed, and the final phase, called Integration. The way to achieve wholeness—the end result of transformation—is to embrace your experiences as they arrive, learn about yourself, receive support from those who appreciate you, and let go of what no longer serves you. This process may sound trite as condensed here, but it successfully produces transformation.

Consider the seed of a flowering plant. Two factors are necessary for it to start its journey to blossom. First, it must possess a natural propensity to grow. Second, the conditions that support growth, such as soil, sunlight, and moisture, must be present. A person’s passage toward wholeness begins just as a seed’s does. That is, the Seed phase occurs when an inner readiness to change encounters favorable circumstances. This readiness is the desire to be happier; it is the “spark” of transformation. Joseph Campbell said that the hero’s journey begins with a “call to adventure”; similarly, you enter the Map to Wholeness when you hear the call to become new.

You Might Be in the Dark

The degree to which you can recognize the Seed phase while it is occurring depends on the type of life-changing event you are about to experience. If you are headed toward a trauma, such as being laid off from your job, or a surprise, such as witnessing an unexpectedly powerful traditional performance by the Māori people while you are vacationing in New Zealand, you will probably be unaware that you are in the Seed phase. For this reason, most people are able to identify this phase only in retrospect.

To figure out your most recent Seed phase, look back to the period prior to your most recent life-changing event. You will probably notice a time frame lasting several months or longer when you felt restless or discontented about your job; your home life; or the health of your body, mind, heart, or spirit. If the unease intensified, you may have felt a desire for change. If this desire grew strong enough, you may have started to look for opportunities or pursued a prospect that you had always aspired to.

If you *set out* to transform, you enter the Seed phase fully conscious of what is happening. You are aware of the feelings of discontent that sparked the process. You know you are ready for a big change, similar to being ready to have a child. The recognition of your inner desire and the readiness of your life circumstances for change cause you to be in a state of willingness, openness, and enthusiasm to transform. You may even be alert for just the right experience to move you into an altered state, beyond your own boundaries.

For instance, a student of mine, while sitting in the student lounge, saw a flyer advertising my study abroad course in Costa Rica. She would stare at the flyer day after day. This invitation to an experience that would expand her world-view was tugging at her heart and weighing on her mind. After many conversations with peers and mentors, who gave her encouragement and emotional support, she decided to answer the call. Her Seed phase had started in her unconscious, where all that manifests truly begins. As the yearning to realize her potential grew, her awareness of the need for change emerged—and was satisfied by her choice to act. A choice for change indicates the culmination of the Seed phase.

Whether your transformation happens through trauma, surprise, or intention, the Seed phase involves a growing need for change. This need always arises from the unconscious and indicates that you are ready to become a new version of yourself—one that is closer to your true self. Transforming through surprise, and especially through intention, feels much better than transforming through trauma—which is harrowing by definition. The more self-aware among us may receive hints from the unconscious that we are ready to transform; in response, we will seek out a transformative experience. The rest of us, unaware of our need for change, will experience transformation through surprise or trauma.

Your mind consists of conscious and unconscious parts. The unconscious mind, sometimes called the “shadow,” contains rejected aspects of yourself that you have repressed. Along with the conscious

mind, the unconscious mind makes your decisions—including the one to transform. As a seed germinates in the darkness of the earth, transformation begins in the darkness of the unconscious—with the spark of desire to remake yourself.

To help you understand this phase on the Map to Wholeness, and the ones to come, I will present the real-life stories of three people: Kenny, Radha, and Alessandro. Beginning here, with the Seed phase, we will follow these individuals through their transformational journeys.

Kenny

Kenny Johnson was born in Star City, Arkansas, in 1948. The oldest of seven children, he grew up in a rural area. Raised by his mother and stepfather, he never knew his biological father. As the family grew, food was scarce, parental supervision was nonexistent, and conditions were ripe for trouble. Kenny was a Boy Scout and a member of the school marching team, but he was also in the “hoodlum club.” At about age six, Kenny began pilfering coins from his grandmother’s and mother’s purses. He quickly progressed to stealing from stores, supermarkets, and even a commercial truck that delivered potato chips. Because Kenny couldn’t afford clothes or the equipment needed to participate in positive recreational activities, a life of crime became increasingly appealing. He felt entitled to what he needed but lacked the moral education to obtain it legally; in his circumstances, he could not perceive constructive alternatives.

Kenny learned the skills of the streets well, and before long, he was a professional criminal. He was arrested 37 times and lived much of his life behind bars, with little time between sentences. He spent a total of 31 years in and out of prison. When he was out, he would work an honest job until his attraction to the money, autonomy, and power of stealing overwhelmed him and he reverted to his original career.

In 1966, Kenny became a father while living with a girlfriend in Kansas City, Missouri. The relationship ended six months after the child’s birth. Because of his criminal lifestyle and years in prison, Kenny did not get to know his daughter until she was a grown woman.

Although Kenny gained great satisfaction from his livelihood as a criminal, his years in prison left him spiraling deeper and deeper into feelings of emptiness and despair. When he felt demoralized, he would turn to spirituality. He read spiritual texts, did yoga, meditated, and discussed spiritual philosophies with his fellow inmates. Engaging in spiritual activity was the only thing that ever helped him.

The context for Kenny's Seed phase began in 1992, about a year after he had served ten years in prison. Like many times before, he intended to stop stealing and remain clean. He had a good-paying job—until he slipped back into criminal behavior.

It started with stealing a newspaper so I could take it to work and read it, like a real businessman. My buddy Jerome said, "Why are you doing that? It's stealing!" It never occurred to me that I was stealing, or that I was a criminal. It just wasn't part of my thinking.

Then I started doing other things . . . sneaky things, like stealing jewelry and selling it.

I thought I was still "the Hustle"—the best at what I did. I didn't realize the technology, the tricks, had changed. I didn't understand that hustling was really over for me. It took quite a while of paying attention to the kids around me to awaken to the hard realization, "Man, you're a dinosaur."

This awareness made me seriously depressed. I didn't know how else I would make money—regular jobs just couldn't hold my interest and didn't offer the freedom and control I needed. What else was I going to do with my life? In desperation, I thought I had one last street hustle up my sleeve—cashing checks. So I started stealing checks, forging signatures on them, and cashing them. I wanted to believe I still had "the scheme" going.

There was no reason for me to do it. I already had a job and was doing fine with that income. But as time went on, I was making so much money stealing and forging checks that I quit my job.

A year later, in February 1993, I was a full-blown criminal again, with three major charges against me that could send me to prison for a very long time. I'd been digging a hole to hell without even knowing it.

I was also beating up my girlfriend.

I was MESSED UP!

Something had to change. Kenny was desperate to get out of crime and to alleviate his depression.

It finally came down to a night when I had to decide to turn myself in or continue stealing. With three pending charges, prison was inevitable—the question was where. If I

continued on the street, I was likely to get caught up with the feds—federal prison. Turning myself in now meant that I would have state charges; I knew I could survive in state prison. It was six in one hand, half a dozen in the other.

With few options, Kenny knew it was time to extricate himself from a lifestyle that could only destroy him. He called his parole officer.

“Listen, I am coming in. I want to turn myself in.”

My parole officer said, “I have been watching you and wondering when you would come in. Good decision. Come on in.”

He had been keeping tabs on me. He knew I was going down a slippery slope.

I went in the next day. They locked me up and sent me to Springfield, Missouri, which was what I wanted. My family was there.

When I turned myself in, I was lost.

I was depressed enough to commit suicide.

Kenny’s decision to turn himself in resulted from the conscious recognition that he was at a major crossroads, requiring a critical choice: to transform or to lead an empty existence.

I started hanging out with meditators and the yoga people, doing all the things I had done before . . . reading spiritual books, too.

But it didn’t seem to help.

Overall, I was depressed, sad, and feeling like a loser.

All I knew was that I wanted out.

I just wanted to be home, with my family, and not go back again. I had all the same thoughts and feelings of doubt and frustration that I experienced the other times I had been in prison—but this time was different.

I was about 45 years old, and I wasn’t about to die a dejected loser.

Kenny didn’t want to hustle anymore. He had felt hopeless like this too many times before. He came to terms with the fact that he needed something bigger than himself, a higher power or God, to help him make a drastic change. Staring yet again at the stark walls of a prison cell, he resigned himself to trying spirituality again. Yet he wasn’t very optimistic. Years earlier, in federal prison, he had dedicated himself to spirituality only to gain nothing.

I knew that something great had to happen to me in order to transform— something drastic to change my mindset from the type of guy I was when I came in, so I could become another guy. Something had to happen there, a major awakening, in order for me to let go of the old ways of doing business. So I could become something new.

To become a new creation, something had to die.

In his miserable and weary state, Kenny was reaching for a different reality. But he had no idea what that was.

It was an internal drive but not clearly defined. How can you have a vision for your life to be unlimited without knowing that such a thing is possible? How can you clearly define what you really need? I didn't know what I wanted. How can you know what you want if you haven't experienced it? How could I know that I had an ideal?

As Kenny describes, it is keenly difficult, if not impossible, to fathom a life other than the one you know. But you can, like Kenny, open yourself up to the unimaginable and decide you want it. His receptivity and sincere seeking constituted his readiness for change, his desire to be happier. This “spark,” which is essential to the Seed phase, was met by the right conditions: Kenny had the support and camaraderie of spiritual friends, in a quiet and contained environment that was buffered from the outside world and its demands. In a real sense, the circumstances could not have been more perfect for the beginning of Kenny’s transformational journey.

Kenny embarked on transformation through intention. His actions suggested that he wanted to transform via spiritual means. With the motive of becoming a healthier person, he identified an experience he believed could transform him, and he committed himself to pursuing it. This combination of factors is characteristic of the Seed phase for people who are transforming through intention.

Radha

Radha Stern was born in Fairfax, California, in 1955 to parents who were intellectual and eccentric. Her mother enjoyed hosting highbrow dinner parties and having rigorous philosophical conversations. Her father was a self-absorbed visual artist, historian, and fringe movement leader who

lectured at Harvard. Both were married three times, with ten children between them, two together: Radha and her brother Adam. Her mother left her father when Radha was two months old.

As a child, Radha enjoyed spending time with her mother's trailblazing friends and came to be known as having an "old soul." She was shy and a "pretty good kid." Culturally, Radha is Jewish, but her mother taught her and her siblings about many different religions and told them to choose the one that worked for them. Walking across the wide-open spaces of a nearby wild game preserve and lying next to its babbling waterfall, Radha came to believe that she could experience something holy—a divine force—wherever she happened to be.

Radha was married by 17 and pregnant with her first child, Christina, at 18. At the same time, her mother became extremely ill, and died three days after Christina was born. Radha received very little emotional support from her husband, and her mother's death left her feeling bleak and very alone. She had a second child, Christopher, at 19; was separated from her husband by 20; and was divorced by 21.

Life as a single mother with two children was daunting. With barely enough money to buy baby formula and pay the electric bill, Radha was forced to work several jobs. These humble, arduous, and bittersweet years cultivated Radha's inner strength, resilience, and inspirational outlook. This time in her life would later motivate her to give back to people in need.

Radha's transformation began in her early 40s, when her children were independent young adults. Over 12 years, she had worked her way up to a top administrative position in the food distribution industry. As a woman in a field that was male-dominated at the time, she worked long days and weeks in order to prove her worth and produce excellence. Increasingly, her job required frequent travel, and the cumulative effect of her hectic schedule made her work less and less appealing.

Christina was still living at home but didn't want a whole lot to do with me. She was doing quite well in business school and was in high demand as a babysitter. I worked long hours and traveled a lot for my job and found that I needed help around the house, so my best friend, Bettina, and my childhood friend Mark were living with me.

Christopher wasn't living at home. He was trying to find himself, running around with his buddies—trying to see the world and figure out what he wanted to do.

I was dating Gary. We spent every weekend together, alternating between our two houses.

I was tired of travel; it was really hard. I wanted to do something more meaningful and make an impact on the world. Selling food was meaningful on one level, but I had been doing it for a long time. I needed a change. I wanted an opportunity for growth.

Radha felt chronically underappreciated, and her job had become unfulfilling and repetitive; it had reached its natural conclusion. Radha's yearning for change was the spark needed to trigger her transformation. Her life was stable, her children grown, and her relationship enjoyable and fulfilling. These conditions were supportive of her desire for change, and she set out on a voyage toward wholeness. Unbeknownst to Radha, however, she was headed toward a trauma—the biggest of her life.

Alessandro

Alessandro Hnatt was born in San Mateo, California, in 1961, into a traditional Italian family. His mother was an artist who had given up her career to raise four rambunctious sons and to support her husband's pursuit of the arts. Caring and well-intentioned, she loved to cook. Alessandro's father was a brilliant and eccentric painter and designer who spoke three languages, studied at several universities (all under scholarships), earned multiple advanced degrees, and struggled with alcoholism. Alessandro loved his father's strengths but also acknowledged the disease that eventually took his life—while Alessandro was finishing his final exams as a 20-year-old college student.

As a boy, Alessandro was soft-hearted, artistic, and the youngest of the family's children, which made him the butt of his brothers' jokes. He was the perfect target for their macho need to dominate, and they badgered him endlessly. As a young man, Alessandro always seized opportunities to travel the world and engage in recreational activities, including mountain biking, snorkeling, surfing, hiking, and various sports. He was as fearless in work as he was in play. In his early 30s, he emerged as a rising star in his profession, environmental science services. He was also courting the love of his life, Mary. During this exhilarating time, Alessandro began his journey toward wholeness.

I was at the culmination of five years of working my butt off to regain my reputation within the industry after someone I had previously been working under tarnished it. I could finally rest easy, and everything had come full circle. I had redeemed my reputation, and my future seemed so open.

Christian, a good friend and colleague, and I laid out an amazing proposal for an enormous job, and it was accepted. We won it flat-out. I was skyrocketing in my career. I was rising to the top, and I knew it. I was going to be the senior project manager of the job.

As for my personal life, I wanted to be with Mary. I decided after I had broken up with my previous girlfriend that the next one would be the one I would marry. When I met

Mary, I knew I wanted to be with her. She didn't fall head over heels for me, though. We met in 1992 and didn't date until 1995.

She would break up with me, and then we would get back together. We had been dating on and off for about two years, and were going through one of those tumultuous times—we had broken up—when Christian and I landed the project.

While we were still together, Mary and I had made plans to go to Costa Rica on a vacation. I knew it was now or never, and I had to convince her to go on the trip with me. I was set to reach all of my dreams except for her.

But Mary was tough to seduce, despite Alessandro's booming career; Italian joie de vivre; and fit, six-foot, 220-pound physique. A gorgeous Italian woman of modest height, with spiraling, dark hair and a sweet smile, she wasn't jumping at the chance to marry Alessandro just because of his charisma and success.

Alessandro's adoration for Mary and his longing to settle down, to create the "good life" he had always dreamed of, combined with his resolve to be the best in his field, formed the spark of his Seed phase. With his professional life more secure, invigorating, and promising than ever before, Alessandro was finally in a place to achieve what he wanted. Yet he didn't know the suffering he would endure to become this vision of himself. Trauma reduces us to nothing, and from this state, we ascend as a new being—like the mythological phoenix rising from its ashes.

Radha and Alessandro wanted more fulfilling lives; Kenny sought fundamental personal change. When their circumstances became conducive to transformation, their journeys on the Map to Wholeness began. These individuals then moved into the next phase, Departure, by taking action toward becoming their new selves.