

# *Thrive*

## Creating a Thriving Spiritual Life Week Eight

### Strength and Resiliency

This week we'll take on another creative block: time. We'll explore the ways in which we've used our perception of time to prevent us from taking creative risks. We will excavate the early conditioning that may have encouraged us to settle for far less than we creatively desire. And we'll explore practical and immediate changes we can make in our current life.

#### **Survival**

One of the difficult tasks we all must face, is the losses we face along the way of finding and living into our creative soul. Loss of hope, of creative dreams, of financial support, of belief in ourselves. It's a matter of survival at times. These losses are not the end of the world, but they feel like it. In order to move through and beyond these losses we must acknowledge them and share them. Creative losses are seldom openly acknowledged and mourned, so they become scar tissue that blocks our creativity and its growth. Deemed too painful, silly, humiliating to share, and so to heal, they become, instead, secret losses.

If the expressions of our creativity are our soul-children, the loss of those creative dreams become our miscarriages. All of us suffer when the book doesn't sell, the new community didn't come together as hoped, or the business idea faltered and failed. It's helpful to remember that our creative soul is child-like. What we can handle intellectually far outweighs what we can handle emotionally. We must acknowledge and grieve our losses.

Community of ONE: an alternative worshiping community, based in meditation, chants, rooted in a deep sense of connection with rather than praise of God, silence, small group authentic sharing. It worked well for a while, but never caught on, never reached that critical mass. I finally let it go, and I tried to just ignore it or buck-up and say, "Time to move on." But the unmourned disappointment became a barrier that separated me from future dreams. I was stuck. I had to mourn its loss before I could move on.

#### **The Managerial and Ivory Power**

But some of the most damaging forms of creative loss come through inauthentic criticism. Truthful, authentic, criticism seldom causes damage, because on some level the soul recognizes it as truth. We can use truth about ourselves and our dreams. "Ah-hah, yes! I can see that. I can change that." But the criticism that contains no kernel of truth yet has a damning plausibility or an unassailable blanket judgment that cannot be rationally refuted, is very damaging to our creative souls. A manager that says he was mistaken to see real promise in us, or a teacher making the blanket statement that we lack promise in our field. Personal in nature, nebulous as to specifics, this kind of criticism is like sexual harassment – a sullyng yet hard to quantify experience, resulting in shame; that it is foolish to even try.

It's not a surprise that those who once were living into their creative souls, find themselves promoted to managerial positions without the necessary creative administrative skills. Now removed from hands-on creating in their area of creativity, frustrated by their inability to create, and threatened by the creativity of their underlings, they over-control and undercut their charges best endeavors, seeking to vicariously fulfill or justify their own position on the sidelines.

Creativity cannot be quantified in strictly intellectual and managerial terms. By it's very nature, creativity eschews such containment, restriction. Since the intellectual life tends to deconstruct, take apart, and the business/managerial life tends to restrict and control, what is often lacking is the corporate encouragement towards and appreciation of true creativity.

In the world of work or academia, many creative souls languish, shamed by their supposed lack of talent or grandiose dreams. They settle for shadow lives, getting close to creativity, but not actually letting their creativity flourish. In order to recover our sense of hope and the courage to create, we must acknowledge and mourn the scars that are blocking us. It is a painstaking, but necessary rite of passage.

Ted sent a first novel to a literary agent. "This novel is half good and half bad. That's the worst kind. I can't tell you how to fix it. I suggest pitching it out." Didn't write for seven years. Julia, read it. Told him, "Please try to write again. You can do it. I know you can do it." Twelve years with Morning Pages, Ted has three novels and two movies. Ted had to re-feel and mourn the wounding he had endured. He had to make peace with the lost years. A page at a time, a day at a time, he slowly built his strength.

But no inventory of our creative injuries and losses is complete without acknowledging those wounds that are self-inflicted. Many times, as creative souls, we are offered a chance that we balk at, sabotaged by our own fear, our low self-worth, or simply our other agendas. These are creative U-turns.

### **Gain Disguised as Loss**

Creativity is the act of structured time, a structuring of perspective. Every loss is a potential gain; every end is a beginning. It's all in how it's framed. We know this intellectually but in the midst of loss, we focus, understandably, on what was lost, and if we do think towards the future, we tend to see is as impending pain. "Gain disguised as loss" is a potent creative soul tool. To use it we must simply, brutally, ask: "How can this loss serve me? Where does it point my work, my creativity, my life?" The answers will surprise and liberate us. The trick is to metabolize pain as energy. The key to doing that is to know, to trust, and to act as if a silver lining exists if we are only willing to look at the work differently or to walk through a different door, one that we may have balked at previously.

Film director John Cassavetes once told a young director, "In order to catch the ball, you have to *want* to catch the ball." Julia Cameron interprets those words this way: "Stop complaining about the lousy curves you get thrown and stretch, reach for what you *really* want." She repeatedly sent original scripts to studios that were bought but never made. Finally she began to look for the other door, the one she had refused to walk through. She decided to become an independent filmmaker, and her first film won foreign distribution and fine reviews abroad. She puts it this way: *I asked "How" instead of "Why me?"... Whenever I*

*am willing to ask, "What is necessary next?" I have moved ahead. Whenever I have taken no for a final answer I have stalled and gotten stuck. I have learned that the key to career resiliency is self-empowerment and choice."*

On the basement floor of Hodge Hall, seen from the spiral staircase that circles upwards three floors, is a circular symbol with these Latin words: *Non illegitimi te carborundum*. Don't let the bastards get you down. Creative souls who take this to heart survive and often prevail. The key is action. Pain, loss, that is not used profitably quickly solidifies into a leaden heart, which makes any action difficult. When faced with a loss, immediately take one small action to support your creative soul. That action says, "I acknowledge you and your pain. I promise a future worth having." Like a small child, our creative soul needs some love. Ouch. That hurt. Here's something to make it feel better, a promise for better days.

### **Age and Time: Product and Process**

Question: Do know how old I'll be by the time I learn to play the piano?

Answer: The same age you will be if you don't.

"I'm too old for that" ranks with the "I don't have money for it" as a Great Block Lie we use to prevent further exploration. "I'm too old" is something we tell ourselves to save ourselves from the emotional cost of the ego deflation involved in being a beginner. "I'm too old" is an evasive tactic. It is always used to avoid facing fear. Then there's the flip-side tactic. "I'll let myself try it when I'm retired." When I'm old and dotty I might be crazy enough to try it. When I was young and foolish I might've tried it. Either way, being crazy is a prerequisite to creative exploration. Trying something like that (whatever it is) at my age (whatever it is) would look like nuts.

But creativity occurs in the moment, and in the moment we are timeless. We discover, in our creative endeavors, "I felt like a kid." Children are not self-conscious yet, they don't have a self yet to be conscious of. And once we are in the flow of our particular creativity, neither are we. As blocked creatives, we like to pretend that a year or even several years is a long time. Our ego plays this trick to keep us from getting started. "It's such a long way" we tell ourselves. Maybe, but each day is just one more day with some motion in it, and that motion toward a goal is very enjoyable.

Creative avoidance is the denial of process. We focus on having learned a skill or having made a finished product whether art or work. This attention to the final form ignores the fact that creativity lies not in the done but in the doing. Focused on process, our creative life retains a sense of adventure. Focused on product, the same creative life can feel foolish or barren. Our culture focuses on finished products – this is a creative block for us. We deny our curiosities, when what we long for is to start something, get into the process, dive into the creative process. Are we humble enough to start something despite our ego's reservations about looking stupid? The grace to be a beginner is always the best prayer for a creative soul. Beginner's humility and openness lead to exploration. Exploration leads to accomplishment, new discoveries, breakthroughs. All of it begins at the beginning with that first scary step.

### **Filling the Form**

Simple. Take the next small step, the next right thing. There is always one action we can take for our creative soul daily. This daily-action commitment fills the form. We don't have to change our whole life first. "I have to quit my job. I have to leave this relationship." Blocked

creatives like to think they are looking at changing their whole life in one fell swoop. This form of grandiosity is very often its own undoing. By setting the bar too high and making the price tag too steep, we set defeat in motion. Fantasizing about pursuing our creativity full time, we fail to pursue it part-time or at all. No. It's the small, daily actions, that create momentum, that change our lives, and we won't even notice until our life is changed.

Creativity requires activity, and this is not good news to most of us. It makes us responsible, and we tend to hate that. You mean I have to *do* something in order to feel better? Yes. And most of us hate to *do* something when we can obsess about something else instead. The temptation here is to wonder about the odds of us living into our creative soul. And that leads to "What's the use?" instead of "What's next?" We use the odds to procrastinate about doing what comes next. This is our addiction to anxiety in lieu of action. Most of us have an active addiction to anxiety. We prefer the low-grade pain and occasional heart-stopping panic attack to the drudgery of small and simple steps in the right direction. Filling the form means that we must work with what we have rather than languish in complaints over what we have not. Work begets work. Small actions lead us to the larger movements in our creative lives. Make changes, small changes, right where we are. Fill this form with creative care until it overflows into a newer, larger form – organically.

Flying in a SST from Paris to the United States, I was sitting close to the front of the plane, and I kept hearing what sounded like mechanical murmurings every few seconds. Was something wrong? I asked one of the flight attendants, and she said, "Would you like to see it close up?" "Yes!" She and I walked to the cabin door. She pressed a button, the door opened, and the co-pilot said, "Yes?" I asked about the noises. He said it was two computers talking to each other to keep the plane on course. Small, incremental changes, guided this huge fast plane to its destination.

### **Early Patterning: An Exercise**

Many of our present day losses are connected to our earlier conditioning. Children may be told they can't do anything or, equally damaging, be told they should be able to do anything with ease. Either of these messages blocks the recipient. The following questions are aimed at helping you retrieve and decipher your own conditioning. Write about *whatever* they trigger for you.

1. As a kid, my dad/mom thought my art/creative expression was\_\_\_\_\_. That made me feel\_\_\_\_\_.
2. I remember one time when he/she\_\_\_\_\_.
3. I felt very \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ about that. I never forgot it.
4. As a kid, my mother/father taught me that my daydreaming was\_\_\_\_\_.
5. I remember she'd/he'd tell me to snap out of it by reminding me\_\_\_\_\_.
6. The person I remember who believed in me was\_\_\_\_\_.
7. I remember one time when\_\_\_\_\_.

8. I felt \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ about that. I never forgot it.
9. The thing that ruined my chance to be \_\_\_\_\_ was \_\_\_\_\_.
10. The negative lesson I got from that, which wasn't logical but I still believe, is that I can't \_\_\_\_\_ and be an \_\_\_\_\_.
1. When I was little, I learned that \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ were big sins that I particularly had to watch out for.
2. I grew up thinking artists and creatives were \_\_\_\_\_ people.
3. The teacher who shipwrecked my confidence was \_\_\_\_\_.
4. I was told \_\_\_\_\_.
5. I believed this teacher because \_\_\_\_\_.
6. The mentor who gave me a good role model was \_\_\_\_\_.
7. When people say I have talent I think they want to \_\_\_\_\_.
8. The thing is, I am suspicious that \_\_\_\_\_.
9. I just can't believe that \_\_\_\_\_.
10. If I believe I am really talented, then I am mad as hell at \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

### **Affirmations:**

The following affirmations affirm your right to the practice of your creativity. Select five affirmations and work with them this week:

*I am a talented person.*  
*I have a right to be a creative soul.*  
*Creativity is a blessing I accept.*  
*My creativity blesses others.*  
*My creativity is appreciated.*  
*I now treat myself and my creativity more gently.*  
*I now treat myself and my creativity more generously.*  
*I now share my creativity more openly.*  
*I now accept hope.*  
*I now act affirmatively.*  
*I now accept creative soul recovery.*  
*I now allow myself to heal.*  
*I now accept God's help unfolding my life.*  
*I now believe Source loves creative souls.*

### **Weekly Tasks:**

1. Goal Search: You may find the following exercise difficult. Allow yourself to do it anyway. If multiple dreams occur to you, do the exercise for each one of them. The simple act of imagining a dream in concrete detail helps us to bring it into reality. Think of your goal search as a preliminary architect's drawing for the life you would wish to have.
  - a. Name your dream. Write it down. "In a perfect world, I would secretly love to be a \_\_\_\_\_."
  - b. Name one concrete goal that signals to you its accomplishment. On your emotional compass, this goal signifies true north.
  - c. In a perfect world, where would you like to be in five years in relation to your dream and true north?
  - d. In the world we inhabit right now, what action can you take, this year, to move you closer?
  - e. What action can you take this month? This week? This day? Right now?
  - f. List your dream (for example, to start a non-profit to help feed the needy). List its true north (respect, compassion and justice for others). Select a role model (Mother Teresa, Henri Nouwen). Make an action plan. Five years. Three years. One year. One month. One week. Now. Choose an action.
2. New Childhood: What might you have been if you'd had a perfect nurturing? What a page of this fantasy childhood. What were you given? Can you re-parent yourself in that direction now?
3. Style Search: List twenty things you like to do. (Perhaps the same twenty you listed before, perhaps not.) Answer these questions for each of item. Does it cost money or is it free? Expensive or cheap? Alone or with somebody? Job related? Physical risk? Fast-paced or slow? Mind, body, or spiritual?
4. Ideal Day: Plan a perfect day in your life as it is now constituted, using the information from above.
5. Ideal Ideal Day: Plan a perfect day in your life as you *wish* it were constituted. There are no restrictions. Allow yourself to be and to have whatever your heart desires. Your ideal environment, job, home, circle of friends, intimate relationship, stature in your creative area – your wildest dreams.
6. Choose one festive aspect from your ideal day. Allow yourself to live it. You may not be able to move to Rome yet, but even in a still-grungy apartment you can enjoy a homemade cappuccino and a croissant.

### Check In:

1. How many days this week did you do your Morning Pages? Have you been tempted to abandon them?
2. Did you do your artist date this week? Have you been allowing workaholism or other commitments to sabotage this practice? What did you do and how did it feel?
3. Did you experience any synchronicity this week? What was it? What was its significance?

4. Were there any other issues this week that you consider significant for your soul recovery? Describe them.