



THE INITIATED PERSON RETURNS

Why Growing Up Should Bring Us Back to Relationship, Not Away From It

Oliver Riddett | The Archetype Approach

The purpose of growing power is not to leave relationship behind. It is to return capable of carrying more within it.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Oliver Riddett is the founder of the Archetype Approach, a developmental and relational model of childhood built around twelve universal archetypal capacities and six axes of balance. Developed through practice at Children of Towan in Porthtowan, Cornwall, the approach helps parents and practitioners look beneath behaviour and respond through balance rather than correction.

There is a version of adulthood our culture rather likes.

The lone figure. Self-made. Needs nobody. Answers to nobody. Walks away from the village with excellent cheekbones and a dramatic soundtrack.

It makes a decent film poster.

It is a fairly poor model of human maturity.

Because initiation, properly understood, does not end with escape. The classic pattern of a rite of passage contains return or incorporation. The person leaves an old status, enters uncertainty, and then comes back into social life changed.

THE FORGOTTEN INITIATIONS

That final movement matters enormously.

Without return, strength can become narcissism. Independence can become disconnection. Courage can become thrill-seeking. Knowledge can become superiority.

The question at the end of every threshold should eventually be: what is this new capacity *for*?

*The purpose of growing power is not to become less related.
It is to become capable of bringing more into relationship.*

THE FORGOTTEN FINAL MOVEMENT

Modern stories often love the middle of initiation: the ordeal, the wilderness, the challenge, the moment the hero proves themselves. We are less interested in incorporation because coming home is not cinematic in the same way.

Yet van Gennep's structure does not end in liminality. Turner's work likewise reminds us that the threshold has social meaning. The person returns to a community whose recognition helps stabilise the new status.

This is important for childhood because development is never purely private. A child learns something new, then the relationship around them has to change enough to receive it.

The child who can now walk to the shop alone needs adults who genuinely allow more independence rather than constantly pretending to. The child who has learned to apologise needs a family capable of accepting repair rather than keeping the offence alive as identity. The adolescent who develops a serious moral disagreement needs adults capable of seeing conviction rather than only disobedience.

If the community cannot receive the new capacity, the person is pushed back towards the old role.

"You'll always be my baby."

"You're not old enough to have an opinion about that."

"You've always been the difficult one."

These sentences freeze development socially even when development has moved internally.

Return requires recognition.

POWER COMES HOME DIFFERENT

The Archetype Approach gives us a useful way of imagining what return looks like.

Rebel agency comes home as responsible freedom rather than permanent opposition. The person can say no, but their no is not the only proof that they exist.

Explorer courage comes home with something discovered. Curiosity returns as knowledge, story, expanded possibility or a path somebody else can now walk.

Builder capability comes home as contribution. The pleasure of competence becomes useful beyond the self.

Thinker insight returns as wiser participation rather than endless analysis from the sidelines.

Mover strength returns as action in service of something worth doing.

Energy returns as vitality that can warm a group rather than consume it.

This is the difference between acquisition and maturation. A child can acquire power. Maturation asks whether the power can re-enter relationship without losing itself or dominating everything around it.

The balancing axes become crucial here. The returning Rebel needs Helper. The returning Watcher needs Friend. The Planner needs Explorer. Imagineer needs Builder. Thinker needs Mover. Energy needs Joker.

Not because return means moderation, but because the capacity now has to live among other human realities.

INDEPENDENCE IS NOT DISCONNECTION

We often praise independence in children as though needing less were the obvious measure of maturity.

Can they dress themselves? Separate easily? Solve the problem alone? Sleep away from home? Travel independently? Manage their own work?

All useful.

But mature independence is not the inability to need.

It is the increasing freedom to enter relationship by choice rather than helpless dependence.

THE FORGOTTEN INITIATIONS

The child who can stand alone is now able to return differently. The Rebel who can genuinely say no becomes capable of a meaningful yes. The Watcher who can remain distinct can enter Friend's belonging without dissolving into the group. The young adult who can survive away from home may discover home as relationship rather than captivity.

This is a more demanding form of independence because it includes responsibility for connection.

The lone wolf fantasy is easy in comparison. Nobody can disappoint you if you need nobody. Nobody can control you if you never commit. Nobody can expose your limits if you never belong closely enough to be known.

Adult relationship asks more courage than escape.

Independence reaches maturity when it becomes freely chosen relationship.

RETURN AFTER FAILURE

Perhaps the most important return is the one that follows failure.

An initiated person is not somebody who no longer falls apart, lies, hurts people, becomes frightened or makes foolish decisions. Development does not graduate us from being human.

Maturity is increasingly visible in what happens next.

Can I come back after I was wrong? Can I tell the truth before I know whether I will be forgiven? Can I tolerate the wound to my self-image long enough to repair what I actually did? Can I receive consequence without turning consequence into proof that I am unloved?

This capacity begins in childhood every time an adult communicates two truths together: what you did matters, and you still belong here.

If consequence always threatens belonging, children become experts in concealment. If belonging always erases consequence, responsibility does not develop. The relationship has to be strong enough to hold both.

THE FORGOTTEN INITIATIONS

A child who breaks another child's construction in anger can be asked to face the impact and help rebuild without being called destructive. A child who lies can discover that truth changes what happens next without being turned into "a liar."

The return is the repair.

SERVICE: THE OLD WORD WE HAVE MADE SMALL

The idea of service can sound pious or submissive, especially where children have historically been taught obedience in the name of serving adults. That is not what I mean.

Service is what power becomes when it realises other people are real.

The strong child helps move the heavy object. The socially confident child notices the newcomer. The skilled builder helps repair the broken den. The older child who knows the setting teaches the younger one where things go. The person with more capacity takes a little more responsibility because they can.

This should never become exploitation of competent children. The Helper can become trapped in usefulness just as any archetype can become one-sided. Children are not free labour for adults who enjoy calling chores "leadership."

But meaningful contribution matters. Human beings generally want to know that their growing capacity has somewhere to go.

Initiation without contribution risks becoming self-improvement theatre.

What can you now carry *for the life around you* that you could not carry before?

THE COMMUNITY ALSO HAS TO CHANGE

There is a hidden responsibility in every initiation: the community must make space for the transformed person.

Adults often want children to become more responsible while keeping all meaningful control. We ask for initiative, then correct the child the moment their solution differs from ours. We celebrate confidence until confidence turns towards adult authority. We praise independence, then experience distance as rejection.

Return therefore requires adult development too.

THE FORGOTTEN INITIATIONS

Can I relate to this child as they are now rather than as the version of them I have become used to managing?

Parents know this ache intimately. The child's growth is a series of small losses. The hand is pulled away crossing a road. The bedroom door closes. The friend becomes the first person told. The young person begins making choices that reveal a worldview not entirely borrowed from home.

Healthy authority must slowly survive becoming less central.

That is part of its success.

THE ADULTS CHILDREN ARE BEING INITIATED INTO

There is one final uncomfortable question.

What are children being initiated *into*?

We can create meaningful thresholds, offer responsibility, talk beautifully about courage and build sophisticated developmental frameworks. Children are still watching the adults who supposedly inhabit the destination.

Do we use power responsibly? Can we apologise? Can we disagree without contempt? Can we hold authority without enjoying humiliation? Can we tolerate uncertainty? Can we work, love, play, grieve and contribute? Can we carry difficulty without handing it down as shame?

A culture cannot initiate children into an adulthood it does not respect enough to embody.

This is why "role model" is finally too small a phrase. Children are not simply copying isolated behaviours. They are borrowing an image of what adulthood *is*.

If adulthood appears exhausted, emotionally defended, addicted to status, frightened of difference and contemptuous of dependence, why exactly should a child be eager to cross towards it?

The most powerful initiation may begin with adults making adulthood worth arriving at.

RETURN

The child climbs the wall.

THE FORGOTTEN INITIATIONS

Starts school.

Loses the race.

Learns the tool.

Takes the responsibility.

Crosses the small wilderness.

And then comes back.

Not finished. Not hardened. Not suddenly independent of everybody who loves them.

Just carrying a little more reality than before.

More able to contribute. More able to choose. More able to protect. More able to tell the truth. More able to love without disappearing.

Perhaps this is the shape we have been missing when we talk about growing up.

Not a steady movement away from dependence towards lonely self-sufficiency.

A spiral of departure and return, each crossing asking us to carry a little more of ourselves back into the human circle.

Children do not first learn adulthood from our explanations of it.

They learn it from the way we stand beside them at the threshold — and from the kind of people waiting when they return.

SOURCES AND FURTHER READING

van Gennep, Arnold. *The Rites of Passage*. University of Chicago Press.

Turner, Victor. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*.

World Health Organization, UNICEF and World Bank Group. *Nurturing Care for Early Childhood Development*.

The Archetype Approach. *Core Framework: Twelve Archetypes and Six Axes*.

Jung, C. G. *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*. *Collected Works*, Volume 7.