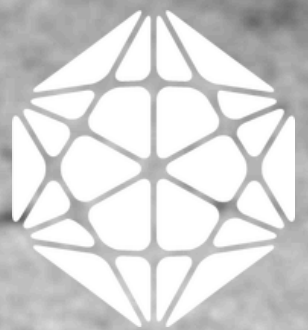


# *The Inner Journey*

By Hayley Morris and Giles Hutchins



# Introduction

Change is inherent in life, we are forever swimming in it. Our ability to embrace change is fundamental to our shift towards Future-Fitness. And yet, within this constant flux, there are periods when larger transitions take shape: ones that up-stretch our meaning-making into new ways of being and knowing.

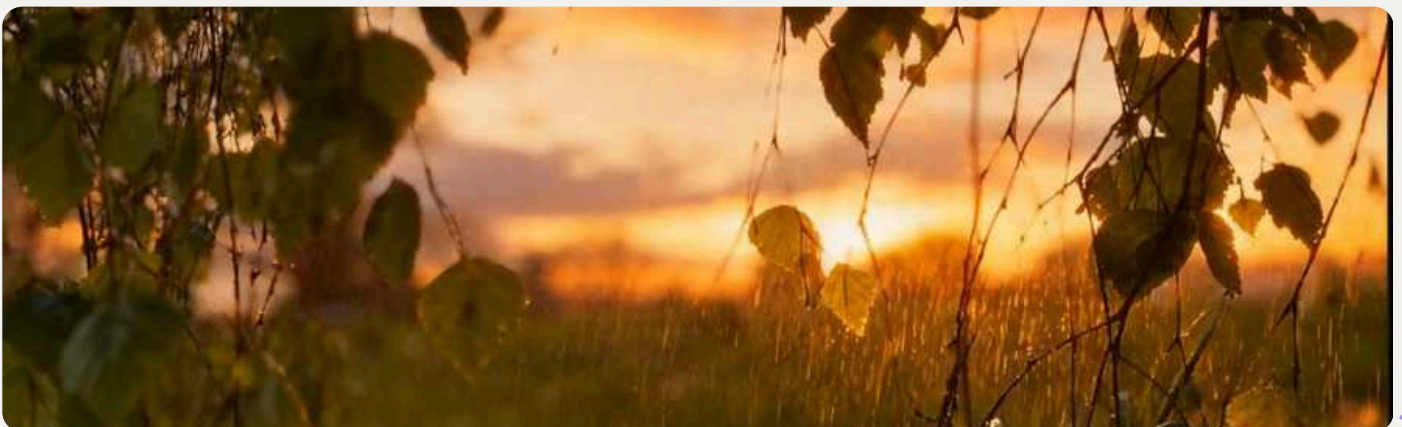
If I told my life as a story, the most interesting parts would not be what I have done or achieved, nor what I have seen or experienced. The most interesting chapters are marked by these periods of transition.

When I map these transition periods, I can see the profound shifts they have created in how I see the world. What defines them is always a prolonged spell of discomfort and confusion — painful confusion — that ultimately produces a significant shift, both inner (who I am) and outer (what I am doing).

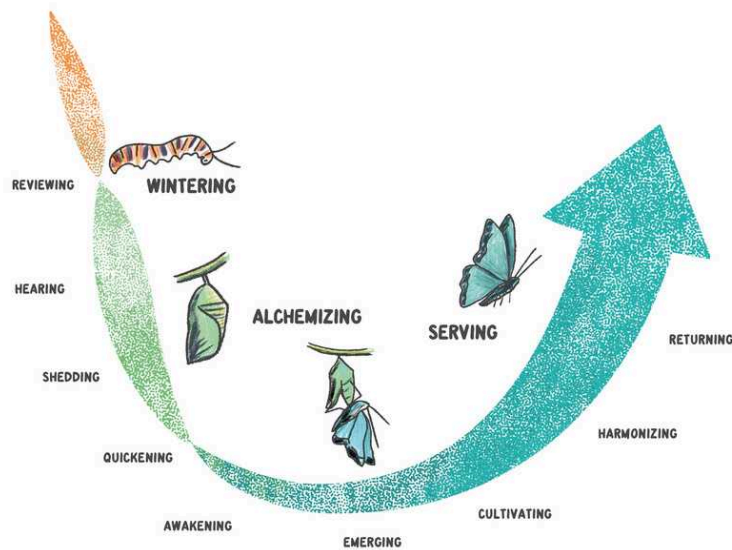
Looking back, I can see that the many transitions throughout my life were all preparing me for the biggest one of all: the mid-life transition, the death-rebirth journey, the metamorphosis of Self. It is a journey at the heart of ancient traditions, explored by philosophers, depth psychologists, deep ecologists, spiritual traditions, and many other modalities.

*"The sacrifice endured on the journey crucifies our Selves, dismembering us, down into the descent of our own shadows, wounds, constrictions, and fears. Uncomfortable tensions pull us apart, disorientating and disrupting what we thought we knew of self and world. In disintegrating the old self, the dominant ego-conscious 'I' habits, personas, protection-rackets, and thoughtforms that encapsulate the achiever as self-as-separate in turn disintegrate. It's only through this descent into our own dying that we slough off these old skins. Here, in this inner space, we form a kind of cocoon inside our psyche, which can process the disintegration-reintegration and to birth and nurture the true nature of our soul. Then, as we start to sense into the soul-scape at the center of our being, we find our way of living and leading more authentically in right relation with self-other-world—our dharma. The wisdom of the death-rebirth process reveals our soul powers, the higher faculties that aid our knowing and walking the path back into service."*

– Giles Hutchins



# The U-Journey



The journey can be depicted in the shape of a 'U', with three phases: Wintering, Alchemizing, and Serving with each phase having three stages. The nine stages are our friendly way markers on a map for those of us enduring what can often feel like a messy, confusing, twisting, and turning labyrinthine metamorphosis.

Although we have given these phases names, the journey is far from linear, it is more akin to a labyrinth. Still, having a map is useful, helping us orient to what we might expect, given how uncomfortable the unfolding can be.

It is worth noting that my ability to share my experience in the subsequent pages is only possible with the benefit of hindsight, which has brought clarity in reflection. I certainly could not have explained any of this coherently while in the midst of a stage, or just after it.

***"The real challenge of embarking on this journey is that none of what we speak of makes any sense. That is, until we are a significant way through the journey, which does precious little to convince our dominant achiever mind that embarking on such a journey is a good idea in the first place."***

***- Giles Hutchins***

# The Early Transition Periods

Before adulthood, there are many transitions a child naturally moves through, the key one being the passage into adolescence. In both our mainstream culture and my family culture, the arrival of puberty was barely acknowledged.

By 24 I had become a hardworking, resilient young adult with an impressive CV: a degree in International Business, experience across multiple disciplines, and work in Australia, the US, and Europe. Then an experience changed everything. I was on holiday with my family in South Africa, in the game parks of Kruger National Park, spending my days watching, learning from, and experiencing a fully functioning ecosystem in all its danger, wildness, beauty, and aliveness. All of a sudden I became viscerally aware that I was not part of it. What role did human beings play in the circle of life? We had unplugged ourselves from this cycle in so many ways that almost everything we did in our everyday lives, in some shape or form, destroyed this beauty. And the hardest realisation of all was that hardly anyone seemed to care, or see what I was now seeing.

This sudden awareness marked the start of an intense period of painful confusion. I left my job; the call to find answers was too strong. I couldn't pretend to be who I had been, because I felt different in every way.

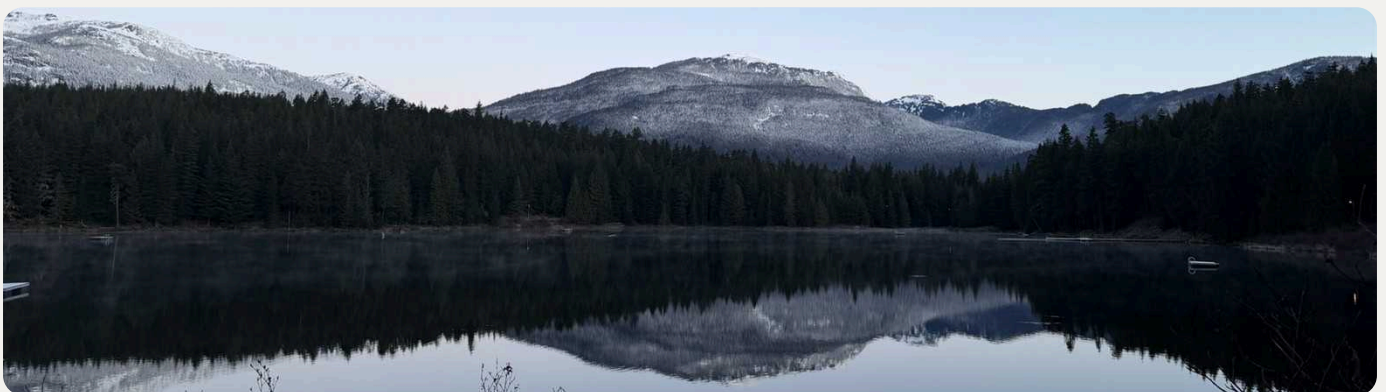
I thought I would find answers in the environmental movement, and I threw myself into everything that opened up to me, mostly voluntary roles at first, and later sustainability consulting.

I started an environmental non-profit, a social enterprise and ran our family philanthropy. I was doing too much, and had almost lost sight of why I was doing it: to reconnect to life.

My inner voice was clear, "the path you are on now is not the path you are meant to be on". The period included a divorce, single parenting, and the intense grief of losing my mum. A potent cocktail of painfully confusing emotions; fertile ground for any transition.

The key lesson of this period became an awareness of my ego, and how much it had got in the way of my ability to create real change in the world. I had got caught up in proving myself as a successful founder, trying to step out of the oversized shadow that a successful parent unintentionally casts over their children. I was fighting with my own perception of how others might see me, and in the process, limiting my ability to create the very change I so desired to see in the world.

While I made decent inroads in loosening the ego's grip on managing other people's perceptions of me, I was still wholly focused on outer doing, on trying to 'save the world'. I was tired, anxious, and addicted to work. I had no idea how to actually rest. By my late thirties, it was increasingly clear that what had got me to where I was would not get me to where I wanted to go.



# Wintering

*Reviewing > Hearing > Shedding*

## Reviewing

Without knowing it at the time, I was entering the **Reviewing** stage of the U-Journey; looking back over my life and wondering what it had all been for. Even with all the hard work, I wasn't sure I had achieved anything, other than adding to the stressed-out, overworked, and disconnected humanity I had recognised years ago and tried to 'save' us from. In the process, I had become the very thing I was trying to avoid.

Up until this point in my life, my achiever mind had always kept a plan in place. I was here to do my best to save the world and leave it better than I found it. Now I began to question where I was going. A voice deep down asked me, "How can you create a regenerative future if you're not regenerative yourself?"

I looked at my life with all I had done and achieved and, for the first time ever, allowed myself to accept that if I stopped all the doing right now, perhaps I had already done enough. This seemed radical to an obsessive do-er, but the seed of hope it offered felt revolutionary. Maybe, just maybe, there was another way.

But there was a big barrier in the way. I was now close to 40, and my work habits were so deeply ingrained, with such a stronghold over me, that I had no idea how to unravel them.

## Hearing

The deepening painful confusion moved me into the **Hearing** stage, where I realised I needed help and guidance; I couldn't begin the unravelling simply by deciding to change.

I leaned into a focused period of intentional inner work: coaching, mindfulness training, silent retreats, fasting, various bio-hacks including ice baths, energy healing, breathwork, and a plant medicine journey. I put my achiever mind to work on achieving inner change.

I became far more open to life, able to experience magic; my intuition grew stronger and my spiritual practices deepened. And yet... I was still doing and holding too much, and my ego kept telling me I couldn't put any of it down. So, rather than wait for me to decide, life began making the decisions for me, and I entered the **Shedding** stage.



### Shedding

This period was defined by so many of the things I had once felt I could never put down suddenly ceasing to feel so important. Either I chose to leave, found I was no longer needed, was told I wasn't needed, or things simply wrapped up of their own accord. I found myself with a lot of spaciousness and, rather than rushing to fill it, I moved to the mountains for the winter and started saying 'no' to almost everything.

And as I let go on the outside, my body took over some of the letting go within. I went through some weird and wonderful illnesses, as suppressed emotions, feelings, and experiences I had pushed down into my body over the years were released.

This period was also marked by intense dreaming. I have always been a dreamer in every sense of the word, daydreams and night dreams alike, but now my night dreaming turned into night terrors. My unconscious forced me to face my shadows: the deepest parts of myself, and the fears I didn't want to see. My dreams gave me no choice but to make the unconscious conscious.

And then came the water: floods, tidal waves, rising tides engulfing me and everything around me. Sometimes I held on for dear life; other times I woke suddenly, gasping for air, having lost the inner battle with the unconscious and been swept off into the depths of the ocean.

Intentional shadow work became another tool during this period: if I faced into my shadows, then my dreams could loosen their grip on me. Every heightened response and trigger became an opportunity to notice, listen, and learn.

Despite the turmoil and intensity of these inner shifts, I was enjoying my wintering, and my achiever mind had truly loosened its grip. In fact, I was rather taken with the idea that I might never return to full-time work, that introversion and rest had started to suit me just fine. I was becoming happy and comfortable in my metaphorical inner cocoon.

I felt as though I'd done a lot of the tough work, and that things should surely start to get easier now. But the move into the **Alchemizing** phase brought a new level of unfolding, and its own version of painful confusion.



# Alchemizing

*Quickening > Awakening > Emerging*

*"The darkest hour is just before dawn, just as nature can be at its most cruel at this tail end of wintertime."*

*- Giles Hutchins*

## Quickening

As I moved into the start of the Alchemizing phase and the **Quickening** stage, life felt like a constant two steps forward, one step back. The need to retreat from life was loosening, and I felt a growing energy and enthusiasm to be out in the world and learn new things. I knew I was starting to see the world differently, and that gave me confidence, but then something would trigger me, or I'd be plagued by self-doubt, and the urge to retreat back into winter would follow. At the same time, I was getting better at seeing these triggers for what they were, ego projections, and I had the tools to explore them from a less reactive place.

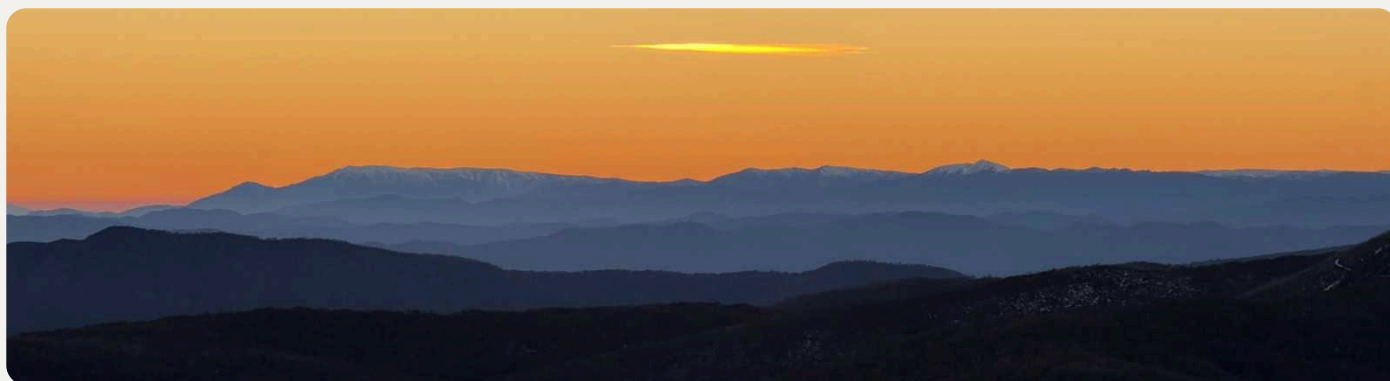
My shadow work began to feel more like a game: noticing, exploring it in the body, accepting, allowing, watching for patterns. I learnt to befriend all the inner parts of me that were doing their best to keep me 'safe'.

The things that interested me had shifted too. I no longer cared to keep up with the news and politics; I was far more drawn to reading about symbolism, dreams, depth psychology, and adult development.

Embodying emotions was something I was re-learning during this stage. From those early messages, that emotions are unhelpful and should be controlled, I had learnt to be resilient by rationalising and suppressing them. I could talk about what I was feeling while, in many ways, compartmentalising and disembodimenting the emotion, taking the processing out of my body and into my rational mind.

The major downfall of this kind of resilience is that it makes us miss the learning that is only available when we let ourselves sit in the discomfort of the unknown, the darkness of deep emotions, and grief in particular. Learning to embody emotions doesn't require wallowing or hiding from the world; it is a subtle shift towards holding the tension of the emotion with softness, care, and patience.

There was also a growing desire to spend time in nature, where new insights could emerge. I would return to the same places and these spots held space for me as fresh insight unfolded, supporting the shift into the **Awakening** stage.



### Awakening

By this stage of the journey, through all the 'wading through the marshes' of shadow work, I had peeled back many layers of ego and was feeling far more open to life. In attempting to describe the embodied feeling: my heart region feels open and permeable, and whilst this openness is incredibly beautiful, it also comes with pain and vulnerability, which has meant leaning into a new level of trust in life.

This opened me to a deeper experience of reality, where my sense of being 'me', the boundary between myself and the world, is thinner, more permeable, more whole. The beauty of the world is felt in my heart, not for what I see through my eyes, but for what I feel inside. It feels as though there could be nothing more beautiful than where I am right now. And this feeling comes out of the 'pain'.

*"Truly, it is in the darkness that one finds the light. So when we are in sorrow then this light is nearest of all to us"*

*- Meister Eckhart, mystic*

In time, my inner world, which had once felt like a competition between parts of myself, began to feel more integrated. There was less craving for some elusive balance between work and rest, doing and being, the masculine and feminine energies within me. Instead, these ways of being started to feel more in a flow between two states, rather than a fixed point to achieve.

Befriending the pain, the deep emotions, the fear, all the things I had taught myself to turn away from, began to become the very gift I had to offer others. I was learning to find my voice, and ultimately my unique way of being in service to the world, as I moved into the Emerging stage.

### Emerging

The **Emerging** stage has been about trialling and testing, finding ways of being in service through new ways of being and knowing in the world. While I feel clear about what I am here to do, how it manifests in action is still emerging, being shaped and moulded day by day.

One of the loveliest realisations of this time is that I no longer need to run away from the busy-ness of the world, to retreat to the mountains or go on holiday, in order to revive myself. I can choose to carry the stillness and awe with me, staying connected to the magic of life. My work no longer feels like a heavy 'should-do' list of responsibilities to the world. It feels like love.

It is at this point of the journey that I will hand over to Giles words to map the ground ahead in the **Serving** phase, for I am still finding my way in the light and the darkness: learning, integrating, and, most importantly, having fun.



# Serving

## *Cultivating > Harmonizing > Returning*

### **Cultivating**

This stage of the journey does feel quite different from the stages before, as we have now moved into the outer world of action as we enter the **Cultivating** stage. The depressive introspection and murky foggiess of earlier stages has lifted, there's fire in our belly, more creative impulse, more yang energy to aid our get-up-and-go.

While this can feel celebratory, it's still a time of challenge and immense learning. Bringing our unique gifts into the world is not easy, and knockbacks and rejection are painful while our skin is still thin this early out of the cocoon. We're clear about our sense of place and purpose, yet as we enter the market dynamics of the world, it's easy to be affected by the critiques and judgements of others, especially the pioneers, experts, and purists whose rigor matters but whose critique can inhibit our entrepreneurial flair. Be wary of wanting to fit in, gain recognition, and mold our soul craft around what others are doing. Learn to discern what is ego seeking to be liked within a new 'clan' and what is soul searching well beyond clans.

If we've not mined our darkness and integrated our shadows well enough at the bottom of the U, we get caught in the ego-soul tussle and risk self-criticism that undermines our value proposition. Watch out for the achiever-mind, ever-ready to usurp control, and the yang energy of the marketplace, social media, brand-building, chasing references, which can be a trap. Learn the subtlety of being 'in' the marketplace but not 'of' it.

As Lao Tzu reminds us, "Know the masculine, yet remain in the feminine." Stay connected to the yin of inner-nature, call upon Nature's Wisdom, and keep up daily energy cultivation and spiritual practice.

In practical terms, we may still be working a day job, or bringing soul craft into misaligned work, we needn't be militant about only serving the soul. Working on the margins to transform the status quo requires versatility; we can stay the course as long as the soul-path stays resolutely in focus.

So we learn the art of cultivating mini-winters during this summertime, honing soul craft alongside authenticity, boundaries, daily practice, and right relation of self-other-world. We sense abundance, stay grateful, and know when to retreat and rejuvenate, quietly watching the ego: its attachment, its reactions to criticism, the creep of scarcity mindset and comparison, the lure of shortcuts and spiritual materialism.

Our twilight zone of dreamtime, visioning, and Creative Imagination feeds the craft, and our thirst for academic learning gives way to embodied, experiential work. This inner-outer shaping, and our enthusiastic service amid the fidelity of life, brings a re-generative magic to our work.



## Harmonizing

Now we enter into the **Harmonizing** stage with much promise around and just ahead of us, a time when inner-nature and outer-nature start to find alignment and flow. It's as if the whole of the inner journey is being rewarded, as we settle into our soul craft as a way of living and leading, both inwardly and outwardly.

We feel a rightness in our relation and a profound sense of place and purpose. The strategic outer mind and the intuitive inner mind learn to work in harmony. In fact the inner and outer interpenetrate so deeply that the notion of 'inner' and 'outer' is transcended, and a quintessence flows through us. We live our purpose not through soul craft alone but through each and every experience. The sacred moment is the work, whether next to a tree at sunrise, in the midst of a keynote, holding space for a tension, or walking beside a colleague. We are sensitive receptors. The meditation is life itself.

Self and craft have become harmonized. Work-life balance has transcended into work as a way of life, we neither live to work nor work to live; we simply live, and in doing so work. Retirement is no longer a goal, as there is nothing to retire from.

Think of the shaman who lives midway between forest and village, available to both, and of the Buddhist 'middle way' through the dualities of doing-being, head-heart, masculine-feminine, self-system, human-nature.

Letting go is no longer something we do but a way of experiencing life in an ungrasping, improvisational way. There is sacredness in all we do, from washing the dishes to designing business strategy. At this stage, growth is no longer about size, reach, or impact but about growing down-and-in, connecting into the invisible realms while bridging the conventional world that is breaking down with the potentialized future emerging. We neither resist nor insist. We step back from the immediacy of events, not in complacency but in trust of right timing, seeing the alchemizing potential in everything.

Gratitude and abundance become core qualities, lightening the load of an increasingly committed way of life. Yet this is no idealistic utopia; we are still 'in it', making compost, adapting amid eddies and tripwires, innovating all the while. No perfection here, only harmonization in a world full of tension and transformation. Synchronicities abound, a correspondence of inner and outer coming together in the moment, a space for grace to enter.



### Returning

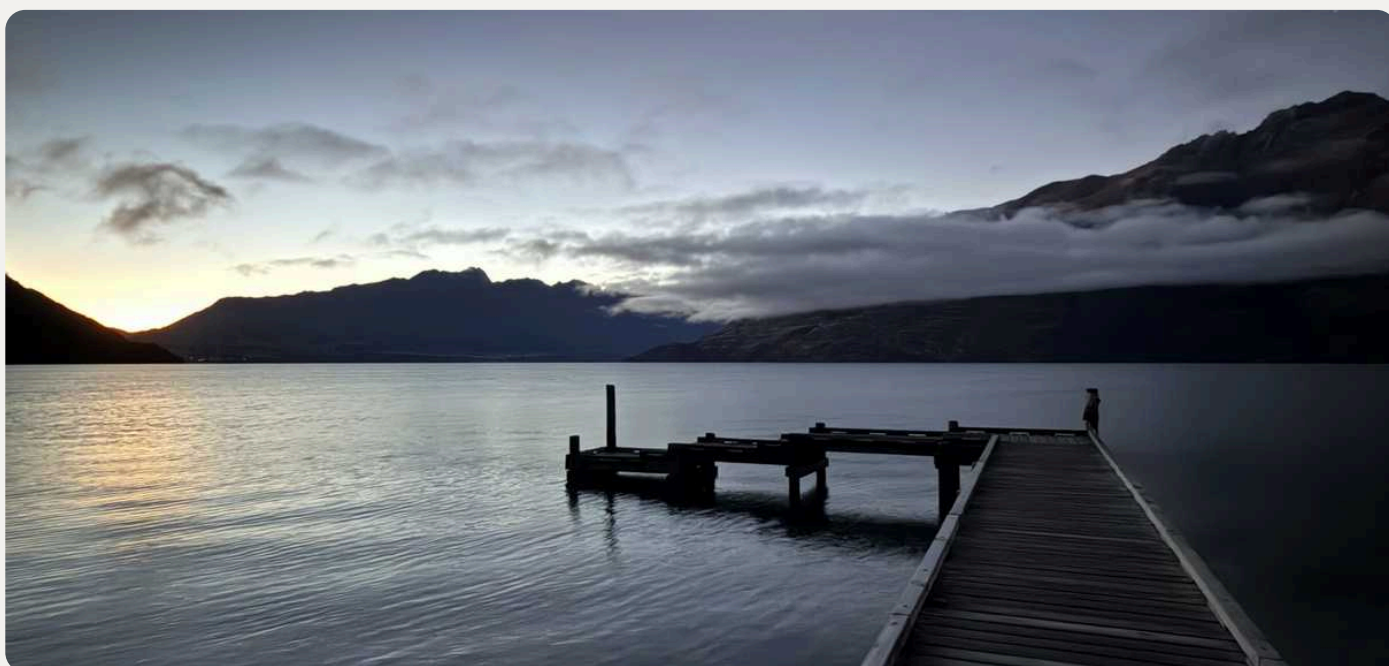
For we now turn to the final phase, the **Returning** stage: a threshold crossing, the ending of one labyrinth journey and the beginning of another, arcing back to the beginning seen with new eyes, higher up the spiral. Endings for new beginnings.

The Returning stage invites us to pause, reflect, and gather the wisdom of the journey so far. Depending on our life stage, this may prepare us for another descent through the U, another psychological death-rebirth and renewal of our soul craft, or it may begin to call us towards Elderhood. In either case, Returning asks us to review the experiences, relationships, learnings, challenges, and contributions that have shaped us. We cast our mind back over the work we have offered, the people and communities we have served, and the ways our meaning-making has expanded since leaving the achiever stage behind.

This reflective process is not passive nostalgia; it is a deep inner alchemy. It helps us release what remains unresolved, integrate the fruits of our experience, and prepare for a new form of service, whether that service is a renewed expression of our craft or a quieter, wiser, more spacious way of being in the world.

Elderhood, in this sense, is not retirement or withdrawal, but a sacred deepening. The outer intensity of striving, building, and proving begins to lessen, while the inner intensity of wisdom, presence, discernment, and service grows stronger. The soul-elder becomes a guide, steadying others through complexity, helping people hear their own soul's song-lines, and supporting organisations, communities, and systems to evolve in more life-affirming ways.

This stage is also a remembering: a return to ancient wisdom, to Nature, to Earth, to the cosmos, and to the deeper patterns of life that modern civilisation has largely forgotten. Returning therefore holds both a personal and collective purpose. It prepares us to serve not from ego or ambition, but from depth, coherence, humility, and love, helping humanity re-integrate with the living systems of which we have always been a part.



# In Summary

**Whilst change is inherent in life, our ability to embrace and learn from our transitions is a choice. If we choose to lean into the process and find the courage to stay with the painful confusion, the opportunity for growth is profound.**

Perhaps the most important of these is the mid-life transition, which offers us the chance of a complete metamorphosis of Self. It is a journey we can map to the shape of a U, moving through Wintering, Alchemizing, and Serving, mirrored in the caterpillar that spins its cocoon and emerges as a butterfly.

In the **Wintering** phase, we review where we have come from and question the assumptions that have shaped how we see the world. We hear the call to transition and begin letting go of all we thought we were, allowing the ego to shed its attachment to the roles we had defined ourselves by, and the beliefs we had held so strongly.

In the **Alchemizing** phase, the inner transformation begins, an embodied experience of disintegration and reintegration, as the energies within us shift from feeling binary towards more of a unification. It is a period of opening to life: a heart-centred opening that is both beautiful and painful.

In our new skin, we move into the **Serving** phase, a time defined by being back in the world, living our soul craft. We learn to be 'in' the market but not 'of' the market. Life itself becomes the meditation as we experience the sacred in the mundane, and continually learn to dance with change.

And just as we arrived at one transition, we will inevitably arrive at another as we ready ourselves for the return, back to the start of the U at reviewing, but this time with a far greater set of tools and readiness to experience the depth of life. As clichéd as the phrase may sound, life is indeed a journey, an adventure, if we choose to experience it this way.

Despite the painful confusion, the twists and turns, the tripwires and heartache along the path, it is the most important thing we can be doing right now. Not only for ourselves, but for the collective experience of being human on earth at this moment in time. This is the knowing I have gained from my U-journey: a deeper sense of truth than I have felt about anything else in my life.



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# About the Authors

If you would like to explore the themes explored in this Paper in more detail, then you can tune-in to the Keys for Future-Fit Leadership podcast found [here](#), and feel free to contact the authors Hayley Morris and Giles Hutchins [here](#) for further conversation.



## Giles Hutchins

Thirty years of professional advisory & leadership experience, formerly Director of Business Transformation & Head of Practice with KPMG, and Global Director of Sustainability Solutions for multinational Atos (150,000 employees across 42 countries), last 14 yrs as Executive Coach, thought leader and advisor on future-fit leadership. Author of 7 critically acclaimed leadership books and several leadership papers. His coaching work has been called 'life changing'. Find out more about his coaching [here](#). His Leading by Nature podcast can be found [here](#), which interviews a selection of his coaching clients.



## Hayley Morris

[Hayley Morris](#) is an Australian philanthropist, impact investor and social entrepreneur, with 20 years' experience across business, philanthropy, investing and systems change. She has co-founded Sustainable Table, Climate Zero, The Regenerative Leader, and farm-to-table restaurant Barragunda Dining. She leads her family's philanthropy and impact investments through the Morris Family Foundation, is a Director of her family office, The Morris Group, and is a certified leadership coach in vertical development, working with change leaders across the impact sector.



## Keys for Future-Fit Leadership Academy

Co-founded by Hayley Morris and Giles Hutchins, this leadership academy is dedicated to facilitating a developmental up-stretch toward life-affirming Future-Fitness for purpose-based leaders, philanthropists, impact investors and systems-change practitioners, see [www.kffla.co](http://www.kffla.co)