Victor W. Turner's article, "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage", is well known. The article is primarily an analysis of symbols. Turner presents a brilliant model for the symbolic structure of a period in ritual which has hitherto been considered to be insignificant and rather confused. He lays stress on the inner meaning of the rituals, and knits together ritual, myth and society into a cohesive structure. This type of theory, which opens perspectives on the structure of symbols in different areas of culture, is basically useful in the study of the history of religions. Because of difficulties in finding an acceptable external point of reference within this field, it is natural to concentrate upon the internal logic of a given religious system: not, in the structuralistic way, to determine the external relationships between the various factors, i.e. their "grammatical" structure, but to discern the internal meaning of the different factors and their combined system of meanings. The result could then be correlated with sociological, psychological or historical perspectives.

In religion, the consciousness of the believer is expressed through myths, and the original experience is locked therein. The problem for the researcher is to reconstruct their meaning and examine their intention. This may be done by means of a theoretical model which fits their symbolic structure and makes it intelligible. Turner's theory about the liminal period in the rites of passage offers that sort of model. It interprets the religious facts and correlates them with social realities. The theory has been fruitful in ritual-analysis. In this article, his observations concerning the liminal phase will primarily be applied to an analysis of myths.

In general, all rites of passage are characterized by three phases: separation, limen (or margin) and aggregation. According to Turner:
Turner characterizes the liminal phase as having a lack of structure and as the initiand being "betwixt and between". It is the peculiar character of this phase which makes the transition and transformation possible. Liminality is basically characterized by being without structure, but is the source and seedbed of positive structural assertions. The lack of structure is combined with a richness of symbols. The symbolism is often modelled on human biological processes, seen as equivalent to structural and cultural processes and to processes which take place within man. Aspects of human physiology are used as models for social, cosmic and religious ideas, and the human body is a symbol of different levels of existence. The "passenger" is viewed as structurally "invisible"—he is "at once no longer classified and not yet classified". This paradoxical situation is often expressed by symbolism connected with death and decomposition on the one hand, and with embryos and birth on the other. The sex distinctions are blurred, and the liminal persons are treated as neither male nor female or as androgynous. The cultural and social bonds no longer exist. The same symbolism is used to connect antithetical processes, for example, symbols related to both birth and death.

The liminal persons are often secluded from the structured society. They have nothing, "no status, property, insignia, secular clothing, rank, kinship position, nothing to demarcate them structurally from their fellows". The social structure of the liminal phase is very simple: the instructors have complete authority over the neophytes, who are totally submissive to the instructors, and there is complete equality among the neophytes (communitas).

The liminal period is the period when what Turner calls gnosis is achieved. Although the change of being takes place in the liminal phase, it is not activated until after the aggregation into the higher state. Gnosis is communicated through myths, exhibitions of sacred articles and through actions. Instructions contain the main outlines of cosmogony, theogony and anthropogony, and frequently the