

Thrive – 3rd Edition

Creating a Thriving Life Week Two – May 3, 2021 Take Off the Overlay, Face the Resistance

This week, we'll focus on the ongoing process of living into our true identity. This is what James Hillman explores in his book, *The Soul's Code*. He calls it his Acorn Theory. Just as an Oak tree comes from an acorn seed, we, too, at birth, come with a seed that is our own soul, with its own unique, God-given package of gifts, a blue-print if you will. Our experience of growing up often buries this sense of self under the wishes and influence of family and culture. We learn to play rolls, wear masks, rather than discover who we are. Recovering our soul's creativity, its gifts, is a slow process of removing all that was laid over the soul, in order to let the soul begin to express itself.

I am reminded of a story in the Gospel of John. Lazarus has died and his sisters and friends are mourning, and so is Jesus. They go to the tomb, and Jesus says, "Lazarus, come out!" Lazarus comes out wrapped in grave clothes, and Jesus says, "Unwrap him and let him go," a metaphor for what we do for each other in community. We have been wrapped up tight in the expectations and values of others, and it entombs our creative souls. But when we are called forth, "Come out, be who you are, live!" we help unwrap each other, so we can be ourselves.

But even when we help each other throw off what has been laid upon us, we run into our own resistance to living fully into who we are. As we redraw the lines of who we are, we draw ourselves to a fuller size. But by coming into our true selves, we will encounter resistance from those around us, and from ourselves and our inner critic.

Going Sane, Becoming Whole

All of us want to fit in, be accepted, valued. But it is that very sense of what is normal, what is sane, what is acceptable, that becomes a problem.

In the Gospels, Jesus is criticized, by his family, for being insane. He is living from a deeper sense of who he is, and who every one else is. He does not bow to the notion that Jews are the chosen race and Samaritans are not. He crosses cultural barriers because he responds to each one's uniqueness. He calls forth each one's creative soul. He criticizes the Pharisees for putting people into cultural and religious strait jackets, and he asks the lame and the blind if they want to be made well, because sometimes they don't want to be well, for it asks much.

Julia Cameron calls our creative soul recovery, "Going Sane." She writes, "Trusting our creativity is new behavior for many of us. It may feel quite threatening initially, not only to us but also to our friends and family." Allowing our creativity to blossom, going sane, becoming whole, *can feel like* we are going insane! Our family and friends might think the same thing, and so do we!

Buzz Kill Friends

Creativity flourishes when we feel safe and accepted. We need trusted companions who encourage us. But the recovery of our creative souls can be threatening to others who might be blocked themselves. *Blocked friends may find our recovery disturbing.* Our getting unblocked holds up the mirror. They, too, can become unblocked, move into their creative souls, and leave behind the bench-sitting criticism. Most people don't intend to sabotage our flourishing, but our thriving kicks up unconscious reactions, which can reactivate our own self-doubts. They may say, "You're selfish, different." They are scared; they want you to stay the same for *their* comfort. This calls for compassion for them and for us. Living closer to our creative souls, calls for self-care, and kindness towards those struggling to accept the new us, and to us, who are scared to be who we are!

We are asked to *safeguard our emerging creative soul*. We have compassion for those dealing with a new us, but we do not let their agenda for us, take away from *our* soul recovery. We want to go on a creative soul date, but the laundry calls. Morning Pages and the weekly tasks call, but we feel like we *should* do what others have learned to expect from us. A friend, doing 12-step recovery work, volunteered to lead several groups, as a way of giving back. It felt good. But she began to resent the commitments she'd made. After much soul-searching, she kept two of those commitments and let the others go. We often think doing the dutiful thing makes us *good*; it actually makes us *frustrated*. The more we discover what God has put in our creative soul, the easier it is to discern what to give ourselves to, and what we can let go of.

As a side benefit, the recovery of our creative soul, becomes an example for friends and family that they, too, can move towards who they've been made to be, so they might thrive as well.

Crazymakers

Julia Cameron talks a lot about *Crazymakers*. We get involved with *Crazymakers to avoid being creative ourselves*. *Crazymakers* are charismatic, charming, highly inventive, powerfully persuasive. As Julia puts it, "*You know the type: charismatic but out of control, long on problems and short on solutions...whether they appear as your overbearing mother, your manic boss, your needy friend, or your stubborn spouse, the crazymakers in your life share certain destructive patterns that make them poisonous for any sustained creative work.*"

Crazymakers:

...break deals and destroy schedules. They arrive a day early and expect you to be ready for them; they forget their wallet; they say it'll cost this much and you pay twice as much as expected.

...expect special treatment. The toast has to be done just right; they have a migraine that requires your undivided attention when you have a deadline at work.

...discount our reality. You're clear about boundaries, values, schedule, yet they disrespect them regularly. "I know you're on a deadline but this will only take a minute," and it turns into 30 minutes. "I know your daughter is on a special diet, but she loves it when I make her favorite dish."

...spend your time and money. They borrow your car, they return it late, with an empty tank. Their travel arrangements inevitably cost you time and money.

...triangulate the people in their lives. They set people up against each other, with things like gossip, or they say, "Promise me you won't tell anyone that I told you..."

...are expert blamers. Nothing is their fault, they take no responsibility for their actions, emotions, words, and lot in life. The fault is yours, or someone else's.

Julia goes on and on about *crazymakers*! Finally she gets to the point: “If crazymakers are that destructive, what are we doing involved with them?” The answer, she says, is that we’re that crazy ourselves, and we are that self-destructive. Really? Yes. *As blocked creatives, we are willing to go to almost any lengths to remain blocked. As frightening and abusive as life with a crazymaker is, we find it less threatening than the challenge of a creative life of our own... Our crazymaker is a block we chose ourselves, to deter us from your own creative soul life.*

Julia uses hyperbole when she says, “As frightening and abusive as life with a crazymaker is.” Maybe. But more often it’s like this: “as *frustrating and soul-denying* as life with a crazymaker is...”

In 1st Corinthians, the Apostle Paul says that each one of us has gifts of the Spirit, different, but they work together for the whole. “The body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body.” But then he says, “If the foot would say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body.’” This reflects self-doubt about the value of our own creative soul gifts. Someone else does great things? We denigrate our creative gifts. Then Paul says, “If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be?” This reflects the *crazymaker* -all the focus is on them. “I’m the eye! I’m the best! It’s all about me!” Each person needs to develop and live into their own creative soul gifts, not only for *their* thriving, but for the thriving of the *collective*, for all of us.

Crazymakers hold us back. But we also run into our own resistance. Pat B. Allen, author of *Art is a Way of Knowing*, says that it wasn’t until she started living into her creative soul that she “encountered the power of the inner critic to control and limit my life. This force that counters the desire to create is within each of us. Generally *the critic doesn’t appear in full force until you are in a situation where you have the opportunity to do what you want, something important and self-chosen, something with risk.*” It’s only when we go toward our creative souls, try to live from it, that’s when the inner critic really shows up. So if your inner critic is assaulting you at every turn you know you’re on to something!

“The inner critic in some form is universal and has nothing to do with art or creativity as such. The inner critic really arises from the fact that *creative activities wake us up and lead to knowing.* The critic says, ‘Don’t know, you might find out something awful about yourself, don’t go into that river of life, you might drown.’ Actually knowing is dangerous because *it leads to change.*”

To live is to change, and change often evokes feelings of loss and even death. Many times we try to fight the inner critic with alcohol or drugs to increase our courage, or we try to deny the inner critic by overachieving or simply not trying at all. We are ashamed of our resistance; we call it laziness or worse. We disparage ourselves for not succeeding, or call the safety of conventional life “success.”

Pat Allen suggests a different path. She invites us to honor the resistance, get to know our inner critic. The critic holds very valuable information. The critic holds our deepest fears; resistance shows we are on the right track. The critic, in a sense, is trying its best to spare us the pain of change, the shame of fear. Our critic discourages us from doing those things which are perceived as dangerous.

We are invited to get to know our inner critic. Yes, acknowledge that while real people – parents, teachers, friends – may have criticized us, *an internal version of the critic exists.* We are invited to know this inner-critic-self because *we have the wisdom to understand it, and we have the power to change it.*

A dear friend used to harm himself. He would hit things hard, cut himself, causing trauma to himself. As an adult, after a difficult conversation with his supervisor, he pulled out an exacto knife and cut himself again. He counseled prisoners, but couldn't see his own self-injury. In pursuit of a more authentic life he took himself to a retreat. During a meditation practice he was asked to imagine walking up a grassy hill to catch some expansive vision of God, but he refused to look up and when he looked down he was in a dark cave and a stone rolled behind him. He was in complete darkness. And suddenly he was surrounded by the wings of a black bird; the bird's beak was sharp like a pair of scissors. He thought of his own cutting. Despite the ominous vision, he felt God's presence. The leader invited the retreatants to have a conversation with whatever showed up in their meditation. So he asked the bird, "Why?" And the powerful, frightening bird began to cry, fell to the ground, and said, "I'm trying to protect you."

Real change, living closer and closer to our creative soul, is scary, and our inner critic is trying to save us from the difficult and painful process of change, but it keeps us from our real life.

Claiming our particular creative soul is a "coming out" process. "I think I am, I think I might be, I really identify with, OMG, I think I am" – fill in the blank. But our inner critic is still in doubt that it's okay to be creative in our way, to be who we are. We're brave enough to try this course, be open-minded about our creativity, but a warning - doing so will open us up to the inner critic's fiercest attacks. We need to get to know it. One of our tasks this week will be to get to know our inner critic and to see what it points to in us.

We are reluctant to take seriously the possibility that the universe might be joyfully cooperating with our moving closer to our soul's creativity. But our fear can sabotage us. When things become clearer for us, coincidences happen, connections are made, way opens up, nudge that door open to the possibility that you are being guided more deeply into who you are. It's an exercise in trust, in your creative soul, in the Creator. And counter-intuitively, when it gets louder and more vicious, our inner critic shows us we're on the right path.

Paying Attention

Creative soul recovery calls for paying attention. Attention connects us with life around us, life within us. Morning Pages is a way to pay attention to what's in our hearts and minds. It also helps us see and know the Inner Critic. It's not selfish. Attention, conscious awareness, helps us see where we are selfish, doubtful, anxious, or filled with gratitude. Attention helps us see our gifts, and our fears. Attention creates a gap so you can see more clearly to move away from ego and toward soul. It is a way to truly be sane. Julia Cameron puts it this way: *"The quality of life is in proportion, always, to the capacity for delight. The capacity for delight is the gift of paying attention."*

Attention heals. It leads to seeing that we are deeply connected with life, with Source, with all that is. Julia Cameron says it this way. *"It may begin as the healing of a particular pain – the lost lover, the sickly child, the shattered dream. But what is healed, finally, is the pain that underlies all pain: the pain that we are all, as Rilke phrases it, 'unutterably alone.' More than anything else, attention is an act of connection."*

Thomas Merton was in downtown Louisville, KY, and had a moment of deep attention. People were milling all around him, and he had this sense of delight that each person was so

unique, each created in the image of God, and there was a oneness underlying it all, including him.

Paying attention to our own stuff can be painful, very painful. But it's really the only way to heal and become whole. It's the path of stepping into our creative soul more fully. It's a way to see and call forth the creative soul of others.

Weekly Tasks:

1. Getting to know your Inner Critic.
 - a. Center yourself for 5 to 10 minutes. Invite the presence of Spirit to be with you.
 - b. Bring to mind an experience of discouragement or criticism, in an encounter with another, or with yourself. Close your eyes and focus on the sensations, words, and feelings you experienced.
 - c. If a real person is involved, let the image intensify until the personality is gone and the image prevails. For example, a witchlike teacher is no longer Mrs. Smith, but becomes rather a witch or your own image. Once the image is present, greet it and acknowledge any fears or other feelings the image evokes in you.
 - d. Sit with this image of the inner critic. Give your critic your attention. Try to receive any messages it sends. What fears does it mirror? What sort of pain does it wish to protect you from?
 - e. Draw, paint, or sculpt (with Play-Doh) the image, being as faithful to your inner image as possible.
 - f. When ready, tell yourself and your critic how much you are willing to risk. If hardly at all, say so. Thank your critic for the attempt to protect you. State your intention to be compassionate with your own fears, and vow to dialogue with your critic when it makes itself heard, recognizing that you can choose how much protection you really want and how much risk you will assume.
 - g. Hang your rendering of the image on your mirror, or somewhere you will encounter it regularly. Now that it is outside you, you can develop a more conscious relationship with it. There will come a time when your critic will mature and change too, into a compassionate helper who let you know when to keep working, when to sit and wait. For now just try to accept your critic as is.
2. Identify any "Crazymakers" in your life. Identify 5 things you can do differently to lessen their grip on your time and energy, to set clearer boundaries for your own soul care. Talk with a trusted friend about the changes you make in these relationships, and ask them for support and encouragement.
3. Do Nothing: Thoroughly do nothing for 15 minutes. Sit quietly, with no distractions, and just be. And then let your imagination speak to you. Follow your train of thought wherever it leads you, to the past, the future, into some part of the present that you haven't let yourself explore because of busyness or distraction. Fully inhabit it. What do you find?