



The Lifecycle of the Amoeba and other Universal Archetypes

By Ema Melanaphy



Ema is a geeky vegan multi-potentialite Holistic practitioner. Her passions include empowering and helping people live more balanced, integrated lives. A late-comer to her practice, Ema's past work includes: Music teacher, Banking officer, City Solicitor's PA at Manchester Council, Area Base Controller at the Environment Agency, and Senior Project Manager! A Reiki Master Teacher, accredited Animal Reiki therapist, and Meditation teacher, Ema is a second year student at Manchester Shiatsu College (with an extra year during lockdown!). In her spare time, Ema loves playing D&D, reading, yoga, walking, and reading the Tarot – ably assisted by her fur-baby sidekick, Tigger.

In developing his Zen Shiatsu theory, Masunaga observed that the 'Lifecycle of the Amoeba' could be understood as expressing different movements and qualities of Ki, at the most basic and universal level.

The model follows the sequence and progression of the meridian pairs according to the Chinese Clock. Masunaga illustrates the functions and movements of Ki in each of these pairs, through each successive phase of the Amoeba's development.

This model describes the different motivational forces behind human behaviours and states, on physical and emotional levels, pared back to as simple (and therefore as universally applicable) an example as possible.

Lifecycle of the Amoeba

Stage 1: Lung and Large Intestine

The Amoeba comes into being as an individual entity, distinct from its surrounding environment. It 'makes a border' between itself and the outside world. This border is semi-permeable.

Stage 2: Stomach & Spleen

The Amoeba sees food and feels hungry. It moves towards the food and takes the food, bringing it within its own physical borders and satisfying its needs.

Stage 3: Heart & Small Intestine

The Amoeba digests and absorbs the food it has taken in – transforming and assimilating it so that it becomes part of the Amoeba.

Stage 4: Bladder & Kidney

The Amoeba sees danger, turns its back on it, and flees.

Stage 5: Heart Protector & Triple Heater

The Amoeba protects itself from emotional threats (social), bringing its arms together around its heart space, and bowing its head over at the top, to hide its soft, vulnerable heart from being hurt by others around it.

Stage 6: Gall Bladder & Liver

Finally, the Amoeba looks around, decides what its direction in life will be, and moves forward on that basis.

Having studied and worked with this model in my Shiatsu studies, what struck me in particular was that the qualities described by each of the phases of development of Masunaga's Amoeba can be applied to a wide array of real life situations and universal aspects of the human experience. This is one of the reasons why it can be such an effective tool with which to engage, mentally and energetically, whilst giving Shiatsu. It can enable

us to distil, and work with, the applicable archetypes, from the often complex, contradictory and layered experiences and energetic patterns of our real-life human clients.

Part of the strength of this model is that it is universally applicable. The archetype of the Amoeba is (in Masunaga's narrative) literally the most basic level of conscious existence possible. As such, the Lifecycle model is broad and high-level enough to easily be applied to the specifics of particular individuals' circumstances. Its simplicity makes it eminently flexible - meaning that it can be adapted to reflect all the complex, non-linear and illogical nature of humanity, and the world we live in.

When we engage with a Shiatsu receiver through the lens of Masunaga's model, we have the added benefit of more easily keeping our own energetic and mental borders healthy during the treatment. Engaging the mind with the archetypal Ki patterns, qualities and motivations as embodied by the Amoeba can lend a different, wider-lens perspective to our view of the receiver's situation or condition and this can help us bring a fresh perspective – and Ki - to the futon. It can also help prevent our focus from becoming caught up in the receiver's narrative of their specific experience. We can still empathise, witness, connect and 'hear' our receiver's experience, but with enough separateness more easily to keep hold of our own experience in the moment. Using this archetypal cycle can help make our Shiatsu more effective, 'cleaner' and more powerful.



Masunaga's Lifecycle stages also empower us, as practitioners, to find an appropriate energetic/healing composite to apply to our receiver's prevailing energetic imbalance.

Working with our own empathetic and intuitive understanding we can model our energy in a way that is compatible with - but, crucially, separate from - the client's energetic pattern, enabling the treatment to be more effective for their healing journey.

Other Models - The Tarot

The more I experienced how the Lifecycle applies to the general human experience, the more I started to see it within the context of other models which also draw on a set of universal human archetypes - such as the Tarot. The Tarot deck has been used for cartomancy but also applied to self-exploration/development and psychology.

Notably, Carl Jung expounded some of his thoughts on Tarot during a seminar on active imagination, which he gave in 1933. He is recorded as having said.

'...man always felt the need of finding an access through the unconscious to the meaning of an actual condition, because there is a sort of correspondence or a likeness between the prevailing condition and the condition of the collective unconscious.'²

Having worked with both Masunaga's model and the Rider-Waite-Smith (RWS) Tarot deck, I find parallel journeys and marked similarities between the two.

The Fool's journey of the Major Arcana of the RWS shows the archetypal progression of a naïve individual - with no wisdom and no material possessions - entering and moving through the world of human experience to attain 'The World'.



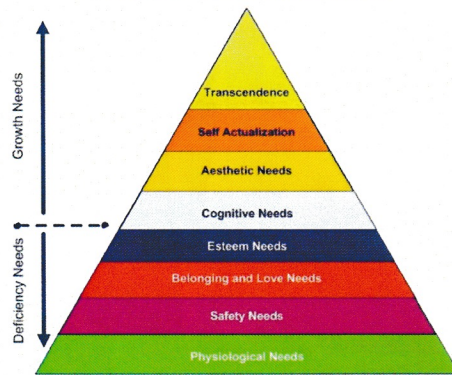
Like Masunaga's Amoeba, the Fool moves through different stages of personal development and growth as they travel out into the world. They begin the journey as a childlike character, oblivious to danger (usually shown stepping off a cliff's edge) and with no social status or connections with others – but in harmony with nature (usually illustrated by a dog running alongside and looking adoringly up at them). This card is the first of the Major Arcana, but the Card's number is 0 – the Fool is at the point just before they begin their evolution.

This could be likened to the moment before the Amoeba forms its borders – an integrated part of the world around them, and on the cusp of beginning their journey of growth and development as a separate entity.

The Fool goes on to meet characters such as the Magician (the force of will, and strongly representing the individual, in some ways similar to the Lung and Large Intestine), then the Mother Earth-like Empress character (maternal, representing physical nourishment, abundance and sustenance – not dissimilar to the Stomach/Spleen). The Fool encounters and learns about the structures and rules of society (from the Emperor and Hierophant), before moving on, seeking partnership and love (Fire Element) - as well as finding their place in the world.

Like the Fool, Masunaga's Amoeba shows a clear progression in the level and nature of the needs being described – from the most basic needs of physical survival, right

MASLOW'S MOTIVATION MODEL



through the range to create the Whole Self. The higher levels are understood (in the case of this story) as being impossible to address until the more basic needs are met.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

So from needs relating to the very existence of the individual through to those which relate to thriving and fulfilment, Masunaga's model then reminded me strongly of Maslow's 'Hierarchy of Needs' theory, as shown above right:³

Immediate parallels can be drawn between Masunaga's Lifecycle and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. This begins at the base of the triangle with Physiological needs (taking on food to survive), Safety needs (fleeing from danger), Belonging and Love needs (emotional protection). It then proceeds along similar lines, from 'surviving' towards 'thriving' – as seen in the Liver/ Gallbladder pairing - where the Amoeba decides what their direction will be in life – planning, personal goals and development - all of which could be said to correspond to the 'Growth Needs' of Maslow's chart.

However, whilst there are some surface similarities between these models, looking

more deeply at the two brought me to the conclusion that Maslow's Hierarchy is rather limited and less universally applicable than Masunaga's model. The concept that Maslow illustrates through his Hierarchy is very simplistic, and does not account for, or acknowledge, the complex, multi-layered and non-linear nature of human beings and their journeys through life.

In reality people may be at more than one stage at a time, and oftentimes might skip a stage. In effect Maslow gives a very generalised, narrow view of archetypal needs and the human states which relate to them, and only allows for a person being in one state at a time – moving up or down, and (when moving down) effectively writing off the personal development and progress they have made up until that point. For me, Maslow isn't describing human existence at all - which could be why it is popularly used as a management tool in western society today! But, as noted above, it does illustrate the broad sweep and characteristics of 'deficiency' and 'growth' needs, also illustrated by Masunaga's Lifecycle, so Maslow must have grasped this concept on some level.

The Menstrual Wheel

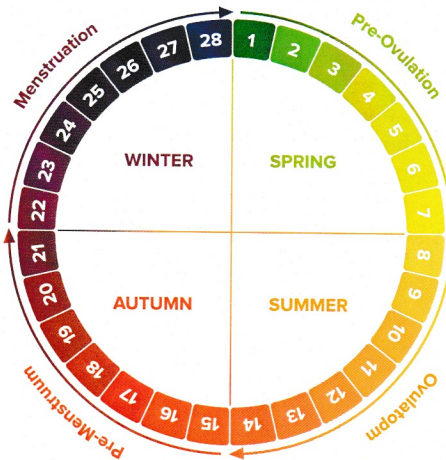
Masunaga's archetypal journey can, as we have seen, be applied to many aspects of human existence, and the different stages and energetic flows which emerge. The Lifecycle of the Amoeba can also be related to the cyclical 'Menstrual Wheel' of the month, the energetic patterns and characteristics of each of the phases, and the different states each of them brings.

Inner Winter: Water Element. Menstruation. Deep rest, allowing the learnings and activities of the last cycle to be integrated, choosing what to bring forward with us into the next cycle, and mourning the passing of what we're letting go of. Hibernation – avoiding/minimising social interaction, to care for ourselves and give ourselves what we need (running away from danger – hibernation, safety, cosiness, trusting that we'll come through safely into the next phase).

Inner Spring: Wood Element. First tender shoots of growth. Pre-ovulation phase. Fruitfulness – new ideas, inspiration, social vulnerability, but energy starting to expand outwards - starting to build towards Summer. Clearly seeing our direction in life and how to take that forward – planning.

Inner Summer: Fire Element. Ovulation. The energetic peak. Out in the world, leadership, direction, physicality, power and relationships with others. In the pinnacle of the natural 'flow state', in harmony with nature and the world. Having all the energy in the world for people and projects. Highly social. Bringing projects and ideas to fruition. It can also be a good idea to embed qualities of the Earth element at the apex of this time, to avoid burn-out and to ensure we can assimilate and take forward the personal growth aspects of the fruits of our labours, as well as our personal resilience, into the Autumn and Winter phases.

Inner Autumn: Metal Element. Beginning the contracting phase of the cycle. Reflection, learning



lessons of the year, to bring forward with us into the next cycle of our evolution. Inner critic likely to come to the fore – a need to consciously balance this by including reflection on successes. Preparing for inner winter. Noticing the ebbing of energy. A tendency towards solo activities.

We live in a highly Yang, 'always-on' culture, with a strong tendency towards ideas and theoretical concepts and with less emphasis on, or even allowance for, the need for embodiment, rest and Yin qualities to rebalance the

CPD Questions:

- 1) Have you worked with universal archetypes like this, in your work, or personally? If so, how applicable and/or limiting was it? And what were the outcomes for you / anyone else concerned?
- 2) What cycles describing the evolution of the individual resonate most for you, and why do you think that is?

strong Yang influences. In most people's working lives, a 24-hour cycle is applied to everyone (based on the energetics of the standard 'male' cycle of 24-hours, as opposed to the menstrual cycle of 28 days) regardless of their natural energetic patterns and needs. Engaging with the 4 phases of the Menstrual Wheel - and the wisdom and richness it can bring - can help menstruators accept and own their lived experience. Each cycle is an opportunity to bring learnings from the last cycle forward into the new cycle, to work in harmony and with wisdom through the growing peaks and falling energy patterns and qualities, to choose what to leave behind and what to bring forward into the next cycle.

Unlike the previously explored models though, the Menstrual Wheel enables cyclic evolution, rather than incremental evolution through each phase - as was the case in the earlier models. Each new cycle is the next iteration of the individual's personal development, as they bring the learning and growth from the last phase, and all previous phases cumulatively, whilst receiving new learning, new experiences and growth into the current cycle.

Whilst this model applies to around 50% of humans on the planet, interestingly the stigma around the menstrual cycle is still so prevalent that this model and the understanding it can bring, is not standardly shared with, or even in the awareness of, most menstruators (past, present and future). It is highly relevant, can help improve people's quality of life, encourages self-acceptance and empowerment - surely that should be a good thing? The ridiculous, outdated stigma also





makes it feel uncomfortable, awkward and even unacceptable for menstruators to share this knowledge (or even raise the subject of how menstruators experience the world from their own energetic perspective) with non-menstruators. There is a perception that it's 'too much information' – something that should be hidden, something shameful, or at best irrelevant to non-menstruators.

But nothing could be further from the truth. The nature of our experience is part of who we are, and how we engage with the world. Promoting understanding and acceptance of this to everyone, regardless of gender or physiology, can bring us to a place of deeper understanding and acceptance of self and others. Understanding, integrating and working with these phases can enable menstruators to work in harmony

with them, play to the different strengths that each phase brings and find more energy, fulfilment, success and harmony in life than is often the case when they are dictated to by a highly Yang, male-oriented 24-hour cycle. And non-menstruators can use the archetype as well – slowing down and engaging with each phase of energetics and qualities in turn can bring greater self-understanding, greater empathy and wisdom. Resting deeply and regularly tuning into our energy will surely have a beneficial effect on both individuals and society.

In Conclusion

Archetypal models can help us to learn, grow and heal ourselves, as well as each other. Each model offers a slightly different perspective through which we can learn. Engaging with and exploring these models can enhance our understanding, our ability to develop and grow, our self-awareness and awareness of others, and our ability to self-heal and to heal others. It's a way of bringing in the wisdom of the ages and applying it to our specific circumstances today.

Maybe these age-old understandings can help us avoid repeating the same mistakes and create a better world?

References

- 1 <http://www.learnarot.com/journey.htm>
- 2 <https://marykgreer.com/2008/03/31/carl-jung-and-tarot/>
- 3 Image taken from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maslow%27s_hierarchy_of_needs

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