

## VISION CYCLE

This cycle of 24 paintings was inspired by a half-hour long visionary experience one evening in July 1977. Before it I had done an hour of yoga, then some sitting meditation. I followed awareness of body sensations and came to a state of simple acceptance, letting the day's experiences die, though noting flickers of fear in this dying.

I did the paintings a few at a time, not always in sequence, between July 1977 and March 1979. I needed time to grow and to integrate different parts of the vision before I could externalize them, ground them in the physical form of the paintings. The process of painting was itself part of my understanding and integrating what I had experienced in the vision. The paintings were done in opaque watercolor; each one is about nine inches wide. (See p. 86 for more on the painting process.)

The cycle is one turn on a spiral. I returned to where I started, but returned changed, moved to a new level of awareness. The cycle of paintings parallels the cycle of movement through my natal chart. When I first saw this correspondence I was astounded at the correlations between the paintings and the signs, planets, and houses in the chart shown in the diagram on the next page. The connections to Huichol Indian shamanic cosmology came several months *after* the experience.

I experience the cycle as a map and a guide, a set of symbols to use as a tool for expansion of self-awareness. It is my personal mandala. My understanding of the initial visionary experience and the images from it continues to grow. I journey round and round the cycle. I even made myself a small set of cards, photographs of the paintings, that I use as an oracle to mirror my current inner state. It is a real delight to have a home-grown oracle!

The symbols are also more than just my personal images; they are archetypal images and can have meaning for the cycle of your journey too. Go through the paintings on the following pages several times, sometimes focusing on the flow of images and reading only the brief words in *italic*. Notice your mental, emotional, intuitive and physical responses to them. For you, your own experience is more important than what mine was. At other times enjoy reading the more detailed text and make your own interpretations as well.





*No wants - Stillness - Being*

This after yoga and meditation. Silver symbolizes quiet receptivity.  
*Astrology:* First house is “I am”, being.



*Orange flower - darkness in center. The way in, literally.  
I choose to enter the darkness.*

Having recently read about the value of going into the darkness when at an impasse, I was aware of the dark center as an opportunity, a doorway into other realms, what the Huichol Indians call a “nierika.”



*Into the darkness. No sense of confinement, rather one of great space.*

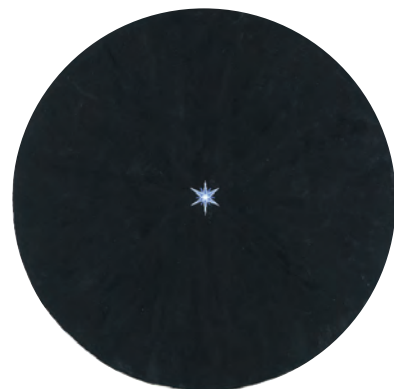
*Darkness - total - nothing else can be said about it.*

The most still darkness I have ever experienced. Not negative, not positive. Even these words and images are too explicit for this experience.

*Astrology:* Pluto is the farthest planet from the sun.



*In the center of the darkness appear sharp crystal fragments of blue-white light, increasing in number and intensity. Cold icy land. Looking “back” into the darkness to see if the orange flower is visible. It is not. No way to go back.*

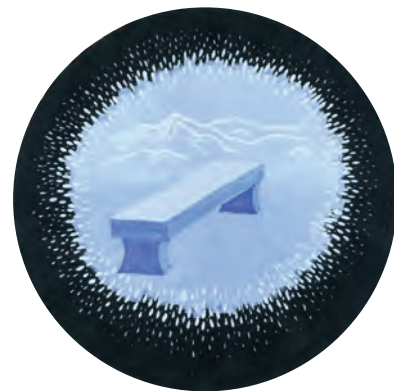


*Bench of blue ice in the icy land. Accepting this as my reality for now. No emotion. Only curiosity as to what will happen next, if anything.*

*Dual awareness of sitting on my meditation bench and on this inner bench. Very cold. Body shivers. Feeling like a tourist in a strange land.*

Even during the experience I was aware that the bench was like an ice version of the granite benches on the common in the small New England town where I grew up.

*Astrology:* The nadir - the underworld.





*A hag appears, black cape and head, gnarled face, intense blue eyes. She walks toward me. I wonder what this is all about, aware it is a test of some sort. Then I meet her face to face. I could get scared, but I don't. Very present and centered.*

I wondered if I was “making up” these images - this seemed like a caricature of what I was “supposed” to meet in the underworld. She had a face that is mine, my mother's, my father's, my grandmother's, all in one. An image of personal history. All my fears.

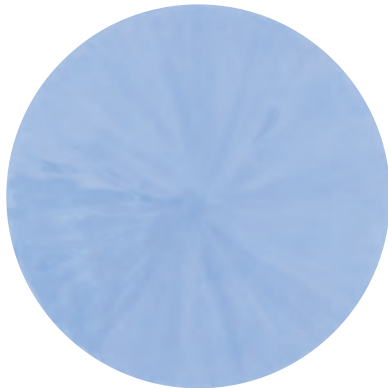
*Astrology:* Fourth house is family and home.



*Meeting her head on I ask, “Who are you?” She begins to dissolve.*

*The face becomes darkness, a deep hole into nothingness.*

The partly dissolved image is a dark ghost. It mirrors non-being to ego-me, to my small self. The darkness is another nierika.



*Then the whole face dissolves and I find myself sitting again on the bench.*

*Astrology:* Neptune is the dissolver.

At some time while I was on the bench, before or after the hag, I opened my eyes and returned to awareness of my room, but this did not feel comfortable. The cold icy feeling was still there and I knew I had to go back into the icy land for a while.

*From the right a hooded reindeer appears, brown with fuzzy antlers. Its eyes are the same deep darkness, but the overall presence feels very friendly.*

I was puzzled as to how to deal with this being. “Who are you?” didn’t seem appropriate. The eyes are another nierika leading to yet another level.



*While wondering how to relate to the deer, I see off in the distance a castle on a hill. Looking back at the deer I ask, “Are you supposed to take me there?” The answer was a wordless, “Yes.”*

“Kayumari” the deer is a Huichol spirit-guide. Delighted, I rode him toward the castle. Movement at last after so much stillness and confrontation. Going toward the sky-realm. The castle is its gateway, another nierika.





*At the castle. It now bulges, and the door is like a heart. A lot of energy is moving in my body, changes in breathing.*

A pregnant mother castle. I lost awareness of the deer-guide here and became entranced with the images and the physical experience. Fire in the upper windows is a clue to what is to follow.



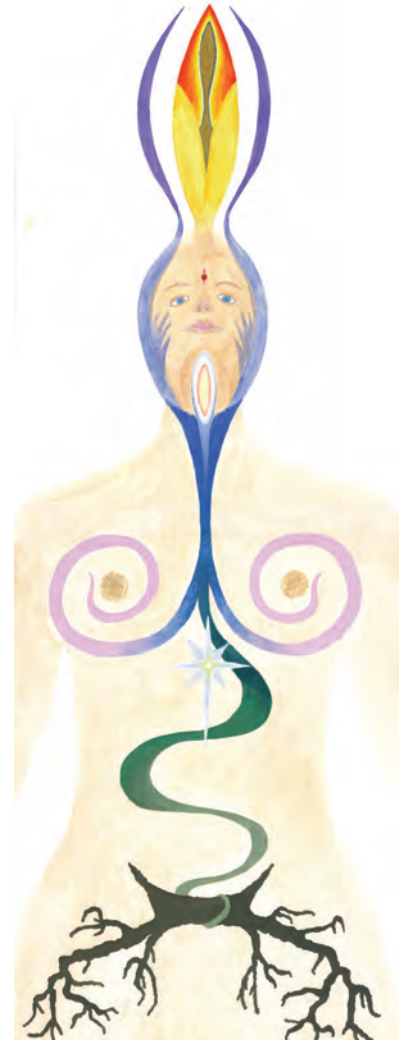
*The doors fly open and I see myself as a baby - very clearly it is me. Black., green, blue and yellow curving shapes around the baby. Regressing into being the baby. Aware I am losing myself by letting this happen.*

By now the experience was much more than visual and was moving very fast. Feelings and emotions moved through me. Memory of the experience is not as clear here.

Clearly the experience of birth. I was born non-labor cesarean so the upward, sudden birth is appropriate.

*Baby flesh becoming adult female flesh. Much energy moving through my body. I see/feel energy curl from around the breasts up into the face. Flowers budding and opening. Chaos of organic forms. An explosion of growth. Face dissolves into an organic form, a large bud unfolding, moving, colors streaming.*

This painting and the next are not exact representations of the visual part of the original experience. By this time it was much more than visual. These are attempts to put into visual form some of the quality of the overall experience,





Fire! All fire. Becoming fire. Grainy cellular reality.



Feeling as if I am falling over backwards off my wooden meditation bench. I am going crazy. I am dying. If I go into the white light I won't know how to return. Terror.

Wishing I had with me a human guide I trust. Energy streaming through body - I forget the specifics. Then I ask aloud, "What is this?" The intensity diminishes and I become aware of being present in my room. I open my eyes.

This seems to be the place from which ego-death and transcendence are possible. The place to get off the wheel of life. I wasn't ready! Astrology: Eighth house is the place of death and rebirth.



Eyes open, still aware of some fire. Tension in throat and mouth. Not satisfied with the present, feeling I have lost something precious. Wanting to return to the vision world, I close my eyes and immediately meet the deer again. Relief. I am ready to stay with my guide now. Trusting him. A friend.

The difficulties I had just encountered seem to have come from my having lost contact with the guide, from having identified with the forms that were disintegrating rather than with the transpersonal witness.

*Telling the deer that I'm ready to go wherever I need to go now, we ride to a cave in some dark mountains. Deep terror, not fiery terror as before, more a sense of foreboding. Trusting the deer and staying in contact with him.*



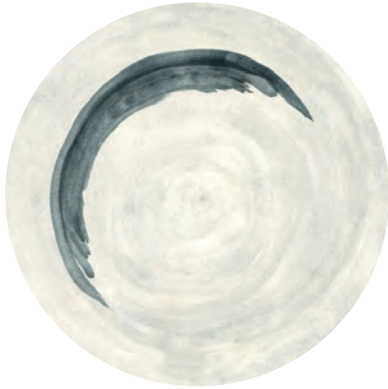
*An old person holding a lamp giving off curved streamers of liquid light. I feel tempted to go into the light, to lose myself in vision. I hesitate when I hear an inner voice say, "It's important to remember that I am in a body."  
I sense that I have passed a test.*



*Immediately I am with the deer again. I want to remember these experiences, but know attachment will stop the process. I choose to let go in order to move on. The deer assures me it can lead me back to the memory of each part. I believe him and say, "OK, where to now?"*

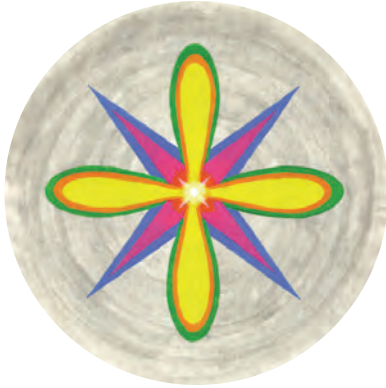
*Astrology:* The deer spirit guide was with me through the part of the cycle that corresponds to the fifth through ninth houses of my astrological chart, the big space where I have no planets.





*I surrender to wherever he will take me next. Instead of being taken somewhere, I feel a sense of “circleness,” of coming around, of return. A circle begins to appear.*

*Astrology:* Moon and Venus - a beautiful crescent shape



*The circle becomes the most beautiful mandala I have ever seen. I become entranced with its perfection. Then I notice that it is just an image; it is static. I let go of it, totally.*

For a long time I couldn't paint this one because I had let go so totally and had forgotten the image. This is not the mandala I saw, but is one that, while I sketched it as part of another drawing, suddenly seemed adequate for this position in the cycle.

*Astrology:* The Sun is the energy source, is like a mandala.



*Immediately after letting go, I am in a snowstorm of mandalas, each one perfect. I resist holding onto memory of any of them.*

The blizzard of mandalas was much less orderly than this painting.

*Then the mandalas become lollipops, and an angry voice from a dark cloud says, "You didn't grab on!" It has been trying to tempt me with images the way it would a little girl with a lollipop.*

Humor at last after all the intensity! I hadn't become attached to the stillness, the flower, the darkness, the cold, the fear, the dissolution, the guide, baby-me, female-me, the white light, the liquid light, perfect form, or the lollipops.

*Astrology:* Saturn - form, limitation, and attachment followed immediately by Uranus - breaking free, the cosmic joker.

*I relax and realize I have been in the land of the dead and had, even there, managed to stay in touch with life. My eyes open spontaneously. I am very present and more myself than I have ever felt. Seeing equally with both eyes, I am content, awed, peaceful, awake, and alive.*

Gold now as well as silver. Silver refined by the fire of experience. The dynamic in harmony with the receptive.

\* \* \* \* \*

Sitting for a while I was aware of easy access to both worlds – inner and outer. I had crossed the line easily several times during the journey.

I felt much gratitude to all my teachers for the experience and knowledge that enabled me to journey safely.

Then began the rest of my life! I ran though the whole journey in memory, with a moment of feeling I had finally fallen for the trap of attachment by trying to recall the experience. But what is life but the ebb and flow of attachment and release, of inbreath and outbreath! So I surrendered once again, this time *to* form. That evening I began writing and the following morning began to paint.



*An experience like this is a challenge - work is required to bring it more fully into the ordinary waking world and to learn from it. The following are notes I made on the process of doing the paintings.*

October 16, 1977

The bulging castle had enough charge around it for me that I did a pencil sketch of it the next day. Then the following day I did the orange flower. I didn't remember any background color from the vision, but during painting an intuition of maroon emerged. It felt right – some later connection with orange and maroon being the colors of the robes of Tibetan Buddhist monks.

The bench was next. I felt quite intensely the coldness, aloneness and desolation of that place as I painted. I also felt a lot of energy and excitement.

I first sketched the hag as she walked toward me, but that didn't feel right. She seemed like a cartoon and didn't have the energy of the experience. I then did a quick sketch of the hag dissolving and was pleased and amazed at the power of the stylized image that emerged. Painting it I felt I was entering an even colder more dead place. I was uncomfortable with and even a bit shaken by the painting after I finished it.

Then somehow I got the idea to start immediately on the deer even though I was tired of painting. Just sketching the deer changed my energy completely and brought much relief. While I painted the deer I felt it was a friendly, positive presence and enjoyed being with it. This was a comfortable interlude before the journey continued.

At this point I laid these first four paintings out on the table and became aware of a too sudden transition between the flower and the bench. Something was missing. So I did the totally black painting and liked what it did to the sequence, separating the warm energy of the flower from the cold icy underworld.

Doing the painting of riding the deer toward the castle I was aware of whole new element in the process. Movement had entered. The first five images I had painted had been rather static; they are confrontations of various sorts. Riding the deer I began to move. Hope, excitement and

anticipation were all present. The warm friendly energy of the deer took on a more dynamic quality in the light around the castle. I found myself singing and dancing after completing this painting.

While painting the castle with the heart-shaped door I was aware of much blocked energy. Tremendous tension in me. I got quite sick the day after finishing it.

Painting the opened castle was straight-forward until I got to the baby. Then I realized I'd never really let myself look at babies clearly. I felt awe and wonder as I touched the form with my brush. While painting the spirals I felt a rising and opening within me. At first the castle windows were pale yellow, but that seemed not quite right. Adding the intensity of the red and orange pointed to the energy still locked up in the castle. The baby is not the end of the process.

The process of painting the female form with energy channels was different, not so true to the visual component of the original experience, though parts of it are what I saw - the curling energy arising from the breasts and the bud form with fire at the top. I started from the bottom with the roots. It was the first day of my period and I felt very much in touch with my pelvis. After painting that part I lay down and listened to music and let energy flow. I felt the sadness of having a barren womb. Then the experience changed and I transcended identifying with being either mother or child. With this came a sense of relief and freedom. The next part, the curving green form did not have a lot of emotional charge. The curling form around the breasts I first did in gold, but that didn't seem right. When I closed my eyes and relaxed, my whole visual field turned to deep pink—raspberry sherbet and good tastes!. So I painted it pink.

The crystal star I associate with the third chakra, the center of power. The painting seemed to gain cohesion. The opening in the throat is vocal expression; it connects with an area of tension for me. The face was hard to paint. The pink in the mouth connects with the breasts. The eyes were those same disturbing blue eyes, like the hag's. I alternated painting them open and then closed and again open. I felt good painting the purple, gold, red, orange and yellow part

at the top. The last parts I painted were the red dot in the forehead and the blue moving into the cheeks. Both grew out of sensations in my face. By the time I did the blue I was getting impatient and it shows. I was eager to finish this painting project that had possessed me all summer.

*Notes on four additional paintings - October 31, 1977*

The streaks of orange going into darkness were easy to paint. This is the abstract, purely visual, part of the experience. This painting makes clearer the transition from the flower to the darkness

It was possible to paint the image of the hag's face only after I processed and met some of my fears associated with intense blue eyes.

The plain blue painting expressed the pause between the hag and the deer, the time of again just being in the icy cold place.

The painting of the fire image brought a sense of completion and acceptance of having refused the white light. The process of doing the paintings stopped here - for a while!

*Painting again - January 8, 1978 - rainy and windy day*

Last Sunday I was feeling really low, despairing. I took an afternoon nap hoping for a dream that might provide some guidance. I received the following dream:

Walking out through the orchard at my childhood home I meet a friend who seems very energized, glowing. She tells me of a dead deer she has seen out further in the pasture and woods. It has large antlers. She tells me that if I am up to it, it would be good for me to drag it back to the house. She starts giving me directions on how to find it, then seeing I don't understand she says she will go with me.

We arrive at the deer. It is dead but does not seem yucky. It feels like a mix of an actual dead deer she and I had seen once on a walk, and the deer in my painting. I feel glad to be in its presence.

I awoke soon after this.

That night I had a hard time sleeping. Lying there I realized I needed to continue the paintings. I knew that the paintings would only be a representation of the experience, yet it seemed right to go ahead and do them -- and let them "do" me!

The next morning I got a sense of the paintings being in a circle, not in a linear series. I sketched them in a circle and felt a sense of returning home. I saw the vision, and the paintings, as one turn on a spiral, a return to the starting place but on a new level.

For four days I had a good rhythm of painting in the morning and doing yard work for a friend in the afternoon. I first painted the second deer painting. Good to be back with my friend and guide.

Painting both of the cave paintings was a struggle. I felt that dark place within myself. It was good to do ordinary work in the sunny afternoons. The fifth morning I planned to paint the mandala, but I felt much resistance. I did a sketch with marking pens but it felt stiff and uninspired. Then I thought, "That's it for painting for now." So mysterious is this process, starting and stopping as I grow into being able to assimilate parts of the vision experience, then become saturated and burned out and need to stop. I wonder when the process will resume.

*Spring 1979*

I was able to complete the cycle of paintings after seeing that a small mandala I had painted as part of a larger work would fit as the mandala in this cycle, even though it was not the original mandala I had seen then totally released.

I realized recently that at the castle I lost contact with the deer. That is why I got so scared and out of control. I was trying to go through all that by myself, as my small self without the guidance of the inner shaman part of me. I was afraid of dying because I was identified with aspects of my personality, which actually were dying.

I just went back through the experience of approaching the castle on the deer and felt the energy of the castle, baby, woman and fire while still in the quiet witness presence of the deer. Last week a friend told me that for the Huichols the deer *is* the shaman, the one who can travel safely in subtle realms. That was a key to a missing piece of the puzzle for me.