

# *Thrive – 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*

Creating a Thriving Life  
Week Three – May 10, 2021

## Anger, Shame, Power, and Success

This week, our focus will turn toward recovering a sense of power. Power has a bad rap. Those who have a lot of it often misuse it. But each one of us has power; we must recognize and own our power, or it will use us, or others will use our power for them. How power is used makes the difference. French poet Jean de la Fontaine wrote, “Anyone entrusted with power will abuse it if not also animated with the love of truth and virtue, no matter whether he (sic) be a prince, or one of the people.” Ghandi’s non-violent approach to ending British rule over India was grounded in his notion of “love-force” or “truth-force.” He believed that the methods employed in any attempt to confront injustice must reflect the spirit of the goal, the spirit of love. This is true for politics as well as personal and communal transformation.

One of the assumptions of this course, is that we, as Rilke said, “have come of age as masks; our true face never speaks.” Who we are, as souls, is mostly buried under the values and wishes of family, culture, and religion. For the most part, we were taught to value conforming to societal norms, rather than discovering, nurturing, and delighting in the unique gifts each one of us is given at birth in seed form.

So when it comes to personal power, we deny it, we have very few positive experiences of our own power. Marianne Williamson offers a thought-provoking insight. She writes, “Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, ‘Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?’ Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won’t feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God within us. It’s not just in some of us; it’s in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”

Yes, our creative souls are meant to shine. But what guides our light, our personal power, is love. Love for self, love for neighbor, love for the world. Our power is not to do whatever we want. Our power is to love our neighbor as we love our self. This course is mostly focused on love of self, partly because we have lost

the idea of who that self is – created in the image of God, a creative soul. But let's always keep in mind love of others and love for the world.

## Anger and Power

So let's talk about anger. Anger is a red flag. It tells us power has been misused or not used, by others, or by us. It asks for our attention because it speaks of boundaries; it speaks of deep-rooted values and a sense of self and a sense of others. Julia Cameron's words say it well.

*Anger is fuel. We feel it and we want to do something. Hit someone, break something, throw a fit, smash a fist into the wall, tell those bastards. Be we are nice people, and what we do with our anger is stuff it, deny it, bury it, block it, hide it, lie about it, medicate it, muffle it, ignore it. We do everything but listen to it. Anger is meant to be listened to. Anger is a voice, a shout, a plea, a demand. Anger is meant to be respected. Why? Because anger is a map. Anger shows us what our boundaries are. Anger shows us where we want to go. It lets us see where we've been and lets us know when we haven't liked it. Anger points the way, not just the finger. In the recovery of our creative soul, anger is a sign of health. Anger is meant to be acted upon, not acted out. Anger points the direction. We are meant to use anger as fuel to take the actions we need to move where our anger points us. With a little thought, discernment, prayer, we can actually translate the message our anger is sending us.*

Let me rephrase that – with a lot of thought, discernment, and prayer!

What are you angry about? Take a few moments to become present to your anger. Who, what, are you angry with? Explore that anger. But what's beneath the anger? Beneath the hurt, disappointment, grief, how was power misused or not used? When I dive deep I often find I'm angry at myself. And I find I did not use my own power, or I misused it.

In college, I told a friend, "I don't get angry anymore." You see, I had grown so much spiritually, I convinced myself I had conquered anger. Of course, what I'd done, was bury it, deny it, make excuses for it. I was trying to meet external expectations. In truth, I was afraid of anger, seen in my father. I was afraid of power.

At seminary, a friend asked me how I felt about a past event. I said, "I felt some anger." He said, "Tim, you talk about your anger after the fact, but I've never seen you be *angry* in the moment."

The next year I was in a reader's theatre play at Seminary, *Thurber's Carnival*. I was cast as a business owner in correspondence with a client. My secretary and I were on one side of the stage, my client and his secretary on the other side of the stage, worlds apart. Each of my letters, dictated by my secretary, was completely misinterpreted by my client, whose letters back to me caused me to become angrier and angrier. By the end of the vignette, I was to be apoplectically livid!

During rehearsal the professor stopped me. "Tim, can I show you what you're doing?" He got up and did a fair imitation of my best anger. He asked me, "Is that real anger?" "Not really," I said. "Let it out, man! Feel it! Tap into your own anger!" And then I said, "But I don't really get angry." He stared at me a long moment. "You don't get angry." "Not really," I said. "Oh, I get it now. You're too *Christian* to be angry!" And he stormed off the stage. I thought, *Too Christian?? How can you not be too Christian? We're at Princeton Theological Seminary for God's sake!! How can you be too Christian??!!* Suddenly I found myself yelling after him, "Too Christian???! How can be too Christian???!!!!!" Then I saw it. "I am angry!!" I expressed it! The professor said, "Got ya!!"

The next two weeks I explored my buried anger, and the fear of my own power. I was mad at Dad's anger, mad at an old coach, mad at my Christian College for not exposing me to

the variety of Christian expressions and other religious traditions. But mostly I was mad at myself, for not being assertive enough, for not learning how to use my power. By opening night, I had enough fuel to be volcanic. At the end of the vignette, I was apoplectic! I can't tell you how good it felt to be truly angry! After the show my friends said, "Tim we have NEVER seen that part of you!"

*When we feel anger, we are often very angry that we feel anger. Damn anger! It tells us we can't get away with our old life any longer. It tells us that life is dying. It tells us we are being reborn, and birthing hurts. The hurt makes us angry. Anger is the firestorm that signals the death of our old life. Anger is the fuel that propels us into our new one. Anger is a tool, not a master. Anger is meant to be tapped into and drawn upon. Used properly, anger is use-ful. Sloth, apathy, and despair are the enemy. Anger is not. Anger is our friend. Not a nice friend. Not a gentle friend. But a very, very loyal friend. It will always tell us when we have been betrayed. It will always tell us when we have betrayed ourselves. It will always tell us that it is time to act in our own best interests. It invites us to move into our own power, and to use it for good. Our anger always invites us to be responsible for the power we do have, and to use it wisely and with love.*

## **Synchronicity**

When we pay attention to our creative soul coincidences happen. Call it luck, sheer good fortune, randomness, at the right place at the right time. Call it God. But when I use "God", I don't mean a narrow view of God. What it points to is a *responsive creative force* that hears and acts on our behalf. If the universe is not responsive at all, then there is complete randomness with no real values. It leads to apathy, or absolute selfishness. But if the universe is responsive, then it leads to purpose and power. Those dreams of our creative soul can come to life! And they do.

When I first started to believe that I was an artist, a friend said he stumbled onto this old warehouse on 4<sup>th</sup> St. that had been turned into a studio and gallery. I went down immediately, became a member, and my painting life took off!!

Carl Jung, following his inner leadings, brought him to experience a phenomenon that some of us prefer to ignore: the possibility of an intelligent and responsive universe, acting in accord with our interests. Synchronicity. Julia Cameron writes, "It is my experience that this *is* the case. I have learned, as a rule of thumb, never to ask whether you can do something. Say, instead, that you are doing it. Then fasten your seat belt. The most remarkable things follow." This is what Manifesting Motion Pictures gets at – you really imagine doing it, and you will find you will do it. This is a different way of experiencing power.

In *The Scottish Himalayan Expedition*, W. H. Murray tells us his explorer's experience: "Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness. Concerning all acts of initiative (or creation) there is one elementary truth, the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely declares oneself, then Providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would otherwise never have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favor all manner of incidents and meetings and material assistance which no man would have believed would come his way." Even Goethe, famous statesman, scholar, artist, man of the world, said, "Whatever you think you can do or believe you can do, begin it. Action has magic, grace, and power in it." Choice, commitment, action is our power in motion.

## **Shame**

So why aren't all of us out there going after our creative soul's dreams if the universe is so responsive with assistance?

Shame. Most of us grew up with some form of shame. We were made to feel bad, awful, for doing something embarrassing or disappointing *with our power*. Our parents, family, friends, or faith community asked, “How could you?! How dare you!” But shame does not come from *doing* something bad. It comes because *the one using power is wrong*, according to them. Shame cuts our connection to our own power. We are rotten to the core, our power is bad. So when we move toward letting our creative souls come to life, use our creative soul power, shame is kicked up.

A friend of mine in Chicago has a troubled, contentious relationship with her mother. From a young age she remembers she couldn’t do anything right. She could never please her mother. About 2 years ago her mother suffered a stroke; she went to take care of her. My friend did a lot for her mother, but was frustrated with not being able to do it right. But this time, she saw it. It had little to do with her. Her mother was stuck in a pattern - being disgruntled with everyone and everything. My friend saw deeply the effects of shame on her life. It freed her to know, it wasn’t her fault.

Julia Cameron writes in *Walking in This World*, “When the creative power moving through us asks us to expand, we would rather contract, calling it more comfortable – it isn’t really. We are spiritual beings, and when our spirit grows larger, so must we. There will be no comfortable resting in yesterday’s definition of ourselves. It is spiritual law that as the Great Creator is always exploring, experiencing, and expanding through its creations, we must cooperate or feel the pitch of spiritual dis-ease. We can try to play small, but if the universe has big plans for us, we are better off cooperating than resisting. Creativity is God’s true nature and our own.

Mark Nepo writes, “*It is the world that is enlightened and we who are intermittent*. Like radios, we struggle through our static to receive wavelengths that are always there, and, being human, we are unable to sustain the clarity necessary to apprehend the magic inherent in everything. So we vacillate from the extraordinary to the ordinary, time and time again, and most of us blame the world. It is not surprising, then, that though we feel intermittently gifted, our gifts are ever-present. For if enlightenment stems from a *clarity of being*, then talent is no more than a *clarity of doing*, an embodied moment where spirit and hand are one. The chief obstacle to talent, then, is a lapse in being. It is not that people have no talent (creativity), but that we lack the clarity to uncover what it is and how it works. Talent, it seems, is energy waiting to be released through an honest involvement in life. But so many of us check whether we have *power* with the main switch off – the switch being risk, curiosity, passion, and love. With this in mind, happiness can simply be described as the satisfaction we feel when we are in ultimate accord, however briefly, *in being and doing*. In those unified moments, our purpose is *life* and our talent is *living* it in its most immediate detail.” Thrife!!

## **Success and Love**

Success is a big word in our culture. And so far, in Thrife, success is seen as uncovering our creative gifts, shedding the overlay of who we were supposed to be according to our family and culture, and finally living out of our creative soul and achieving the creative goals we envision. We arrive at our longed for destination. Yes, but. There’s more.

Mark Nepo, in his book “The One Life We’re Given,” tells a story. A Hindu sage shares with his students a parable about two monks who had studied for years, preparing to climb a high mountain to meet with Buddha. They begin the arduous climb, and halfway up the mountain, one of the monks breaks his leg. The other monk makes his companion comfortable as possible, but in the morning it’s clear the monk cannot go on, and has become feverish, and should not be left alone. The sage stops the story and asks, “What would you do? Would you leave and keep your appointment with Buddha or take your fellow monk back down the

mountain to be cared for?” One earnest student replies, “I’d make him as comfortable as I could, then I’d leave to keep my appointment with Buddha.” The sage looks at him and says, “Well, I’m glad I wouldn’t be traveling with you!” The sage then says, “In every era and every generation, when we have more who leave that monk to keep their appointment – no matter how sacred – we have an age of cruelty. When there are more who would take the injured monk back down the mountain, we have an age of compassion.

What if making it to the top, what if meeting our creative goals, isn’t the summit of our journey? What if making it as far as we can go is the summit? What if putting down what we’re after in order to care for another is the heart’s destiny? What if our grand dreams are only meant to start us on our journey until our love awakens us? Perhaps caring for another – wherever we’re stopped along the way – *is* the summit?

So what really constitutes success or failure? Are we open to where our effort, if we trust it, will bring us? We’re both the monk who would go to keep the appointment with Buddha and the monk who would take the injured one back down the mountain. How do we discern whether we’re trapped by success or open to the life of the soul? How do we move beyond our insistence to go after only what we want and allow ourselves to come close to what matters?

Mark Nepo then writes one of the most powerful sentences I’ve come across. “Often our dreams don’t come true, but sometimes we do.” Working toward our dreams and through them, with Thrive, enables us to inhabit our truth, which is more important and life-giving than whether we get what we want or not.

### **Weekly Tasks:**

1. Describe a time in your life when you felt a tension between what you wanted and what, or who, you cared for. Did you finish the climb to the top or bring your wounded companion back down the mountain? What did you learn from your choices?
2. Describe when you feel most powerful and you’re using your power well. What conditions, circumstances, lead you to this place of power? Now, describe when you feel powerless or when you’re not using your power well. What conditions, circumstances, lead you to become powerless or misuse power? What do you learn about yourself and your circumstances?
3. In a conversation with a friend or loved one, discuss what you currently want, and what life is bringing you close to. How are these different? How are they the same? Which is more life-giving? Where does your success lie?