

Pagan Ritual as a Means of Therapy and Self-Empowerment

Yael Katz-Henkin
Independent Scholar, Israel

The question that I attempted to consider relates to the advantages of contemporary Pagan rituals, as performed by a group of Israeli Pagans nowadays. Ritual is viewed as a special language that is expressed in structured actions, performed in a special space, at a specific period of time. Humans have the capacity to create a verbal language and use it for social communication. A similar mechanism enables humans to create rituals. Ritual behavior is initiated by a certain cause, which means that it has a purpose. Most scholars consider ritual as a social mechanism that enables society to experience its ethos, and bring different streams of ideologies into cohesion. It is also accepted that ritual is performed in order to restore order in the social type of existence that has been threatened or damaged. Among the different ritual theories on which I base my approach, I prefer Gruenwald's ritual theory. Gruenwald understands ritual as a performative expression of cerebral (or cortical) processes, similar to the linguistic cognitive and conceptual processes. In religion, rituals are performed in a context that seeks meaning in the framework of the holy (Gruenwald, 2003, pp. 3, 12). The actual performance of ritual ceremony achieves its goal by causing actual transformation of the reality that needs change (for instance: creating a sacred time, or conferring a sacred status). The actual change is a mental transformation; the mind strives to gain control over reality. The ritual performed restores an infracted metaphysical condition. According to Gruenwald, in order to achieve the ritual goal it has to be performed in some context that is meaningful for the participants. The myth, of which the participants are familiar with, confers that context. The Neo-Pagan ritual context is based on the mythic idea that our universe is interconnected in an all-inclusive energetic web. I intend to demonstrate the process that enables the ritual participants to undergo an emotional and spiritual transformation that elevates their self-esteem, and give their life a meaning of a life worth living.

Keywords: awareness, thinking process, ritual, transformation

Introduction

This article focuses on the beneficial effect of the Wiccan ritual from the view point of religion studies, relying on the corresponding methodology. Nevertheless, interdisciplinary approaches and methods will also be used to examine the data of my study. Interdisciplinary approach has become a widely accepted method in many fields of research, reflecting the "New-Age" concept of the wholeness of the world and the interdependence and connectedness of all its components.

I base my study of the Wiccan religious ritual on the basic assumption that man is the creator of the gods and the founder of the thousands religious systems and theologies existing in this world. Following this basic idea, any study of a religious phenomenon cannot ignore psychological theories, including brain research and new neurosciences' approaches. Although Hagner denigrates the overflowing amount of interdisciplinary new

approaches, especially concerning neurosciences, it seems to me that any new scientific knowledge is always relevant to the human cultural development (Hagner, 2012, Hebrew translation).

Hagner reminds us that there were three principal revolutions in western cultural history which bore a tremendous effect on human self-perception. The Copernican revolution forever changed the place of man in the cosmos. With Copernicus' innovation no longer could man take that premier and central position in the world which had been assigned immodestly to him by the theologians. The Darwinian revolution refuted the idea that man was God's creation, and the Freudian revolution claimed that human spiritual life was controlled by subconscious, unknown inner forces.

According to Hagner, the newest revolution is the new alliance between brain research and psychoanalysis. This revolution is about to pave the way to scientific knowledge of man, based on psychology and biology, hoping that by following interdisciplinary methods, which branch from the many neurosciences, human spirituality research will gain empirical scientific validity (Hagner, 2012, pp. 31-32).

Bearing these ideas in mind as an inspiration, I intend to examine the Wiccan ritual according to new theories which ensue from the combination of brain research and ritual theories.

Wicca and Neo-Paganism

Neo-Paganism is an umbrella term for various and diverse beliefs within the framework of "New Age" spirituality. The Neo-Pagans are any of several spiritual movements that attempt to revive the ancient polytheistic religions of Europe and the Middle East. They strive to revive authentic pantheons and rituals of ancient cultures, though often in deliberately eclectic and Reconstructionist ways. Some Neo-Pagans find no incongruence practicing Neo-Paganism along with adherence to another faith, such as Christianity or Judaism, although the Neo-Paganism movement can be defined as a religion by itself.

Neo-Pagan religions are eager to return to the values of nature conservation, taking responsibility for the world's ecological balance.

Wicca is one of the streams of Neo-Paganism. Like other Neo-Pagan religions, Wiccan ideology relates to the survival of the ancient original religions of the world. Wiccan cult is based on ancient cults of gods and goddesses that manifest natural forces, while recognizing the importance of ecological values.

Wicca differs from other Pagan religions by the prominence of witchcraft within the Wiccan ritual process, and by emphasizing the priority and dominance of the female deity (Starhawk, 1989, pp. 15-47). Wicca originated in the early 20th century in England, where many believed that the old polytheistic cults have been secretly kept alive by mysterious and secret communities of witches. It was believed that those communities of witches had passed on their knowledge for generations until our times. For that reason Wiccans call themselves witches, without gender distinction, namely, men and women are called witches. Equality between men and women has always been a main factor in Wiccan ideology. Originally this religion was antithetic to the Patriarchal Christianity which, as claimed, had oppressed the female half of society. In monotheistic patriarchal religions female body and sexuality were considered sinful and shameful. In response Wicca emphasizes the value of the female body and of female sexuality. Gardner, who is considered the founder of Wicca in Britain, ascribed a lot of importance to the naked bodies of women and men during the ceremonial meetings, as well as the equality between them. As it spread in America Wiccan ideology assimilated feminist ideas, and as a result, the top position of the female goddess was enhanced. Following the theories based on feminist studies in archeology and anthropology, Wiccans assimilated a belief in Matriarchal Primordial religion, in which humans

venerated a great goddess. Mother Nature, bearing different names in different cultures, was believed to have been the dominant ruler in ancient pantheons, while male deities held secondary positions, being the goddess' consort; a lover or husband, and sometimes a son. Nowadays the Great Mother Earth, or Mother Nature, is highly worshipped by Wiccans. They believe that the goddess is immanent in the world, that she is the world, and that she may become manifest within anyone at any time through various methods.

Wiccan ideology is developing and changing, reflecting the ideology of new-age spirituality which tends to be instable. As Prof. Idel claimed (in the Third Conference for the Study of Contemporary Spirituality), New Age Spiritual ideologies are difficult to follow and discern due to the fact that they are inconsistent and constantly changing. Indeed the group that I am studying had designated its members as "witches", or "Wiccans". A few months later they changed their title and called themselves "Neo-Pagans". These days they relate to themselves as "Pagans". Nevertheless, despite the change in definitions, epistemologically no substantial change has occurred in terms of ideological approach and ritual behavior.

In my view any religion is formed by a social framework of ideology and conduct that is rooted in faith in a superior power which has a bearing on the physical existence of the whole community and its individuals.

With this definition in mind I would state that Wicca, or modern Paganism, can be defined as a religion. Like every other religion the Pagan religion has its special religious procedures, namely, ritual. This article relates to the Pagan Ritual, as performed by a certain group of Israeli Pagans or Wiccans. This group consists of a few covens, which form small ritual communities¹. On the whole it seems that Neo-Pagans in Israel can be counted by a few hundreds. They use the internet for communication, but most of them observe their religious practices individually in private domains.

Neo-Pagan Ritual and Ritual Theory

Ritual is a human mechanism that enables people to cope with changes.² Ritual mechanism is a kind of language that is expressed in structured actions, performed in a special space, at a specific period of time. Humans have the capacity to create a verbal language and use it for social communication. A similar cerebral capacity enables humans to create rituals, as Gruenwald puts it: Rituals are a form of human behavior that primarily reflects the mind that generates them... In rituals, the mind demonstrates its reaction to existence (Gruenwald, 2003, pp. IX). According to this approach, ritual behavior is initiated by a certain cause, which means that it has a purpose. Most scholars consider ritual as a social mechanism that enables society to experience its ethos, and bring different streams of ideologies into cohesion (Durkheim, 1994, pp. 104, 112-117; Gorman, 1990, pp. 17-25; Bell, 1992, p. 109; Valeri, 1985, p. 344; Douglas, 1973, pp. 42-43). It is also accepted that ritual is performed in order to restore order in the social type of existence that has been threatened or damaged (Gorman, 1990, 17-25). Boyer underlines the social importance of ritual. In his opinion social groups would fall apart if ritual did not periodically reestablish that all members are part of a greater whole.³

These attitudes should not override the fact that ritualistic behavior is a biological phenomenon; we must recognize that ritualistic behavior is not a human privilege, and exists in other animals too. Furthermore, human ritual is not limited to social activity; it also occurs in individual and private realms. In fact, many Wiccans prefer to observe their religious cultic procedures privately. Among the different ritual theories on which I base

¹ A coven is a Wiccan cultic group that was formed by people who know and trust each other.

² Van Gennep, 1960, pp. 10-21, 191-192.

³ Boyer, 2001, p. 25.

my approach, I prefer Gruenwald's theory of ritual. Gruenwald understands ritual as a performative expression of cerebral (or cortical) processes, similar to the linguistic, cognitive and conceptual processes. According to him, in religious ceremonies, rituals are performed in a context that seeks meaning in the framework of the holy (Gruenwald, 2003, pp. 3, 12). Gruenwald believes that the mind strives to gain control over reality, and that the physical performance of the ritual ceremony actually transforms the reality that needs change. The ceremony may create a sacred time, or confer a sacred status. The most obvious example is the process in which a couple undergoes a real transformation of the social, mental, and legal status by the performance of a ritual ceremony. Gruenwald emphasizes the fact that the change brought about by the ritual is real, not metaphorical; although in most cases the actual change might be a mental transformation (Gruenwald, 2003, pp. 14, 16).

In order to achieve a ritual's goal the ceremony has to be performed in a meaningful context. A myth, of which the participants are familiar with, can provide the meaningful context for the ritual process. It is important to clarify that the ritual act is not a dramatic imitation of a particular myth, nor is it a dramatic description that illustrates a sacred principle, yet every ritual is connected to a particular myth that forms its cognitive context (Gruenwald, 2003, p. 55). Like ritualistic behavior, mythic thought is also a special human capacity that enables man to build and create imaginative worlds and consider them real. Myths seek to shape reality in their own manner, which expresses a unique statement about reality. "Myth is a unique kind of reality that the human mind conceives and shapes in relation to a ritual" (Gruenwald, 2003, p. 55). "Rituals are effective, because they operate in a kind of reality that allows myth and behavioral practices to interact. Together they bring into effect changes that are inconceivable in normal modes of existence (Gruenwald, 2003, p. 56).

What may be the myth that creates the cognitive context of the Wiccan ritual? According to Pascal Boyer, beliefs and religious ideas are influenced by the manner the brain's inference system is working. According to this notion, the most ubiquitous ideas are those who correspond to the brain's cognitive processes.⁴ On the other hand, Boyer does not ignore the influence of the style of living on the religious ideas. In this respect it seems that only a comfortable and secure life can produce the ego-boosting "New-Age" ideology. According to him, the "New-Age" mythic ideas stem from a belief in benevolent forces that rule the universe, in the fundamentally good nature of humanity and in the inner spiritual strength of each individual to control good health and spread benevolent vibrations that will cure the universe.⁵ Indeed, it seems that the ritual context of modern Pagan cults ensues from these mythic ideas.

Starhawk, the founder of the "Reclaiming" stream of Wicca in America, expresses this common Pagan idea declaring that our earth is a living entity, and that all forms of life on earth are sacred and interrelated. The whole universe is interconnected in an all-inclusive energetic web, in which every part and particle, including human beings, are interdependent (Starhawk, 1989, pp. 10-11, 32). In accordance with these ideas, the main goal of the Wiccan rituals is to connect to the energetic forces of the universe in order to make a change. As a feminist who resents the oppressiveness of patriarchal society towards women, Starhawk states her understanding that the Goddess religion is a conscious attempt to reshape culture (Starhawk, 1989, p. 11). The gods, according to her, are vehicles which can open doorways into new dimensions of our own possibilities (Starhawk, 1989, p. 8).

⁴ Boyer, 2001, pp. 18-45.

⁵ Boyer, 2001, pp. 20-21.

The Wiccan religion is based on the faith in immanent gods. Divinity is female and male, but, as mentioned above, priority is given to the Goddess. Since the gods are inherent in the world and humans are part of the world, it means that the gods are within every human being. Hence there is a direct communication between man and gods, and there is no need of mediation by prophets and priests. Any accomplished witch can conduct a ritual ceremony and act as a priest or priestess.

The main factor of the Wiccan ritual is to invoke the relevant gods and natural forces to participate in the ceremony. The aim is to accept energy from these sources of spiritual energy, and use that spiritual power for self-empowerment and for changing reality. The transformation achieved by ritual is considered natural magic, and ritual activity is considered witchcraft, or “the craft”. Each ritual ceremony has its own ritual goal—a specific transformation is expected as a result of each specific ceremony, yet there is a basic mutual structure to all ceremonies, although the exact order differs in different covens. There are three basic rules that have to be followed:

1. One must be careful for what one asks from the gods, since the energy that might be distributed to the world will be returned to the sender magnified at least three times.
2. It is important to be exact in phrasing one’s request. It seems that the gods read the request literally.
3. Each witchcraft ceremony must be dedicated to a specific single task.

Bearing these rules in mind we can now concentrate on the basic structure of a ceremony, based upon some ceremonies in which I had participated. As Starhawk puts it, in fact what is needed to make magic is only “our bodies, our breath, our voices and each other” (Starhawk, 1989, p. 15), yet the ceremony entails some preparations and some sequence of actions:

1. The preparation of an altar—The altar is composed of artifacts which symbolize the gods to be invited to the ceremony, some fruits, food or beverage as gifts for the gods, and also a candle for each god.
2. Purification—First, the chosen space, in which the ceremony is to be held, undergoes a purification by means of incense smoke, or sprinkling holy water, by sound of bells or incantation, or any other imaginative action. The procedure of purification is performed in circles counter-clockwise around the compound. The same purification actions are performed around each participant. The priest or priestess who guides the ceremony purifies each member, and the last one purifies the priest.
3. Grounding and centering—A meditative stage in which the priest guides a simulation the purpose of which is to concentrate in the present moment, and connect with the energy of the earth. This can be achieved by visualizing our body sending roots deep into the earth in order to allow free flow of energy through us safely.
4. Casting a circle—Creating an energetic space protected and separated from normal reality. Being in the circle is considered being in between worlds, where fantasy becomes real. It is a liminal space situated between the physical world and the astral world, and therefore is not in any of them but between them, touching them both, so that what happens in it can affect both. This is done through chants or any kind of guided imagery directed in a clockwise direction. When the circle is imposed, it is declared by all participants: “The circle is imposed, we are now between the worlds, what happens between the worlds is changing all the worlds”.
5. Invocation of the four elements—The air, soil, water, and fire are the four elements that are sacred in Wiccan religion. The elements are affiliated with the four winds. The air is affiliated with the east, fire with the

south, water with the west, and soil or earth with the north. Beginning in the direction of the solar rotation each element is invited to the circle by citing a verbal invitation in the direction of the corresponding wind, and by lighting a candle to each element. At the end of the ceremony, the elements and the four winds are being released by uttering blessings and extinguishing their candles in a reversed order.

6. Invocation of the Goddess—Calling the Goddess allows the awareness of her presence. The concept of the Goddess is related to any goddess. The appropriate goddess is addressed according to the aims of the ceremony. The Goddess is being called by incantations or dance or any other imaginary means. The Goddess' presence is indicated by lighting a candle on the altar.

7. Invocation of the God—Calling the God follows the same procedure and meaning as the invocation of the Goddess. Many gods, or only one God or one Goddess might be invited to a ceremony, depending on the ritual intentions.

8. Trance—The trance is the core of the ceremony. All previous procedures are aimed at creating the suitable frame of mind and atmosphere for this to happen. A priest or priestess conducts a guided imaginative journey, while all participants sit in a circle meditating and focusing on the guide's instructions. Starhawk explains that trance is a special mode of consciousness, which allows for an altered state of awareness; in this frame of awareness, we create imaginative metaphor senses that "see", "hear", "feel", "smell", and "taste". In this manner we can create an elaborate metaphor world that represents the reality of the astral dimension of the universe. What begins in the imagination becomes real. It is the reality of the underlying energy currents that shape the universe (Starhawk, 1989, pp. 154-155). In that reality, according to Starhawk, we can communicate with the gods and accept their answers and help. We can perform witchcraft, changing reality and shaping it according to our will.

9. Grounding—When the energetic work is concluded, we drain excessive energy back to the ground by touching the ground with our palms.

10. Sharing offering—Participants share the food offerings and libations with the gods.

11. Sharing—Sharing and comparing trance experiences enable the realization that trance states are both subjective and objective. Parts of the experiences are relevant only to the individual's interior world, but there are parts which can be shared and agreed on by others. People are encouraged to describe in writing their trance experiences in a special notebook, the book of shadows.

12. Dismantling of the ceremony—The gods and elements are thanked, praised, and released in honor. The devotion is very similar to the invocation but it's done in the opposite order and direction from its preparation.

13. Releasing the circle—The circle is opened the same way it had been cast but in a reversed direction, counterclockwise.

14. Feast—A joint meal is shared to celebrate the invigorating life forces in people and the universe.

Neo-Pagan Ritual as a Therapy—What Must Be Cured?

Since the ritual theory that I rely on expresses the idea that every ritual is connected to a particular myth that forms its meaningful context, it is time to delineate the most important myth which underlines the Wiccan or Pagan ritual performance. That myth would be the "New-Age" concept of the energetic flow that encompasses the whole universe, connecting all its components into one whole entity of interdependent and

interconnected constituents. According to that idea, the Wiccans concern for the health of the universe is being expressed in every ritual, as well as in any other aspect of their everyday life. Ritual's goal would be to cure our damaged world. Each rite is aimed at that intention in its own special way. One of the major ways to achieve this goal would be to distribute benign vibrations around the universe, by way of transmitting positive thoughts and compassionate energies.

In order to be able to generate positive thoughts, people need to cure themselves from all kinds of ailments. But, there is a major cultural impediment which causes western humanity a lot of grievance.

The problem ensues from the dichotomy in the way western cultures view human beings, namely, the separation between corporal and spiritual activities. This dichotomy in our self-perception causes a lot of psychological problems. For many ages intellectuals and religion thinkers have dealt with the separation between body and soul. The spiritual level of human activity had always been considered as the noblest, while bodily needs and activities were considered disgraceful and shameful.

Scientists have strived to map the human anatomy as comprehensively as possible, delineating the tiniest ingredients of the human cells, including the structure of the genes and DNA. During many years of history, attempts had also been made to map the spiritual structure of the human psychic entity, and discern between: ghost, soul, spirit, animus, anima, ego, id, conscience, sub conscience, self-etc.

In monotheistic religions, man has always been demanded to overpower his bodily functions and control his mind and soul to the best of his ability. Man had been supposed to control his functioning like a monotheistic God who rules the universe demanding total submission. Psychological approach treats the monotheistic religions as Freud would have seen them, namely, a projection of the oedipal complex and destiny, which demands complete submission to the will of the God-father.

Nowadays there is a tendency to neutralize the separation between body and soul, since it is understood that body and mind are unanimously controlled by the brain. Following the knowledge humanity has gathered so far, it is commonly accepted to regard the complexity of the human being as a complete undivided living being whose function is expressed in many physical, cognitive, and psychological dimensions.

In Neo-Pagan thought man is considered a whole unit but also a particle of a bigger unit, the universe. The universe is conceived as a complete undivided living being composed of many components that are interconnected in a mutual flow of energy. That means that every component including humans can affect the energy flow of the whole universe. Basically humanity should be striving to establish balance and harmony between man and his world. But as a matter of fact people find it difficult to establish their own individual balance and harmony. Although it seems that we can overcome the imbalance between spirit and matter, the scientific thought, prevalent in our times, produces another problem. I believe that there still exists a deep inner rift within each of us that threatens everyone's mental health.

The Therapeutic Meaning of Witchcraft in Wiccan Ritual

The scientific approach values cognitive evaluations and resolutions, and denigrates imaginative, non-realistic thinking. This approach is the core of the problem at hand. The psychoanalyst and writer, Christopher Bollas believes that the need to listen and speak our imaginative dream language is an existential necessity. Bollas argues against the priority given to rational thought at the expense of imaginative and mythic thought. He believes that Mankind's survival depends on the ability to reach the subconscious knowledge and

give words to the dream language⁶.

Wiccan rituals are very useful in that respect, since they enable us to integrate magic and wonder in our lives.

The Wiccan-Pagan ritual strives to bridge the separation between body and spirit, by treating the body as a sacred vessel that permits the absorbance and transmission of energies. The body undergoes a mental transformation that turns it into a vehicle, equivalent to Winnicott's "transitional object", which makes the connection between internal and external realities possible (Winnicott, 2007, pp. 36-40). Thus the ritual enables the participants to experience the sense of connectedness and oneness with the universe. This experience resembles the feeling that the infant seeks using the "transformational object" to re-experience the feeling of being united with its mother (Bollas, 1987, pp. 16-17). Bollas believes that every man yearns to experience again the original feeling of oneness with his mother. Wiccans achieve that feeling of oneness through the ritual. They believe that the ritual is a means of unification with the gods and the universe. Starhawk states that Wiccans regard witchcraft and ritual as ways to achieve self-development and study, since the ritual enables communication with the gods, and with their inner desires and motivations. According to her, the gods are understood as the projections of inner values, and as transitional objects connecting internal and external realities (Starhawk, 1989, p. 9).

The Wiccan ritual facilitates communication between different kinds of knowledge that are stored in the brain; between the known and the "unthought known" (Bollas, 1987, pp. 3-4)⁷. This means that the ritual transformation entails acknowledgement in one's inner thoughts and inner unknown knowledge⁸.

Thanks to brain research we can acknowledge the fact that we cannot be aware of all the information that is processed and stored in our brains at all times. Our consciousness is limited. We can be focused on a certain range of information at a time, yet we sometimes get the results of processed information and resolutions as a sudden revelation, concerning problems that we had put aside, or when a sudden need to make a decision arises. The brain works, deciphers, and stores all kinds of intakes without our awareness. Winnicott and Bion dealt with the processes of thinking, and following their ideas Ogden delineated three types of thinking; magical thinking, the dreams, and transformational thinking (Ogden, 2011, a). According to him these three types of thinking take place simultaneously. Ogden appreciates the dream thinking the most; he explains that magical thinking does not encourage real growth, while dream thinking is the deepest of the three, and activates the conscious and unconscious mind. Transformational thinking develops from dream thinking, creating a variety of new kinds of emotions and feelings. Therefore Ogden attaches profound importance to the dream thinking. Following Bion's ideas, he sees the dreaming as a potential unconscious psychological work that leads to a development, transformation, and growth (Ogden, 2011, p. 236). Ogden actually referred to the process of thinking that occurs during the psychoanalytic therapy session, more like the reverie that Bion had described; nevertheless psychoanalytic research had always attached a lot of significance to the

⁶ Bollas expressed that concern in an interview by Azaraty Or, "A whale in the ocean of the unknown", in "Haaretz" Journal, 29.03.2010, pp. 34-36 (in Hebrew).

⁷ This expression was phrased by Christopehr Bollas as an explanation for a process of thinking we are unaware of.

⁸ The human brain can process many kinds of information, and store the results in many different regions. Neurosciences strive to map the human brain's different regions and understand their functions. So far the operations of individual brain cells are understood in considerable detail, but the way they cooperate in ensembles of millions has been very difficult to decipher. Especially the mechanisms by which brain activity gives rise to consciousness and thought remain very challenging to understand.

phenomenon of sleep dreaming (Freud, 1925; Jung, 1967)⁹. In ancient times, like classic era in Greece, night dreams were considered the most trusted means of getting a direct message from the gods. There were special temples in which people could go to sleep in order to dream the words of the gods (Burkert, 1985, p. 115). The same practice is described in the Hebrew Bible; the first agreement between Abram and God had occurred at night in a dream. “And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram...” (Gen. XVI, 12). It is also written that when King Solomon went to Gibeon in order to communicate with God, He sacrificed a thousand burnt offerings there, and then: “In Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night: and said, Ask what I shall give thee” (I Kings, III, 5). This same practice had always been known to mankind. Even nowadays people consider very seriously their dream thinking while asleep. While dreaming, the mind releases bits and pieces of information that had been stored and processed without our awareness. Our mind keeps processing information and producing solutions to problems in different channels and symbols. It seems that some kind of thinking is active when we sleep, and according to Jung’s theories, it is advisable to go to sleep when we are confronted with a difficulty that needs a solution. “I love to sleep very profoundly because while sleeping I come to find resolutions to all kinds of problems” said Julia Kristeva, when interviewed for “Haaretz” Journal (Rouner, 2012, p. 5).

In order to explain how is all that related to the Wiccan ritual, I would like to deal with the complexity of human thought in a reductionist and schematic manner, and try to formulate a work definition for the human thinking phenomenon in a binary division:

In this formula the human thinking process is divided into two types of thinking and two processes of thinking. The types of thinking are divided into:

1. Probable reasoning—Probable reasoning is a rational thinking, logical and scientific reasoning. It is based on empirical examination of the information obtained by the senses; analyzing and classifying it, and drawing conclusions for the future. Logical thinking is considered as an expression of objective truth, since it is based on objective experience and factual reality, even on its abstract levels (Kahneman, 2012, p. 21)¹⁰.

2. Mythic thinking—Mythic thinking is an imaginative thinking. It ensues from the human capacity to create imagined reality, divorced from all rules of logical probability. Yet the imaginary thinking succumbs to a unique inner logic that makes the mythic realities acceptable.

In 19th century scholars considered the mythic thinking as primitive and inferior level of human cultural evolution, while probable reasoning was regarded as the highest stage of cultural development. Nowadays it is understood that those two basic types of thinking co-exist in human brains, as an expression of special human capacities.

As mentioned above, thinking is a very complicated process of cerebral activity; this process can be schematically divided into two kinds of thinking processes:

1. Verbal thinking—Verbal thinking is a cognitive processing of information using verbal language. While thinking, we can phrase our thoughts and communicate them to others. We can be aware of many stages in the process of processing our verbal thoughts.

⁹ Following Freud, discusses dreams throughout the 18 volumes of his writings. Freud claimed that dreams are attempts to conceal your true feelings from the waking mind. Jung rejected Freud’s claim. According to Jung, dreams are a way of communicating and acquainting yourself with the unconscious. They serve to guide the waking self to achieve wholeness and offer a solution to a problem you are facing in your waking life.

¹⁰ This method of thought is similar to the mental activity that Kahneman considers as system two.

2. Non-verbal thinking—Non-verbal thinking is a process of analyzing data in non-verbal means. This kind of thinking process is the same practice employed by animals and new born babies. This process is unconscious, we are not aware of the process, but we sometimes feel its consequences. We know something without knowing how we came to know it. This kind of knowing is the “unthought-known” Bollas is referring to (Bollas, 1987, pp. 3-4). This knowledge is sometimes treated as instinctive thinking, or as unexplained sudden enlightenment, and some other times it is considered the word of the gods.

The religious experiences and beliefs are based on an axiomatic knowledge that cannot be explained. This kind of knowledge is very much needed. I rely on Bollas in this assertion, since he expressed his concern for the survival of humanity, if we neglect to hear and speak our dream language. Bollas treats the way people remember as mixture dialectic between history, fantasy, real, and imaginary (Bollas, 1987, p. 6). Following his example we can conclude that human thinking, understanding, and remembering, is composed of a dialectic combination between the types of reasoning and different thinking processes.

It seems to me that as human beings we need to activate and respect all kinds of cognitive processing we can employ in our brains; rational and irrational, traceable and untraceable. We need to find a way of making the combination a whole undivided expression of our being. In order to be aware of our unthinkable knowledge and trace it, we need to pay attention to our inner knowledge, experience it, and speak it. In this respect the Wiccan ritual is very helpful.

In Wiccan ritual, while performing the ceremonial proceedings, the priest or priestess who conducts the ceremony leads the participants to address the gods with a very accurate request or question which had been carefully phrased in advance, and then, through guided imagery, he guides them to feel and experience the goddess or god's presence. In this manner, while in a trance, the mind is focused on an exact question, and the all-inclusive thinking process is activated in seeking answers, without any awareness of it. The gods are used as transformational and transitional objects to get acquainted with non-verbal experiences. They are used to get in touch with inner powers and subconscious knowledge. That way the participants receive answers by their own hidden knowledge, disguised as the gods' advice. This practice is very similar to the incubation rituals of old, only instead of falling asleep; a state of trance is induced.

Trance is a state of non-ordinary consciousness. Trance is explained as: inward awareness, expanded awareness, meditation, hypnosis, or “getting high”. There is an infinite variety of possible states of trance, ranging from day dreaming to deep concentration paired by alienation from the sensory world, and up to psychic awareness of paranormal phenomena (Starhawk, 1989, p. 154).

The altered state of mind can be analogous to the reverie state in therapy, mentioned by Ogden. The state of trance suppresses the rational and verbal thinking and facilitates the mythic symbolic thinking. The ritual is not supposed to function as a therapy session, but when the ritual is performed as described; the participants gain the feeling of experiencing magic and self-empowerment. This feeling may stem from the fact that mythic contents of mythic thinking in non-verbal procedures emerge to the threshold of awareness and transform consciousness. The ritual induces a transformation of awareness which results in a sense of self-empowerment.

When the ceremony is concluded, the participants are invited to share their experiences in the trance. This gives the participants an opportunity to express their experiences in words. When the ritual is performed in private domains, it is advised to write and describe the experiences in written words. The practice of verbalizing non-verbal thoughts and emotions transforms consciousness and brings hidden knowledge and unknown inner powers to awareness.

The Wiccan devotees used to call themselves witches. In mythic terms the gods play the part of the witches' brooms that carry the witches beyond reality and bring them back to reality with energetic empowerment and magical knowledge.

References

Hebrew and Hebrew Translations

- Freud, Z. (1966). *Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse*. (H. Izak, Trans.). Tel Aviv: Dvir.
- Geertz, C. (1990). *The interpretation of cultures*. Jerusalem: Keter.
- Gruenwald, I. (2004). Myth and historical truth—Is it possible to shatter myths? In M. Idel and I. Gruenwald (Eds.), *Myth in Judaism* (pp. 15-35). Jerusalem: Shazar Center.
- Hagner, M. (2012). *Der Geist bei der Arbeit. Historische Untersuchungen zur Hirnforschung*. (N. Kol, Trans.). Tel-Aviv: Resling.
- Ogden, T. H. (2011). *On not being able to dream*. (E. Gabai, Trans.). Tel Aviv: Am Oved.
- Rouner, I. (25.05.2012). Ilay Rouner interviews Julia Kristeva. *Haaretz*, p. 5.
- Turner, V. (2004). *The ritual process*. Tel-Aviv: Resling.
- Winnicott, D. W. (2007). *Playing and reality*. Tel Aviv: Am Oved.

English

- Bell, C. (1992). *Ritual theory, ritual practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bollas, C. (1987). *The shadow of the object: Psychoanalysis of unknown thoughts*. London: Free Association Books.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a theory of practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Burkert, W. (1985). *Greek religion*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.
- Douglas, M. (1973). *Natural symbols: Explorations in cosmology*. New York: Random House.
- Durkheim, E. (1994). The elementary forms of the religious life: The totemic system in Australia. In W. S. F. Pickering (Ed.), *Durkheim on religion* (pp. 102-166). Atlanta: The American Academy of Religion.
- Freud, S. (1989). *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis. Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Translated by James Strachey. New York: Liveright publishing.
- Gruenwald, I. (2003). *Rituals and ritual theory in Ancient Israel*. Leiden, Boston: Brill.
- Gorman, F. (1990). The ideology of ritual: Space, time, and status, in the priestly theology. *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series 91*. Sheffield: Sheffield's Academic Press.
- Jung, C. G. (1967). *The collected works of C. G. Jung*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Kahneman, D. (2012). *Thinking fast and slow*. UK: Penguin Books.
- Starhawk, S. M. (1989). *Spiral dance: A rebirth of the ancient religion of the great goddess*. San Francisco: Harper Collins.
- Valeri, V. (1985). *Kingship and sacrifice: Ritual and society in Ancient Hawaii*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.