

# THE MAINTAINING CYCLE – THE CIRCLE OF MIRRORS

BY DAVID ENGLAND

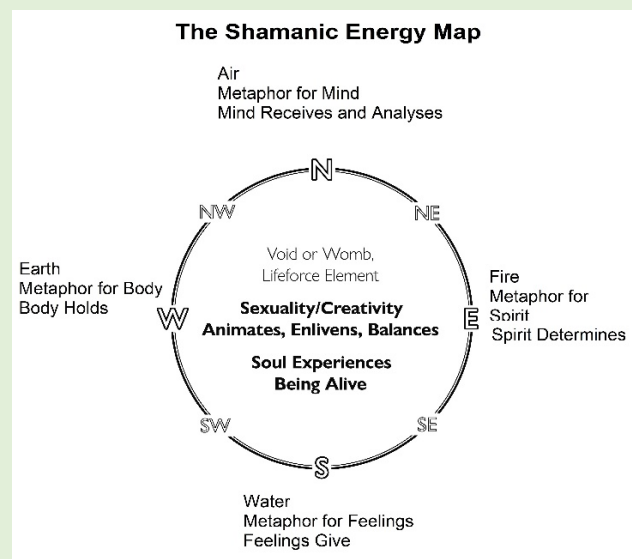
## PURPOSE

Guggisberg Nocelli describes (2017, p141) how “Assagioli strongly supported the theoretical and pragmatic value of synthesis,” in particular, “synthesis in therapeutic approaches.” It has been my professional purpose in recent years to synthesise Shamanic Psychology and Psychosynthesis Psychotherapy, both in my writing and in the development of my psychotherapy practice. The reason for this endeavour is what I see as an affinity between these two therapeutic approaches: ancient Shamanic Psychology and contemporary Psychosynthesis Psychology. Both are psychospiritual, not least because both acknowledge an immanent personal self in relation to a transcendent Higher Self.

I have sought to fulfil my purpose of marrying Shamanic and Psychosynthesis Psychology by writing my book, *Soulfulness* (England, 2017), in which I show how Shamanic and Contemporary Psychology can be integrated in psychotherapeutic practice, in particular: (i) by the inclusion of some powerful psychological models based on the Shamanic Medicine Wheel; (ii) by employing a present-day application of the technique of the shamanic journey as a way of communicating in consciousness with the unconscious mind. This article seeks to further the same purpose of marrying Shamanic and Psychosynthesis Psychology.

## ABSTRACT

Psychotherapists and counsellors are accustomed to clients who are caught in a maintaining cycle. This article describes an approach aimed at helping clients to release themselves from such maintaining cycles. The approach is founded on a Shamanic psychological model which I call ‘The Circle of Mirrors’<sup>1</sup>. According to this approach, from its earliest days onwards a child formulates, from their experience of being alive, a core belief about themselves that influences all aspects of their developing personality and determines their adult character and attitudes. The model, then, serves to illustrate a client’s maintaining cycle, revealing to the client the power that their core belief has over their personality. With this awareness, the client is invited to choose a new, positive core belief, to help them attain release from a negative core belief and to determine their future psychological growth. Note: This paper makes reference to a companion shamanic model *The Shamanic Energy Map*. Please refer to England (2021a) and England (2021b) for a full description.



## MIRRORING AND THE SURVIVAL PERSONALITY

The psychological model *The Circle of Mirrors* is all about mirroring.

<sup>1</sup> Originally titled The Star Maidens Circle, Harley SwiftDeer Reagan (1980, revised 1994).

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An infant gains a sense of themselves according to the quality of mirroring provided by the mother<sup>2</sup>. Sustained empathic and authentic mirroring affords the infant a stable sense of their own being, existing and continuing in time. However, with inconsistent, unempathic and inauthentic mirroring, “the infant does not really come into existence, since there is no continuity of being.” (Winnicott, 1987) Again, for the infant, “When I look I am seen, so I exist (Winnicott, 1988).” The corollary is, in the absence of authentic mirroring: When I look I am *not* seen, so I *do not* exist. To avoid the terror of annihilation, the infant identifies with those parts of themselves which reflect relative acceptance by the unempathic parent and around which a relatively stable ‘survival personality’ can therefore cohere.

The Circle of Mirrors model reveals the influence of a core belief, whose origin is in the quality of mirroring, on the personality as a whole.

The Circle of Mirrors is similar to a hologram: each of the eight directions offers a perspective on the personality, and all perspectives must be seen together to apprehend the whole. Moreover, each perspective highlights and strengthens the whole reflection.

*The Circle of Mirrors* is portrayed in three diagrams:

### **Perspectives.**

This depicts the eight perspectives around the wheel. At its centre is Soul<sup>3</sup>, the experience a person has of being themselves.

### **The Myth of the Wounded Child and the Dark Mirror.**

This represents a person’s reality. The reality which their Soul experiences is the survival personality. The dark mirror is dark because it delivers a murky and inauthentic image of what ourselves and our life could be.

The diagram’s function is to reveal the impact of a false core belief on the entire personality. The dark mirror is a representation of the kind of maintaining cycle in which psychotherapy and counselling clients are often seen to be so tightly caught.

The western side of the dark mirror from south to north is about how in childhood the core belief becomes entrenched throughout the personality.

The eastern side of the dark mirror from north to south is about how in adulthood an entrenched core belief is maintained, affecting our entire adult life and shaping our sense of self.

### **The Myth of the Whole Child and the Light Mirror.**

This represents an ideal model whose function is to chart the way forward out of the dark mirror, breaking the grip of the maintaining cycle. The light mirror is light because it delivers a clear and authentic image of what ourselves and our life could be.

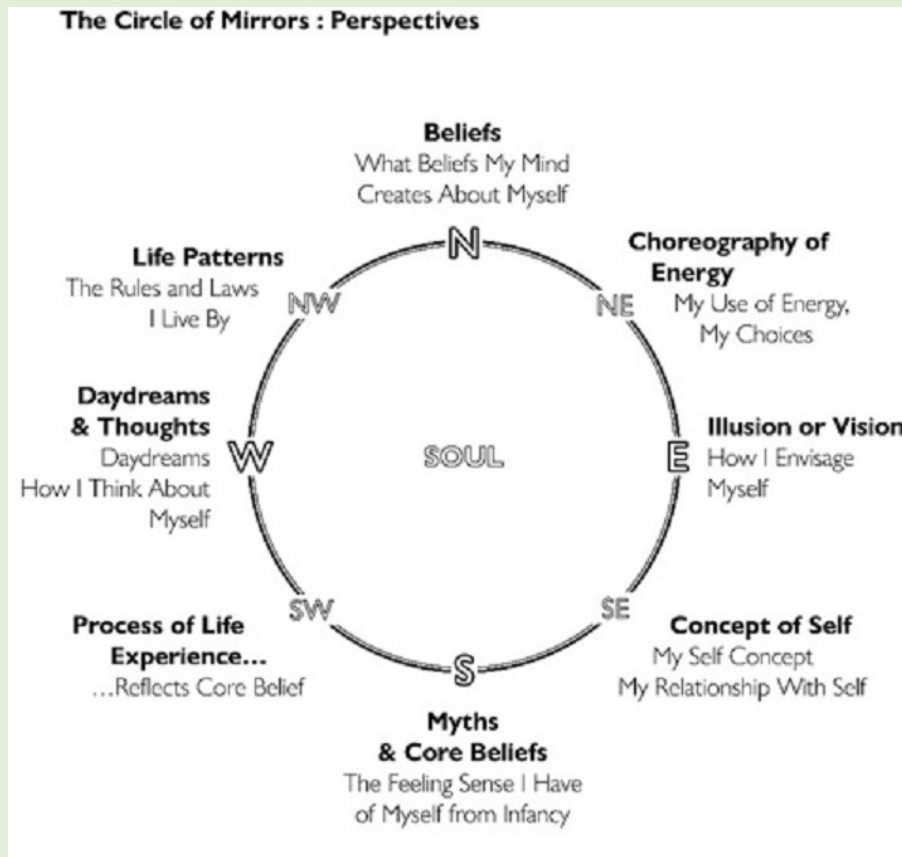
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<sup>2</sup> Or caregiver, throughout.

<sup>3</sup> My definition of Soul: The principle of life, being alive, and a person’s experience of being alive.

## The Maintaining Cycle - The Circle of Mirrors

### PERSPECTIVES



The first diagram depicts the eight perspectives, the eight directions around the Circle of Mirrors.

#### **S: Myths and Core Beliefs**

Water, Feelings Give

The quality of love, holding and mirroring which a mother gives to her infant governs the 'core *feeling* sense' the infant has of themselves. An infant enters the world in a state of innocence: trusting and free to be themselves. However, the trauma of unempathic mothering<sup>4</sup>, holding, and mirroring instils the opposite of innocence, which is fear, the threat of nonbeing. (Firman & Gila, 1997)

So, the infant's core *feeling* sense, whether characterised primarily by love, freedom, and trust, or by fear, depends upon the quality of mothering and mirroring.

'Core *feeling* sense' is also referred to in this paper as 'core belief', because in time it becomes articulated as a belief which is reflected throughout the personality.

#### **SW: Process of Life**

The child's core feeling sense is reflected in their life as it unfolds. A negative core belief attracts related negative experiences and relationships, thereby curtailing their opportunity of living life fully.

#### **W: Daydreams and Thoughts**

Earth, Body Holds

The quality of mirroring which an infant receives affects whether their reflection in the mirror of life is primarily a clear or a distorted image.

<sup>4</sup> Or caregiving.

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Where there is regret about how their life is, their core belief is reflected in the way they *hold* resentment in their body, blaming themselves and later maybe blaming others.

They comfort themselves by daydreaming of a better life in which their core belief is countered.

### NW: Life Patterns

The child's core belief is reflected in the way they fashion their life patterns as a reaction to their core belief, creating a holding pattern for their life in the form of rules and laws which they live by on a daily basis.

### N: Beliefs

Air, Mind Receives

Across the circle from Myths and Core Beliefs, as their *mind* forms it provides words for the core feeling sense and rationalises this core belief into a set of beliefs about themselves.

### NE: Choreography Of Energy

Across the circle from Process of Life, their life experience governs their life choices and the extent to which they balance their energy (see *The Shamanic Energy Map*).

They may begin to recognise what their core belief has manifested in their life and begin to take responsibility for their life choices.

### E: Illusion or Vision

Fire, Spirit Determines

Across the circle from Daydreams and Thoughts, they face the payoff for the life they have chosen: either a clear vision of their life or unfulfilled dreams and Illusions; either self-reflection or self-delusion.

### SE: Concept of Self

Across the circle from Life Patterns, the crux of the whole circle is the relationship with Self.

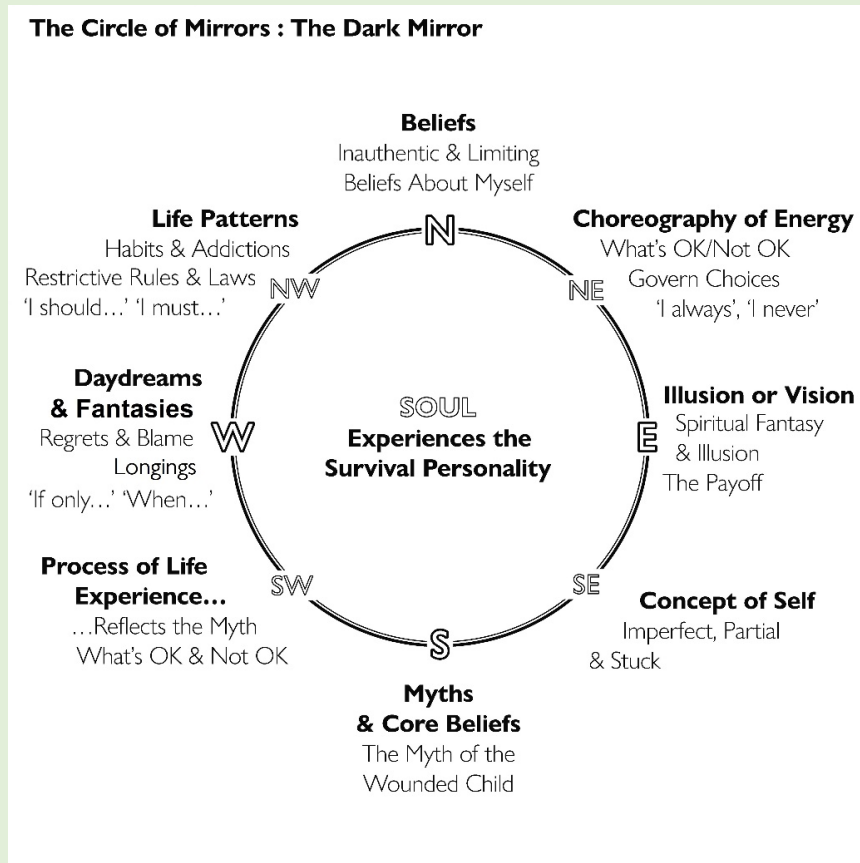
Their life's holding pattern, combined with what their spirit determines for their life, reflect a sense of who they are. This may be the limited image of the survival personality or they may see through to the Self. In the words of George Herbert (1633):

*A man that looks on glasse,  
On it may stay his eye;  
Or if he pleaseth, through it passe,  
And then the heav'n espie.*

## The Maintaining Cycle - The Circle of Mirrors

### THE MYTH OF THE WOUNDED CHILD - THE DARK MIRROR

The next diagram depicts how, with the trauma of inadequate parenting, inauthentic mirroring is reflected throughout the personality.



#### S: Myths and Core Beliefs

Water, Feelings Give

When an infant is not given its birthright of love and consistent, empathic holding and mirroring, they suffer the loss of innocence and trust, and blame themselves for the core *feeling* sense of fear and distress which they endure. The resulting false core belief is the myth of the wounded child.

Psychotherapists and counsellors are familiar with such myths, articulated as: "Nobody loves me," "I am unloveable," "I am unworthy," "I am worthless," "I am a failure," "I am rubbish," and so on. The myth I hear most often is, "I am not good enough."

#### SW: Process of Life

The child's negative core belief, the myth of the wounded child, is reflected in what happens in their lives, attracting negative experiences and negative relationships which reinforce their core belief (what's OK), and shunning positive opportunities which challenge their core belief (what's not OK).

What this means is a rejection of themselves. They will mirror their early environment by rejecting in themselves what was rejected by others. They will try to hide that which has been rejected and they will work diligently to compensate for it. They will shun or be angered by those who display what they have rejected in themselves.

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A child whose core feeling sense is that they are unloveable, learnt how unsafe it was to express his feelings, because to do so threatened his survival, whereas to be quietly detached – seen and not heard – kept him relatively safe. When this is reflected in the child's life, expressing feelings or getting close to people will not be OK, and they will shun intimacy, whereas remaining quiet and withdrawn will be OK. It is likely they will avoid unstructured social occasions, in which they can quickly feel lost, and seek situations where they can exchange thoughts and ideas with others about subjects not too close to home.

### W: Daydreams and Thoughts

Earth, Body Holds

The core belief that they are unloveable/unworthy/a failure... is reflected in the way they hold regret and resentment in their *body*, blaming themselves for the negative experiences and negative relationships they suffer in life. Blaming themselves, or projecting blame onto their partners, only reinforces their false core belief and negative experience of life.

Thus, it is a sign of improving psychological health to be able to direct the blame and resentment where it belongs, most likely onto parents or caretakers.

The way they try to comfort themselves is by daydreaming, little plays in which they are loved/worthy/successful...

They are disconnected from themselves, and their daydreams are grounded neither in their bodies nor in the here and now, but in the past, "If only such a thing had happened," or in the future, "When such a thing happens."

When the trauma they have endured and their blame and resentment are held in the *body*, this may cause physical illness or a distortion of body shape and facial expression into adulthood.

### NW: Life Patterns

As every action causes a reaction, so the child's myth of the wounded child is reflected in the way they fashion their life patterns, the habits they adopt, the addictions they form, how they fabricate a restrictive holding pattern of rules, "I should...", and laws, "I must," which govern all aspects of their daily life, limit their self expression, and stifle their *lifeforce*.

As an example, a child's reaction to the core belief, "I am unloveable," is like to be a repetitive pattern of avoiding intimacy, relating to others at a safe practical level, withdrawing into themselves when feeling stressed, and in later adulthood by sabotaging potential sexual relationships, restricting their *lifeforce*.

It is said (John Davis, 1996), Jackie Kennedy's mother, Janet Lee, was a cold, domineering woman who was emotionally and even physically abusive to her daughters, especially to Jackie. While Jackie grew up surrounded by wealth and opulence, none of it was hers; she always felt like a poor relation – this seems very like a core belief which fuelled her later habitual, even addictive, acquisitiveness.

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### **N: Beliefs**

Air, Mind Receives

Across the circle from Myths and Core Beliefs, as the child's *mind* develops it provides words for the negative core belief and rationalises this myth into a set of limiting beliefs about themselves. For example, from the myth "I am unloveable," the mind may form inauthentic beliefs such as, "I am flawed," and "I have no right to exist."

At the same time, their mind may form compensating inauthentic beliefs; for example, the myth, "I am unloveable," may result in beliefs such as, "I am special," and "I am a very fine person."

### **NE: Choreography Of Energy**

Across the circle from Process of Life, their choices are governed by what feels OK or not OK. They are likely to choose jobs and careers which are essentially functional rather than relational, where they can relate to others at a safe practical level. They are unlikely to ask for feedback and feel threatened when it is offered. Their energy is out of balance (see *The Shamanic Energy Map*).

### **E: Illusion or Vision**

Fire, Spirit Determines

Thus, across the circle from Daydreams and Thoughts, the payoff for the life they have allowed their core belief to choose is a *spirit* mired in illusion and spiritual fantasy. The Spiritual Cycle is stuck. There is no will. For example, for the child whose myth is "I am unloveable," the payoff is a safe but empty life, alone, with low energy, without intimacy.

### **SE: Concept of Self**

Across the circle from Life Patterns, their restrictive life pattern and limited self expression, combined with ungrounded daydreaming and spiritual fantasy, form an imperfect and partial self concept which is stuck in the survival personality and unable to evolve.

## PSYCHOTHERAPEUTIC APPLICATION OF THE CIRCLE OF MIRRORS

*"Inside every human being is a special heaven whole and unbroken."*

*Paracelsus*

### **The Dark Mirror**

Working round the west of the Dark Mirror from south to north reveals to a client how, as a child, their core belief became entrenched and was reflected in every area of their life.

Then, working round the east of the Dark Mirror from north to south challenges the client to recognise how, as an adult, they have chosen to allow their life to be configured and their sense of self shaped by the image they see in the distorting mirror of their core belief.

Arriving at the South East – Self Concept – with these revelations, the client is invited to ask themselves the simple yet penetrating question, "What gift does my wounded child need from me?" The wounded child is the 'Child of History', born to the pain and suffering of being in the world of experience. Careful reflection upon this question leads the client back to the beginning of the circle, to acknowledge and grieve their wounding and core feeling sense, to question the core belief which became entrenched, the Myth of the Wounded Child, and to take responsibility for their lives.



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### An Affective, Healing Experience

Working round the Dark Mirror can give the client a cognitive understanding of their maintaining cycle. But, much more than this, it can give the client an affective experience of their maintaining cycle, each direction of the wheel being an occasion of deep reflection and emotional illumination.

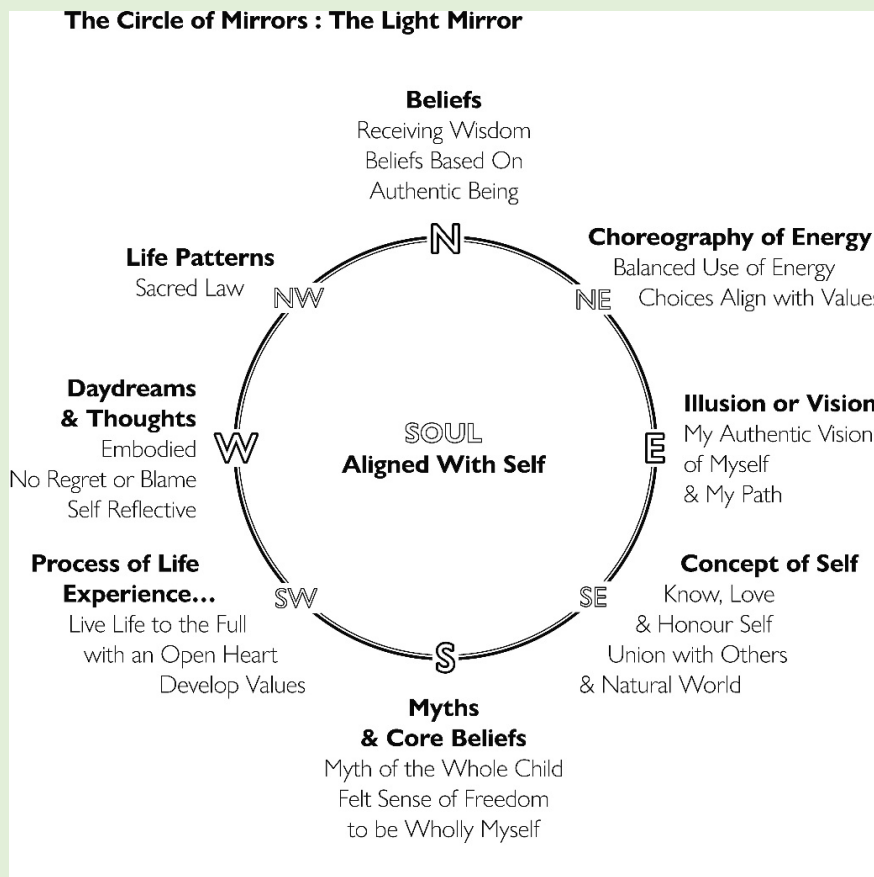
### The Light Mirror

This healing experience makes way for the client to find and afford themselves the gift of a new core myth, the Myth of the Whole Child; the child, whole and unbroken, before the wounding began, is the 'Child of Self'. Finding their answer to the question, "What gift does my wounded child need from me?", serves to open the client to the wisdom of Self.

Then, working around the Light Mirror, the client can visualise a life and a sense of Self which reflects their new myth. They can see the way to break the grip of the maintaining cycle of the Dark Mirror by aligning more and more with Self. However, it must be borne in mind...

### THE MYTH OF THE WHOLE CHILD - THE LIGHT MIRROR

...the Myth of the Whole Child is still a myth! Because its realisation is the ongoing journey of a lifetime, which this following diagram seeks to portray.



#### S: Myths and Core Beliefs

Water, Feelings Give

The core *feeling* sense the infant has of themselves is the love, consistent, empathic holding and mirroring the infant is *given* prior to any wounding. The myth of the whole child might be expressed as, "I am free to be wholly myself."



## The Maintaining Cycle - The Circle of Mirrors

- SW: Process of Life** Their myth affords them freedom to experience life to the full, to be willing to learn from their mistakes, to be willing to relate to others with an open heart. They develop values of freedom, wholeness, openness, participation, and the courage to be themselves and to fully to express who they are.
- W: Daydreams and Thoughts** They do not entertain regret or blame but take responsibility for their own actions.  
Earth, Body Holds They show respect for their *body* and they are *embodied*, grounded in the here and now, self-aware and self-reflective.
- NW: Life Patterns** Their life pattern is founded on a transcendent Sacred Law. The Sacred Law which I learnt from my first shamanic teacher, Nick Headley, reflects the ethos of the Medicine Wheel and the Circle of Mirrors:
- All things are born of woman – for a man, of his feminine.*  
*Nothing shall be done to harm the children or the inner child.*  
*Death brings life. Life brings rebirth. Rebirth is movement. Movement is change. Change is death.*  
*The Light Mirror is my birthright.*
- N: Beliefs** Across the circle from Myths and Core Beliefs, their *mind* forms the belief that wholeness is a process of becoming, a growing into Selfhood by responding to the promptings of Self, with a *mind* open to receive wisdom from significant others, as well as the wisdom lying deep within.  
Air, Mind Receives
- NE: Choreography Of Energy** Across the circle from Process of Life, their values inform their choices, for which they take responsibility.  
Optimally disposing their energy means keeping their energy in balance (see *The Shamanic Energy Map*).
- E: Illusion or Vision** Across the circle from Daydreams and Thoughts, their capacity for self-reflection creates a context in which their *spirit* exercises will and *determines* their future path.  
Fire, Spirit Determines
- SE: Concept of Self** Across the circle from Life Patterns, informed by the Sacred Law and aligned with Self, they know, love, and honour themselves.

They reflect this loving inner environment outwards, understanding their significance as part of a greater union, with other people and with the natural world.

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