

Illuman's MROP—What Are We Doing?

By Terry Symens-Bucher

Last month, I was inspired by Terry Frisbie's [Drumbeat article](#). In that article, Terry shared his reflections on and enthusiasm for Bill Plotkin's new book, *The Journey of Soul Initiation: A Field Guide for Visionaries, Evolutionaries, and Revolutionaries*. Many of you remember that Bill was our primary presenter on "Wild Mind" at Soularize 2018. Like Terry and I, some of you have probably participated in Animas Valley Institute programs led either by Bill or by guides trained by him.

What I share here are musings, but I hope they are helpful in giving us an idea of how we could become clearer and more aware of what is happening for a man at the MROP and how to help him on his spiritual journey. We could improve our programming to assist men who come with diverse psychospiritual tasks and in different developmental stages. We were given a great treasure in the MROP. It is like a beautiful jewel that needs to be securely situated in a crown of jewels.

After reading his article, I wrote to Terry and asked him, "What do you think we are doing in the Illuman Men's Rites of Passage?" As both of us know, that question is really Bill's question to Illuman. Bill asked Illuman, "Are you really doing a *rite of passage*, or something else?" Terry replied to my email with a list of things he has witnessed and/or experienced on the MROP: grief work, healing of wounds, teaching the five hard lessons of initiation, eco-awakening, even movement into what Bill calls true Adulthood and what we might identify as initiation into the journey to our True Self, or initiation into the Journey of Illumination (JOI) within a community of brothers.

I replied that perhaps some men experience what Bill calls Confirmation in the rites and in Illuman community. Confirmation occurs after *eco-awakening*,¹ when a person has created an authentic social persona—a social presence that is both accepted and authentic—that is accepted by a peer group. While this sounds simple, it is extremely difficult to complete this psychospiritual task in our conformist-consumer society. Confirmation is the passage from first-stage adolescence to second-stage adolescence. It is not determined by age, but by fulfillment of psychospiritual tasks. A man who is confirmed is ready to enter the stage of "wandering in the cocoon," and, when ready, what Bill calls Descent to Soul.

Some men who have successfully created an acceptable—but not yet authentic—persona might experience the MROP as the first place where they can be truly authentic. And that might signal the accomplishment of Confirmation. If a man were to experience Confirmation at the MROP (or in our men's community

¹ Eco-awakening deserves its own discussion and may be one of the aspects of the journey of soul initiation where Illuman's curriculum could use the most attention.

afterward) then it may be that the last thing we want to encourage him to do is go back to his previous life as a “better man.” Rather, depending on his circumstances, we might encourage him to disconnect from the matrix of his social role and identity as much as possible. We could encourage him to connect with the more-than-human world through praise, intimate encounter, and reconnection to nature and Earth. As Richard Rohr teaches, such a man has learned that success has nothing more to teach him.

I think many men have not yet experienced Confirmation before coming to the MROP. They have created a social persona that is acceptable to a peer group, but it is at the cost of their authenticity. Other men who come to the MROP have found that even their “acceptable persona” has been shattered by divorce, illness, job loss, etc. They may find in Illuman a space in which they can be truly authentic, perhaps for the first time in their lives. That space allows them to do some healing and “wholing” work that is necessary along the journey of soul initiation. If a man were to experience that healing, wholing work at the MROP, then it might be a mistake to have him get back up on his feet and begin climbing the “ladder of success” by creating another, stronger, success-oriented personality. Again, depending upon the totality of his circumstances, we might rather encourage him to develop the four facets of his Self so that he would be prepared for the Descent when Soul calls.

On the other hand, if a man were already Confirmed by the time he applies to the MROP, we might tell him to disconnect from conformist-consumer society as much as possible and connect deeply with other-than-human environments *before* he participates in the MROP. He is ready for the experience of second-stage adolescence. He can use help understanding his cocoon and the Descent to Soul.

I would close by saying that nothing in this musing is intended to disparage or criticize the amazing amount of work our Weavers, Ritual Elders, Conveners, Wisdom Elders, and Board have put into developing Illuman and its current programs. All that effort has brought us to this point of appreciation and beautiful potential. I think it is time now, during this period of reweaving Illuman, to develop a curriculum based upon Bill’s field guide to soul initiation. That would help us clarify our intentions and the purpose of the MROP as well as more fully inform our Journey of Illumination.