

# TWO'S COMPANY, EIGHT'S A FNORD

A 2021 Relational Gestalt for Leary's  
Eight Circuit Model of Consciousness



BY MIKE GATHERS

Buddhists speak of the bardos as an intermediate, transitional \*space between\* death and rebirth - a space for disembodied consciousness, a state of being lacking form or structure. I suggest to you that on a number of levels, humanity is at a space between, where old socio-cultural norms and societal structures dissolve away while new ones have not yet taken form. While this paradigm shift has only just started, COVID has catalyzed and accelerated our transition into the space between, and I suspect that the transition ahead runs far deeper than most of us have even begun to realize.

Many of us realize the disruptive impact of internet and technology, and of the danger of continued global climate change, and of geopolitical shift taking place with the growth of the Chinese economy, and I believe that each of these three on their own represent signs of three large scale paradigm shifts converging together at this moment in history as a massive restructuring and reorganization of the whole global thing.

Many Wilsoniacs will have some familiarity with the technological shift underway, Toffler's Third Wave, as we move into the next stage of the sociological progression from hunter-gatherer to agrarian to industrial and into technological. The microchip, the personal computer, and the internet may have sparked this revolution years ago, but it appears that the disruption has only just begun. Ark Investment's Cathie Wood believes we sit at the verge of massive technological disruption with the economic maturation of five domains of innovation - energy storage, automation, artificial intelligence, blockchain, and genetic sequencing - creating a period of technological change bigger than the simultaneous convergence of three domains of innovation during the industrial revolution - electrification, transportation (the automobile), and communication (the telegraph). The point being that these five technologies are maturing economically such that they are the tipping point permeating everyday life and radically changing the structure of society.

On top of this rare sociological shift, the fourth in the history of humanity, we find ourselves in a relationship with the planet like we've never had before = the Holocene age, where the welfare of the planet and welfare of the human race reached a point of interdependence on each other. This includes but goes beyond climate change as urbanization, suburban sprawl, and the industrialization of agriculture have literally reshaped the surface of the planet.

Meanwhile, we hear a lot about the decline of the United States and the rise of China. In his forthcoming book, *The Changing World Order*, hedge fund manager Ray Dalio, outlines the patterns and dynamics of long-term debt cycles (over 70-100 years) that shape the rise and fall of the dominant global superpowers over the ages ("super-economies" would be a better way to put it). In short, the United States has been the global economic top dog since World War II, and has followed the same economic patterns over the last 80 years that every global economic super power goes through, and now finds itself very near the end of the cycle. A massive shift in geopolitical power nears its tipping point, although with two other major paradigm shifts under way, maybe the outcome will look different this time. Maybe.

During these times of change we find, by definition, that the conceptual maps and models we've used to navigate our world no longer apply. Renegade philosopher and psychonaut Robert Anton Wilson discussed a disorientated state of being that often results from times of transition where the map no longer matches the territory, which he referred to as Chapel Perilous. I suggest to you, dear reader, that we have all entered into a global Chapel Perilous.

But what to do about that? How to make sense of things during a time when little makes sense? How do we support ourselves and each other during a time of "disturbed homeostasis" when old structures and norms dissolve away and a new order has yet to emerge?

A new map seems in order, eh? During my professional time studying and practicing counseling psychology and in my personal endeavors at self-development, I found the number of maps and models of change, theories of personality, and modalities, methods and techniques of psychotherapeutic practice absolutely mind boggling. As a student my mind spun in circles trying to make sense of it all. As a practitioner, most of us seem to get to a place where we "do what we do" in some sort of eclectic mix of techniques and methods with a, generally speaking, solid foundation in the client-therapist relationship, but I digress. Through all of that, I had a meta-model that I employed to make sense of it all. And the more clinical experience I gained, and the more I read and studied, the more the theory and practice seemed to hang more and more neatly on a model that encompasses what we might call physical, emotional, conceptual, social, and spiritual consciousness, or "intelligence". This model also shows how they come into being, fit together, relate and interact as a multi-dimensional map of the human mind and psyche.

And, as we deepen further and further into this global period of transition, the Bardo of the 21st Century CE™, I have found this model extraordinarily useful in navigating through, out, and sometimes even around the sticky spaces of my own Chapel Perilous. Of course, for MaybeDay 2021, you, dear reader, have already guessed that I speak of Dr. Timothy Leary's Eight Circuit Model of Consciousness (8CM). In our time of transition, I suggest that the 8CM shows us how we can relate to various forces of consciousness and experience in both the personal, local, and global realms, how to stabilize our consciousness during times of uncertainty, unfamiliarity, and change; how to make sense of non-ordinary states of consciousness; how to come to know oneself in relation to all of these things; and that not only that we can grow, develop, transform, and "expand consciousness" or increase intelligence," but point us to how we might to go about it.

In brief, we see that human development appears to go through four fairly distinct stages of neurological and psychobiological development - let's call them the infant, the toddler, the preschooler, and the adolescent - and that these four stages of development create, or at least correspond to, four dimensions of adult consciousness as we choose to define them - physical, emotional, conceptual, and social intelligence.

Sigmund Freud wrote about these stages from his psycho-sexual developmental lens and Erik Erikson through his psycho-social developmental lens. A sect of the Gestalt Therapy community inspired by veteran Gestalt Therapy instructor Dwey Freeman has used them in assessing the here-and-now needs of their clients. Carl Jung's student, Erich Neumann, in his summary of Jung's work, *The Origins and History of Consciousness*, explains that Jung too saw these four developmental stages of human consciousness. And through studying the evolution of western myth throughout history, Jung also saw four evolutionary stages, correlating with the developmental ones, in human consciousness. While modern science has not explicitly supported these four stages, we can still use current neuro-scientific understanding to inform our conceptualization and application of this model.

Let us briefly review our four developmental stages and states of consciousness or forms of intelligence that form the foundation of this model, and cover some methods and techniques for increasing intelligence in these areas while beginning to form a new perspective.

## **First Circuit Physical Intelligence of the Infant**

The infant's primary concern lies in its physical safety and security. Infant consciousness asks, "Is the world OK?" The infant has little to no concept of self beyond its perception of safety and threat in the environment.

In the realm of physical consciousness in the fully grown human, we could start with survival basics such as food, clothing, and shelter, which I wager most of our readers here have covered. Then we could go a later deeper with three basics of well-being - sleep, diet, and exercise - and I'd wager that we have some content that bears dipping into, the vast majority of which goes far beyond my scope here beyond suggesting that each deserves your attention, particularly I've found, as we move into middle age and beyond

When I asked members of my [Intelligence Increase Facebook group](#) how they "activated-increased-expanded-integrated" first circuit physical intelligence, many of the responses discussed techniques for getting-into-one's-body through movement, physical exercise, and assorted other techniques. I believe that the process of \*embodiment\* stands with the process of \*awareness\* as foundational in whatever it is we are doing here, and particularly for our first circuit, but I thought a few member's responses hit on a key area that takes us yet another level deeper in our increase of intelligence - that of the practice of martial arts and/or self-defense. In the arena of physical consciousness, I refer us back to the primary psychological concern of the infant, security, and I suggest to you and my own experience confirms that the training and practice of martial arts or any system of self-defense stands as one of the most meaningful practices one can engage in to improve one's sense of physical security. "The world seems OK" because I know at a somatic level that I can defend myself. I feel more secure.

And while we could go further into this subject of physical intelligence, such as the psychology of eating and the politics of the breast, or the amygdala and its functions, and real versus perceived threats (does fear stand for “false evidence appearing real”?), I believe we have one layer deeper that has gone largely unnoticed and may be the most powerful of them all and a huge key to unlocking the 8CM (for sombunall of us, of course, of course).

## **A Relational Approach**

Within Stephen Porges’ Polyvagal Theory, we find the evolutionary history and some newly discovered functionality of the so-called fight-or-flight sympathetic and rest-and-digest parasympathetic nervous systems. We learn that these systems have evolved in Earthly life forms over time and that we humans have, in fact, two distinct “parasympathetic” systems - the dorsal vagal and the ventral vagal. In the oldest of these three systems, the dorsal vagal, we find a shutdown or freeze-or-faint response - in the case of extreme life threat, heart rate slows, the bowels evacuate, and the body goes limp while consciousness disassociates. We see this manifest at a chronic level in human experience in what we might call depression, or at least a type of depression, as well as a variety of chronic digestive conditions. Evolutionarily, the sympathetic fight-or-flight system developed next, and long-term over-activation in humans can manifest as chronic worry, anxiety, or panic; or chronic irritation, anger, or rage; as well as adrenal and/or chronic fatigue. Lastly, with mammals the ventral vagal system evolved and came on line, and here we find a key twist - the social engagement system.

Dr. Gabor Mate summarized the social engagement system neatly when he said “safety is not the absence of fear, but rather the presence of connection.” The infant seeks a sense of safety (mom) when faced with the unfamiliar. Physical consciousness seeks connection to regulate feelings of fear and create a sense of safety.

In the emerging science of epigenetics, we find that our environment has a huge impact on gene expression, so much so that the old nature vs. nurture argument (genes vs. environment) stands today as a complete relic of the past as we discover that genes and environment are completely interdependent on each other in the way that length and width have to be taken together to determine the area of a rectangle. As we move into the depths of epigenetics and human development, we find that our early environment is largely shaped by our relationships, particularly our relationships with our primary caregivers. In early childhood development, we find that the \*relational field\* between infant and caregiver makes up a huge portion of the environmental field that shapes the epigenetic development of the infant and its subsequent gene expression. And thus, we see patterns of physical consciousness expressed in the variety of infant attachment styles developed by Mary Main in the 1950s - secure, anxious avoidant, anxious ambivalent, or disorganized. We see how infants respond to threat - seeking connection, self-soothing, or disassociating, for example, in relationship to interactions with strangers with and without the presence of mother.

As we learn these patterns of relating, we may see them manifest in our adult lives. We can trace back our history and understand how we developed these early patterns and thus witness how physical consciousness developed in our infancy manifests in everyday life and relates and shifts from person to person, interaction to intersection, and moment to moment. We can utilize this awareness to create opportunities to reshape our responses, step into new experiences, and increase our physical intelligence. In the bigger picture, we begin to see how we are born, or rather conceived, into relationship and how we develop in relationship, and we can then study how we show up in relationship and ultimately, how we can transform through relationship. On an even grander scale, we might say we are exploring “how we relate to these many realms.”

### **Rupture, Repair and Building Trust**

Zooming back into a first circuit experience of the consciousness of physical security, I suggest to you that in longer term relationships we can learn to navigate the challenges of connection and disconnection, of bringing awareness to the ruptures to the relationship and the timely and skillful repairs of said ruptures. I suggest to you that mastery of this repair process leads to an earned trust within the relationship that creates a durable and lasting sense of physical security and safety. The world seems OK because I have a partner on this journey and we can go through tough times and come out OK together.

“Trust is built by going through hard times and coming out ok.” - Duey Freeman

That quote bears repeating, “Trust is built by going through hard times and coming out ok.” With repeatability, we build confidence in ourselves and each other that we can navigate uncertain and unfamiliar waters of disrepair between the two of us and make it through to repair and reconnection with some regularity and repeatability. As such, relationships aren’t some magical fairytales where everything runs smoothly, but rather a thorny mess where we hit completely unintentional snags and disconnect from each other in extraordinarily messy ways. What’s worse, in the realm of intimate relations we seem to find ourselves attracted to, and attractive to, partners who naturally “stir up our shit” without any conscious intent on their part, or our part. We often find ourselves mixed up with folks who activate our shit while our shit activates their shit. Don’t ask me why. I’m just along for the ride on this one. Embrace the mystery.

The key to a strong and lasting relationship is not to find Mr./Mrs. Right and have everything in perfect harmony all the time and live happily ever after. That’s ridiculous. The biggest key I have found to healthy long-term relationships is to learn the process of recognizing ruptures to relationship and repairing them quickly and skillfully - at least as skillfully as possible in that moment. Two people engaged in the process of being-in-relationship and working out the kinks as they come will grow adept at working through the ruptures-and-repairs and develop a sense of confidence that they can go through

hard times and come out ok. This \*earned trust\* between two people leads to a profound internal sense of safety and security. And the science now shows that we internalize this interdependently created sense of security such that we increase our own internal capacity for security and self-soothing through the process of mutual relationship. And thus, we find that as we deepen in relationship, we don't fall into a trap of permanent dependency on another, but rather through interdependence we develop our own internal independence. We develop through relationships (or lack thereof), and we can transform through relationships. However, it takes work. And the courage to take a good hard look at one's self in a context where we prefer to point the finger at the other, but that's a topic for another day.

## **Second Circuit and the Emotional Intelligence of the Toddler**

The Toddler begins to separate from the mother in a process of discovery and exploration of self-other boundaries and all the emotions that naturally arise from that process. As most parents can tell you, "No" can be heard an awful lot from the Toddler. The toddler asks what-is-his, and what-is-not as s-he explores the me/not-me boundaries between self and other. Toddlers also seek to understand the natural pecking order of dominance and submission in any relational setting. Am I top dog, or are you? Emotional expression beyond the first circuit context of safety and nourishment comes to the forefront. As the toddler separates from the mother and develops capacity for emotional expression and self-regulation, a sense of self emerges through these emotive, boundary-defined processes. The toddler asks, "Am I OK?" in contrast to the infant's query, "Is the world OK?". At the extreme negative state of the toddler's emotional consciousness, we find deep shame and diminishment-of-self, whereas we find sheer life-threatening-terror in the extreme negative state of the infant's physical consciousness - fears of existential threats to "self" vs. a first circuit fear of death. Often what some might call "ego" over-inflates to counter the diminished sense of self that comes from shame and emotional dysregulation. As an aside, here we distinguish second circuit "I-am-shame" from fourth circuit "I-feel-guilty" to be discussed later.

Here we find our emotional attachments to other people, places, and things. As we become conscious of our emotional investment outside of ourselves, we can begin to work with that energy and determine whether it serves us or not, and learn how to process the emotions that arise from said external emotional investments. We can also develop awareness around how we view others and if we perceive them as above or below us in terms of self-worth and hierarchy-in-the-pack. We can notice if we engage equally in a relationship or find ourselves caught up in the non-relational drama triangle of persecutor-victim-rescuer. As we notice how we show up in relationship and how it varies from person to person, place to place, day to day, moment to moment, we can begin to work with inflexible or obsolete patterns that interfere with the process of relating.

Can we meet the other on-the-level and open ourselves up for contact? Martin Buber described this as a shift from "I-it" to "I-thou" relationships - when we cease to see

others as objects, but rather as another sacred entity to make contact and connection with.

“Contact over time leads to connection.  
“Connection over time leads to relationship.  
“Relationship over time leads to intimacy.”  
-Duey Freeman

“The divine in me recognizes the divine in you,” as the yogi’s say. Here we find the beginnings of meaningful relationship through contact and connection - not some dissolving of boundaries and merging of two entities, but contact that happens when we meet our boundaries. Contact happens when where-I-end meets at where-you-begin. And thus, healthy boundaries are central to the process of meaningful relating and ultimately, a sense of self. By engaging in the process of contact, connection, and relationship, we can explore the nature of our own boundaries and all the emotional material that comes up around that. The more we know our boundaries, the more we know ourselves. By setting boundaries, by saying “No,” the toddler develops a sense of self.

Properly integrating the second circuit does not work through repression and control of emotions - a third circuit approach to a second circuit issue. Emotions need proper regulation and here we find another hidden relational secret. When we look at the complexities of the human nervous system, we find that when we go beyond the much-misaligned limbic system of unwanted “mammalian” emotional expression, we discover that in our more recently evolved prefrontal cortex we have neurological structures for emotional regulation and these structures develop and mature in the relational field (or lack thereof) during very early childhood. In other words, we initially learn to regulate our emotions (or not) through our early emotional relationship with our primary caregivers during roughly the first and second years of life. And, perhaps more importantly, we can improve our capacity for emotional regulation as adults, a major aspect of our second circuit emotional intelligence, through shared emotionally meaningful experiences with others.

What does this mean? In a nutshell, when we allow for an authentic emotional experience in the presence of another, we can increase our capacity for emotional regulation when we are expressing those emotions while in connection and relationship with that person (I-thou). If they are present and grounded in relationship with us, then their emotional stability and connection with us helps us feel, regulate, and express our own emotions. And not only do we benefit from emotional co-regulation in that moment, but we internalize that process and increase our capacity for emotional self-regulation. We can learn and grow through authentic relationships.

Thus, in integrating the second circuit we learn about boundaries and emotions and how to feel, regulate, and express them. We learn about our emotional investment outside of ourselves. And we learn how to move from dominance-and-submission into contact-and-connection. As we more consciously navigate emotionally charged boundary

interactions, we further develop our sense of self. As we develop this circuit, we move from ego inflation-of-self and shame deflation-of-self to a mature, well-defined, emotionally regulated sense-of-self, and we gain the self-worth and the self confidence that comes with that.

## **Third Circuit, Preschool Symbolic-Conceptual Intelligence**

I find so much to say about the third circuit (of course, of course) that in fact this represents my second complete rewrite of this section. My bottom line? How does the third circuit factor into a relational approach to the Eight Circuit model?

When one starts to unpack the third circuit and separate map from territory, a deep sense of skepticism tends to emerge from the application of the tools of the scientific method, critical thinking, cognitive behavioral therapy, general semantics, and maybelogick. This sometimes leads one to such profound skepticism that one doubts everything and can even spiral into a chapel perilous built on maybe. I see this as just another one of the many trickster trappings of the third.

As I committed on my journey deeper into the third, I moved beyond my skeptical paranoia into what Wilson termed [neurological relativity](#). In Eight Circuit terms, we might say that we filter our perceptions through the lower four circuits, and through that filtration process our perception of reality-as-it-is becomes very much our own subjective reality, complete with all our distortions and biases. And so I became skeptical of the skeptic and may have run down a spiral of Chapel Perilous but eventually I got to know my biases and distortions, or at least some of them, and I tested my perceptions to measure my accuracy. With repeatability I developed some confidence levels on my own perceptions. I got to know “me” on another level. Primarily one made of language, and stories and beliefs. And how I interacted with others based on my assumptions, stories and beliefs. To me, neurological relativity emphasizes our individuality, and highlights how much I assume others think, feel, and see the same way I do, when that’s hardly the case at all.

Early on in the third circuit imprint window, we develop “theory of mind” - the awareness “that others have beliefs, desires, intentions, and perspectives that are different from one's own.” (Wikipedia) I believe a fully integrated third circuit involves a fully integrated Theory of Mind, and that we can easily spot dis-integrated third circuit material when we thoroughly familiarize ourselves with neurological relativity and psychological projection. In psychological projection, we project disowned and/or dis-integrated self-concepts onto others. We see in others what we refuse to see in ourselves. By assuming in part that others think, feel, and see things the same way we do, and on the other hand, seeing in others what we refuse to see in ourselves, we create stories and belief systems that interfere with the processes of contact, connection, and relationship. We can’t make contact if our perceptions are mapped onto pre-existing stories that have more to do with us than the other we wish to perceive.

AND. And. And engaging in the processes of contact, connection, and relationship affords the opportunity to untangle these biases. I've also found a commitment to E Prime to be nearly psychedelic in its effects of stimulating neurological relativity. E Prime brings out all sorts of criticism, fanaticism, misunderstanding, and resistance, and I'd rather not go there. Instead, I suggest the second most powerful personal tool for third circuit integration that I have found - [The Work of Byron Katie](#). Check it out for yourself.

So much to say about the third, but from a psycho-relational perspective, I emphasize the opportunity to more fully develop "Theory of Mind" and to unpack the psychological projections wrapped up in underdeveloped theory of mind processes. From there we can see how we cloud our relational perceptions with preconceived stories and beliefs that get in the way of contact and connection.

### **The fourth circuit social intelligence of the adolescent**

From the childhood developmental periods of infancy, toddlerhood, and preschoolin', we go through a period of little neurological growth and development (think middle school), and then puberty hits and things get really weird. Or complex. Or something. In adolescence, our most recently evolved part of the brain, the prefrontal cortex, goes through another growth spurt while the whole of the cerebral cortex goes through a long phase of pruning and myelination (more on that in a bit) and our bodies mature physically and sexually. Close relations move from the codependence of the child and parent to the interdependence of romantic partnering. Socially, we begin another transition from dependence to interdependence as we find belonging within social circles, begin to explore our specific passions and interests, and begin to discover our role in the village - purpose. We learn to navigate the norms and expectations (implicit, explicit, and secret) of close relationships, social circles, and of the culture and society we find ourselves in. We often sacrifice our individual expression through a sense of guilt over straying from the "norms" of our social affiliations in order to fit in.

If we can see children as generalists, we might see how adolescents begin a process of differentiation. During puberty, the cerebral cortex of the brain goes through a pruning process where unused or little used synapses (nerve cell receptors), simply dissolve away. Use it or lose it, as the saying goes, such that for example, someone who enjoyed playing tennis regularly during the ages of 12 to 15, for example, might forever have a natural predisposition for tennis as all the neural networks that participate in the activities of "tennis" stand out while other network connection points fade away in the neurological pruning of adolescence. Furthermore, in myelination, the remaining nerve cells develop "insulation" which dramatically increases the speed and reliability of transmission. The process of pruning and myelination might be seen as processes of differentiation and linkage as interpersonal neurobiologist Dan Siegel refers to them.

So ultimately, the adolescent asks, "Who am I?" particularly in the context of romantic partnership, social circles, and hir "role in the village," and all the social pressures and

norms that come with each of those aspects and the need to belong. One might tend to feel guilty if they don't fit into the norms of the group of which we find ourselves. As one comes to their own terms on romantic partnership, social circles, mission and purpose, and begins to unpack the guilt involved when our terms differ from the terms of society-at-large, one may find themselves aware of their own \*judgement\* of others. I have found judgment to be one of the most notable telltale signs for the fourth circuit dis-integration, and in fact, lower circuit dis-integration as a whole.

When we carry judgement of others, it often indicates the projection of disowned parts of ourselves (self-concepts) onto those others. When we unpack projections underneath the judgments, we often run into dysregulated emotional material (shame) from the past and perceived threats to our existence. And thus, we see a top-down relational approach to the Eight Circuit Model where Fourth circuit judgements give way to third circuit projections which give way to second circuit shame and first circuit fear. By starting with noticing our judgements, we can begin the process of unpacking deeper disintegrated material and increasing our intelligence across the lower circuit spectrum.

### **A Relational Gestalt for the Lower Circuits**

We develop in relationship and we can heal, mature, and transform through relationship. And through a brief tour of the lower four circuits, a fairly elegant pattern of relational disturbances emerges:

- Judgement
- Projection
- Shame
- Fear

Each of these disturbances inhibit the processes of contact, connection, and relationship in their own way. As discussed above, we have a “top-down” tool for assessing and unpacking material for psychological integration. The integration of said material creates more space for more receptivity, presence, embodiment, expression and relationship.

From more of a “bottoms-up” perspective, by engaging in the processes of presence, embodiment, contact, and connection, we can discover, relate to, and express body-based relational fears, exposing dissociated emotions underneath shame and emotional dysregulation, which with awareness, study, and practice, tends to almost spontaneously unpack projections and judgements, particularly when one develops a solid perspective of neurological relativity and a radar for fourth circuit judgment.

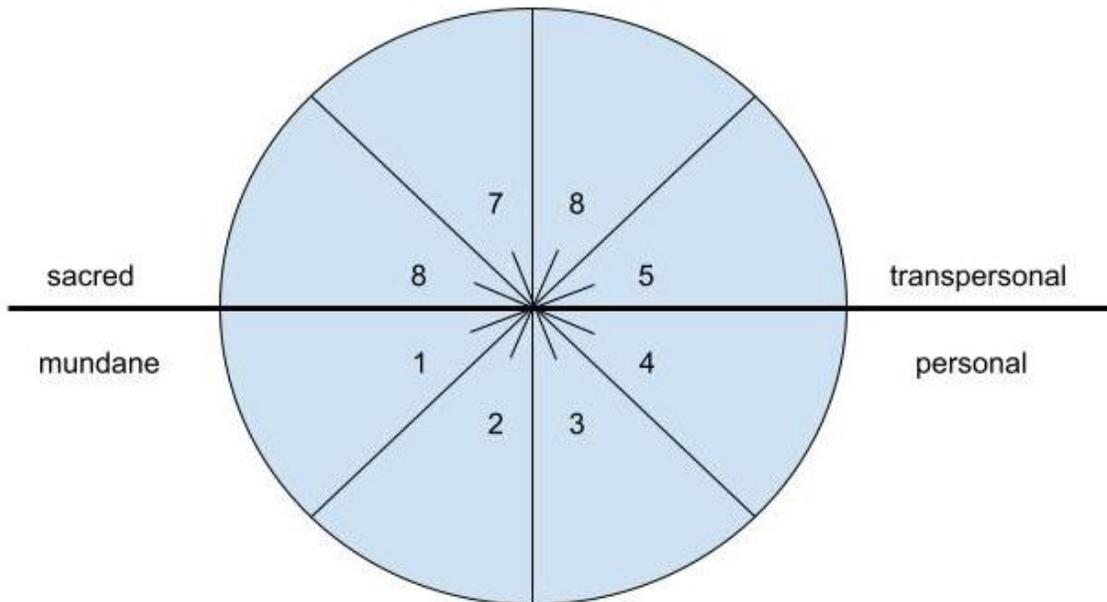
And through the process of contact, connection, relationship, and intimacy, we learn to embrace and sit with the mystery, to step into the unknown and the unfamiliar. When we lean into relationship, we discover the mysteries of the relational field. When we deepen into relational processes, we find ourselves immersed in the now. Relationship and embodiment happen in the now. And when we tune into the now, tune into our bodies, and tune into the Thou in contact with us, we can move into non-ordinary states of being

which we might more accurately described as upper circuit processes. More on that in just a bit.

In a relational approach under the Eight Circuit Model, we work with earned trust though developing relational repair processes, we learn emotional regulation and a more well-defined sense of self through engaged relationship with another, we collapse psychological projection in order to develop neurological relativism and a more complete self-concept, and we unpack our judgements in order to see others and ourselves more clearly. We can use top down and bottom-up relational approaches to integrating material within each of these realms of human consciousness. And we can use relationships to access more mysterious realms.

### Spiritual Intelligence

As I view this model, each of the first four circuits - physical, emotional, conceptual, and social intelligences - describes aspects of human consciousness which develop largely through gene-environment interactions during critical periods of neurological activation. The nature of these developmental intelligences has evolved and complexified since the beginnings of life on Earth with each circuit building on the previous. These first four circuits have commonly been called a few different names – survival, larval, or terrestrial circuits, or just the lower circuits, for example. As I see it, each of these aspects has a corresponding spiritual intelligence commonly referred to as upper circuits, or post-survival, post-larval, etc. circuits. For our purposes here, I tend to think of them as realms of the personal and the transpersonal or the mundane and the sacred.



While the first four lower circuits can be seen as a journey of separation - from the creator, the mother, the parents, and the family of origin (stories for another day), the

upper can be seen as reunifying, first with the body, then with the nervous system, then with the cosmos, and then the void. In a sense upper circuit processes involve \*mystery\* and the unexpected and unexplainable. They involve processes that can be difficult to describe, particularly to those who have not had the experience.

As we journey into the sacred and tie it down with words, it's worth noting that most phenomena do not occur as discreetly as our biocomputer likes to make them. Humans have a tendency to [think categorically](#), and these categories usually represent a spectrum of phenomena which we break down into categories defined by where we \*choose\* to draw the lines. In newly released [The Starseed Signals](#), we note significant discussion on the upper circuits about where to draw the lines in realms that resist labels and lines. We have a variety of different directions we can head in conceptualizing the Eight Circuit Model, and it seems that everyone eventually arrives at their own personal interpretation. Given that I see the upper four as spiritual outgrowths or extensions of the lower, then it seems wise to use the developmental definitions and progressions of lower circuits to inform our definitions of the upper.

## **Somatic bliss of 5th circuit intelligence and our relationship to our body**

The sacred side of physical intelligence might be simply described as profound somatic bliss. The yogi and the cannabis enthusiast tend to know this area well. When we develop a relationship with our body, when we feel safe, present, embodied, and dare I say loved and accepted, this creates an opportunity for the experience of inner peace and bliss. Likewise, in reunifying with our body, the euphoria and bliss brought on by cannabis, for example, can expose insecurities and create anxiety, fears, and even paranoia.

## **Full-sense ecstasy of 6th circuit intelligence and our relationship to our nervous system**

As we sort out our emotional-territorial needs for status and develop the capacity for healthy boundaries and relationships leading to a more well-defined sense of self while increasing our capacity for emotional regulation, we deepen our relationship to our nervous system and enhance our receptivity to more subtle perceptions and intuition. Likewise, by taming the hyper-active monkey mind of the third circuit through meditation and other practices that "[lower the noise](#)," we can perceive more "signal" - the felt-sense perceptions and intuitions of the sixth circuit nervous system. These felt-sense phenomena tend to shatter our pre-conceptualized notions of the world, challenging our sense of certainty and even our sense of self, exposing disintegrated second circuit material and sketchy boundaries. Without well-developed boundaries, emotional regulation, and a little bit of third circuit skepticism, we can confuse the empathically perceived energy of others with our own, and vice versa. We must exercise caution when assigning meaning and value to felt-sense phenomenon lest we get caught in a

process of spiritual narcissism and bypass. Collapsing projections and developing emotional regulation lead to “cleaner” 6th circuit experiences.

## **Universal interconnection of 7th circuit intelligence and our relationship to cosmos**

As we get deeper and deeper into the circuits, these experiences get weirder and weirder. Seventh circuit experiences involve Jung’s Archetypes and the Collective unconscious, Gaia and planetary consciousness, synchronicity and other experiences of connectedness. What is your relationship to the all? Do you feel an interconnected flow and synchronicity with the universe? One part of a multi-faceted, multi-dimensional whole? Separate-but-connected? One-with-all?

Looking back at our third circuit of symbols and language making up conceptual models and belief systems, we find that all symbolism starts with duality, the first symbol. And thus, we find the unitive nature of the mythopoetic in contrast to the dualistic nature of symbolic-conceptual. The more we collapse the projections of the 3rd and integrate our true separateness, the more we can experience interconnectedness. Likewise, a profound experience of connectedness can expose rigidity in one’s beliefs about the world, creating an opportunity to develop more conceptual flexibility.

## **Non-local nature of 8th circuit intelligence and our relationship to the void**

As we develop a sense of our individuality within a community, we create space for the opposite, a place of no-place, non-local, beyond space and time and into the world quantum physics still struggles to explain after over 100 years of trying. Find yourself to lose yourself. Move beyond one-with-all to where one has an experience of everything and simultaneously nothing, merging so fully that identity completely dissolves and we no longer have a sense of time and place, but of the experience of being every-thing, and no-thing at the same time. What is your relationship to the void? To non-attachment and impermanence? To death? Has an experience of impermanence awakened you to a sense of mission and purpose and exposed a need for your development of the individual-within-community? Does your life have such meaning and social connection that you can let it all go and slip into the void?

## **Upper-lower relationships**

As I have briefly described them, I hope one begins to see a relationship between an upper circuit and its corresponding lower circuit. I have found this upper-lower relationship extraordinarily useful in my conceptualization of the model as well as it’s application. One major aspect of this relationship, the shock-and-anchor dynamics proposed by Antero Alli, seem especially useful, particularly as we bring the model into the context of the year 2021CE. To quote from his website [verticalpool.org](http://verticalpool.org):

“Each of the eight circuits exist within each individual at various degrees of expression and latency. It would be erroneous to assume any one circuit as "better" or "worse", or "superior" or "inferior" than any other. Better to look at all eight circuits as symbolizing a spectrum of consciousness simultaneously working together in a kind of dynamic changing whole. There are countless ways these eight functions interact and act on each other. The specific dynamics I have been researching involve how the "survival" circuits (1-4) act as anchors to stabilize the shocks from experiences symbolized by the four "post-survival" circuits (5-8). I have also seen how upper circuit experiences can act on lower circuits as catalysts for growth and development.

“Without a supple and resilient foundation through the integration of circuits 1-4, any significant force of expanded consciousness through circuits 5-8 can destabilize us in a number of ways. Once the survival circuits can be more fully integrated, enough inner stability and strength can develop to help absorb the shocks of upper circuit experiences, i.e., the shocks of C-5 Ecstasy, C-6 Uncertainty, C-7 Indivisibility, and C-8 Impermanence. Upper circuit post-survival shocks stimulate growth and development in the four survival circuits, just as the survival circuits (once integrated) can help substantiate and bring into manifestation the expanded consciousness and accelerated energy states symbolized by circuits five through eight.”

In the theory of Gestalt therapy, the founders propose that we seek growth through a process called disturbing homeostasis. In 8CM language, we might say that during periods of stagnation we seek out upper circuit shocks to catalyze lower circuit growth. In gestalt therapy, the therapist might identify the lower circuit impasse impeding the client in the here-and-now, disturb the client's homeostasis around this impasse, and support the client such that their psyche can spontaneously reorganize into a more integrated way of being. In a similar vein, we might define psychological trauma in 8CM terms as an experience where the upper circuit shocks overwhelm the lower circuit anchors leading to unprocessed experience that remains unexpressed within our energy fields.

## **Contextualizing the model to 2021 and beyond**

As I take a good look at the Eight Circuit model in the context of 2021, two areas stand out to me. For one, psychedelic assisted therapy has risen to the verge of FDA approval and mainstream acceptance and we need some robust maps for this territory. Secondly, it seems mosbunall of us are caught up in a global Chapel Perilous brought on by major paradigm shifts occurring on grand scales, where the maps that got us to this point no longer hold much relevance and the need for resilience in the face of all the instability seems high.

With psychedelic assisted therapy, and even marijuana legalization, we find more and more “normals” accessing non-ordinary states of consciousness and searching for maps and meaning to explain these new experiences. I think within this simple

framework of the Eight Circuit model, we can find explanations for a great deal of this experience, how to make sense of it, and perhaps more importantly of all, how to integrate non-ordinary experiences into our daily routines of chopping wood and carrying water. Psychedelics disturb homeostasis. They induce upper circuit experiences. They expose lower circuit limitations. We start with set, setting, and sitter and the prep work that goes into creating set, setting, and sitter. Relationship to self, relationship to environment, and relationship to another will greatly affect the quality of the therapeutic experience. And while I'm not advocating working with Eight Circuit maps during the session, the Eight Circuit model can help the psychonaut prepare conceptually for the therapeutic experience and what might happen, as well as help make sense of the experience, digest the material, and integrate the work after the fact. And at the end of the day, it's still just a map, not the territory.

With COVID catalyzing our multidimensional transformation from industrial to technological society, while long term debt cycles create a once-in-a-lifetime shift in geopolitical power, and our new interdependence with the Spaceship Earth reaches a critical point, our old maps need some major updating, if not complete revision. If you feel despair at the state of the world, I hope you can come to see that massive paradigm shifts are messy, messy affairs, but we are ultimately witnessing a re-birth. Birth can be a messy affair, but the beauty shines through in the end. However, during this time of instability, we find our homeostasis naturally disturbed. As transpersonal forces continue to re-shape our world, and disturb our homeostasis, we can look for ways to stabilize and integrate these energies. We've got the transpersonal shocks. Let's work on the anchors so we have the resilience to roll with the changes.

## **Answering the Call**

We stand on the brink of what seems like human collapse on the eve of our greatest evolutionary leap forward since the development of language. We have the opportunity to create the future as the past falls apart in our wake. While the space in between can be scary as hell, like trapeze performers without a net, we may not have a choice but to embrace the unknown of the now and step into a new way of being. And we recognize that to do so takes courage.

Our future demands that we adapt, and perhaps that starts with redefining what it means to adapt, and adapt to new ways of adapting. Presence. Embodiment. Self-in-relationship. Self-in-community. Self-in-cosmos. No-self.

We can work through the terror of separation and create trust by finding security-in-relationship through rupture-and-repair processes. We can overcome the shame of separation and develop a sense of self through building well developed boundaries and learning emotional regulation. We can collapse the projections of unintegrated self-concepts and discover neurological relativity while recreating our own maps of meaning. And we can overcome our judgement of others and find our role as an individual-in-partnership and an individual-in-community. We can understand the nature of upper

circuit experiences so that we can make sense of transpersonal forces acting on us during this time of rapid change, open up and develop receptivity to their effects, and integrate their lessons. We can learn to invite in and more gracefully surf upper circuit experiences in order to cultivate more flow and well-being in our life.

The time is now. Make contact.

“Contact over time leads to connection.  
“Connection over time leads to relationship.  
“Relationship over time leads to intimacy.”  
-Duey Freeman

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This project written for [Maybe Day 2021](#).

Deep gratitude and appreciation to Bobby Campbell for the cover art (for the second year in a row) and for putting on such a great Maybe Day production (for the second year in a row!).

Read my piece for Maybe Day 2020, [Freud, Jung, and a Platypus get an MRI](#).

I have much more coming on a relational approach to the Eight Circuit Model.

In the meantime, check out my Facebook group, the [Forum for Intelligence Increase](#).

Follow me on Twitter [@mgathers23](#) where I intend to be more active going forward.

And [subscribe to my mailing list](#).

[Direct feedback welcome](#).

~Mike