

Thrive

Creating a Thriving Spiritual Life Week Ten

Self-Protection and Self-Care

This week we explore the perils that can ambush us on our creative path. Because creativity is a spiritual issue, many of the perils are spiritual perils. In this week's material, tasks, and exercises we search out the toxic patterns we cling to that block our creative flow.

Dangers Along the Way

"Creativity is God energy flowing through us, shaped by us, like light flowing through a crystal prism. When we are clear about who we are and what we are doing, the energy flows freely and we experience no or little strain. When we resist what that energy might show us, or where it might take us, we often experience a unsettled, out-of-control feeling. We want to shut down the flow and regain our sense of control. We slam on the psychic brakes.

Every creative soul, all of us, has myriad ways to block creativity. Each of us favors one or two ways particularly toxic to us because they block us so effectively." What are the one or two preferred blocks for you, for me?

Food? Eating sugar and carbohydrates leaves us feeling dull, hung over, blurry, unable to focus. As the creative juices flow we start to feel we're going too fast and God knows where, so we eat. A big bowl of ice cream, an evening of junk food.

How about alcohol? Or work? Busy, busy, busy we distract ourselves with tasks that numb us. Must-do's prevent us from a half-hour of work on a creative idea.

Love? Some of us reach for painful losses of love. "If only he or she would love me, then..." Or sex? A hot lover slides hot novel erotic possibilities in front of the real novel we are writing.

Food, work, love, sex are good in themselves. But they are powerful things, which makes them powerful blocks. It is the *misuse*, *abuse* of them that makes them creative blocks. Knowing ourselves as creative souls means acknowledging which of these things, and there are many, we abuse when we want to block ourselves. When we grab for one of these things, we are shutting down our flow, and we're doing it for a reason.

We begin to the sense our real potential and the wide range of possibilities open to us. It scares us. Once again, we meet our fear, and we probably know which blocks are the toxic ones for us. The clue: we defend these blocks as our "right," our "due."

Line up the possibilities. Which one makes us angry to even think about giving up? That explosive one has probably caused us the most derailment. Examine it. When asked to name our poison, most of us can. Often we pick one, throw in a second, mix in a third, wearing ourselves out. Me? “I don’t feel like it.” Simple, but powerful. Also, love, longing for love.

The object of all this blocking is to alleviate fear. We turn to our “drug” of choice to block our creativity whenever we experience the anxiety of our inner emptiness. It is always fear – often disguised but *a/ways* there – that leads us to grabbing for a block.

Usually we experience the choice to block as a coincidence. She happened to call, I felt a little hungry and there just happened to be ice cream in the fridge, he dropped by with some killer THC. The *choice* to block always works *in the short run*, but fails *in the long run*. It takes grace and courage to admit and surrender our blocking devices.

Blocking is essentially an issue of faith, trust. Rather than trust our intuition, our talent, our skill, our desire, we fear where our Creator is taking us with this creativity. Rather than paint, talk to the boss about a business idea, apply for a grant, audition, and see where it takes us, we pick up a block. Blocked, we know who and what we are: unhappy people. Unblocked, we may be something much more threatening – happy. For most of us happy is terrifying, unfamiliar, out of control. No wonder we grab for our blocks.

But as we become aware of our blocks, we also see that the blocks no longer work effectively. We begin to sit with the anxiety and fear a bit longer, and we find it can become a fuel for us. The very anxiety we are covering over, becomes the fuel for our creativity. We use it to paint, to talk to the boss, to write a grant, to perform the song. Kudos to Sky.

Feel anxious? Try using the anxiety! “I just did it! I didn’t block! I used the anxiety and moved ahead! OMG!”

Workaholism

Workaholism is an addiction, and like all addictions, it blocks creative energy. The desire to block the flow of creative energy is an underlying reason for addiction. If we are too busy to do Morning Pages, Creative Soul Dates, we are probably too busy to hear the voice of authentic creative desires. The phrase “I’m working,” has a certain unassailable air of goodness and duty to it. The truth is, we are often working to avoid ourselves, our spouses/partners, our real feelings.

In creative soul recovery, it is easier for us to do Morning Pages than it is to take ourselves on a creative soul date. Play can make a workaholic very nervous. Fun is scary. A simple test: how much time do we *allot* each week to fun? Fun is something we avoid as much as creativity. Why? Fun leads to creativity. Take this Workaholism Quiz and see what you discover.

Workaholism Quiz

1. I work outside of office/expected hours: seldom, often, never?
2. I cancel dates with loved ones to do more work: seldom, often, never?
3. I postpone outings until the deadline is over: seldom, often, never?
4. I take work with me on weekends: seldom, often, never?

5. I take work with me on vacations: seldom, often, never?
6. I take vacations: seldom, often, never?
7. My intimates complain I always work: seldom, often, never?
8. I try to do two things at once: seldom, often, never?
9. I allow myself free time between projects: seldom, often, never?
10. I allow myself to achieve closure on tasks: seldom, often, never?
11. I procrastinate in finishing up the loose ends: seldom, often, never?
12. I set out to do one job and start on three more at the same time: seldom, often, never?
13. I work in the evenings during family time: seldom, often, never?
14. I allow calls to interrupt – and lengthen – my work day: seldom, often, never?
15. I prioritize my day to include an hour of creative work/play: seldom, often, never?
16. I place my creative dreams before my work: seldom, often, never?
17. I fall in with others' plans and fill my free time with their agendas: seldom, often, never?
18. I allow myself down time to do *nothing*: seldom, often, never?
19. I use the word *deadline* to describe and rationalize my work load: seldom, often, never?
20. Going somewhere, even to dinner, with my laptop is something I do: seldom, often, never?

There is a difference between zestful, enthusiastic work toward a cherished goal, and workaholism. That difference lies less in the hours than it does in the emotional quality of the hours spent. There is a treadmill quality to workaholism. We depend on our addiction and resent it. For a workaholic, work is synonymous with worth, and so we are hesitant to jettison any part of it. One way to achieve clarity is to keep a daily record of time spent at work, and time spent in creativity. Even an hour a day of creativity can go a long way to offset our workaholism.

Because workaholism is a *process* addiction, not a *substance* addiction, it is difficult to tell when we are indulging in it. An alcoholic *abstains* from alcohol, a workaholic gets sober from *overwork*. We must figure out what *overwork* looks like. It helps to set a *bottom line*. If we have no time, we must make time. It is more likely, however, that we *have* the time and are *misspending* it. Keeping a time log will help create healthy boundaries.

Drought

In any creative life there are dry seasons. Work feels mechanical, empty, forced. No creative juices flowing, have nothing to say, no new creative ideas. These are the times when Morning Pages are most difficult, and, of course, most valuable. Doubts sidle up like sidewinders, hissing, "What's the use?" Droughts feel like they'll last forever. During a drought, we are fighting with God. We are losing faith in the Great Creator and in our creative selves. What to do? Keep going. Particularly the Morning Pages – Morning pages will help us find the well within the desert, if we are patient and persistent. In a creative life, I hate to say this, droughts are a necessity. The time in the *desert* brings us clarity, compassion, and eventually purpose. Like the Hebrews in the wilderness, it shaped their hearts, desires, and their faith.

Fame

A particularly difficult block is fame. Fame is not the same as success, and our souls know it. Fame is addictive, and it always leaves us hungry. Fame is a spiritual drug. It is often a by-product of our creative soul work, but like nuclear waste, it can be a very dangerous by-product. We begin to focus on "How do I look to them?" instead of "Is my work going well?"

Instead of being creative in our unique way, it becomes about being recognized. Focusing on fame creates a feeling of lack. There is never enough of the fame bug. Fame is really a shortcut for self-approval. Try approving of ourselves just as we are, loving ourselves as we are, in the process. We fear that without fame we won't be loved, as creatives, as ourselves. There is something called Fame Induced Apathy. Without fame we become apathetic about anything. Love is the answer. Love of ourselves and love for what we do creatively. When we are being joyfully creative we can release the obsession with how others see us.

Competition

Competition is another spiritual drug. When we focus on competition we poison our own well, impede our progress. When ogling the accomplishment of others, we take our eye off our own through line. We ask, "Why do I have such rotten luck? Why did she get that promotion?" instead of asking ourselves, "Did I work on my music today? Did I reach out to make more connections in my creative field today? Did I sign up for that class I want to take?"

Competition lies at the root of much creative blockage. As creatives, we must go within. We must attend to what it is our inner guidance is nudging us toward. The desire to "be better than so-and-so" chokes off the desire to "be me." Competition leads us away from our own voices and choices and into a defensive game that centers outside of ourselves, and our sphere of influence. It asks us to define our own creativity in terms of someone else's. Let us concern ourselves first and foremost with what it is within us that is struggling to be born. Originality is not rooted in separating ourselves from and competing with others in our creative field. It is rooted in being true to ourselves.

The spirit of competition – as opposed to the spirit of creation – often urges us to quickly winnow out whatever does not seem like a winning idea. It can interfere with our ability to carry a project to term. We forget that not all babies are born beautiful, and so we abort the lives of awkward or unseemly projects/plans that may be our finest work, our best creative ugly ducklings. The workings of a creative soul need time to mature. Judged too early, it may be judged incorrectly. A lousy painting may bring about a shift in style. A failed business plan may be the thing that leads you in a surprisingly different and productive direction.

Weekly Tasks:

1. The Deadlies: Take a sheet of paper and cut seven small strips from it. On each strip write one of the following words: *alcohol, drugs, sex, work, money, food, family/friends*. Fold these strips of paper and place them in an envelope. We call these folded slips *the deadlies*. You'll see why in a minute. Now draw one of the deadlies from the envelope and write five ways in which it has had a negative impact on your life. (If the one you choose seems difficult or inapplicable to you, consider your reaction as resistance, and answer it.) You will do this seven times, each time putting back the previous slip of paper so that you are always drawing from seven possible choices. Yes, you may draw the same deadly repeatedly. Yes, this is significant. Very often, it is the last impact on the final list of an annoying "Oh no, not again" that yields a break, through denial, into clarity.
2. The Awful Truth: Answer the following questions.
 - a. Tell the truth. What habit do you have that gets in the way of your creativity?
 - b. Tell the truth. What do you think might be a problem? It is.
 - c. What do you plan to do about the habit or problem?

- d. What is your payoff in holding on to this block?
- e. If you can't figure out your payoff, ask a trusted friend.
- f. Tell the truth. Which friends make you doubt yourself? (The self-doubt is yours already, but they trigger it.)
- g. Tell the truth. Which friends believe in you and your talent? (The talent is yours, but they make you feel it.)
- h. What is the payoff in keeping your destructive friends? If the answer is, "I like them," the next question is, "Why?"
- i. Which destructive habits do your destructive friends share with your destructive self?
- j. Which constructive habits do your constructive friends share with your constructive self?

3. Cherishing:

- a. List five small victories.
- b. List three nurturing actions you took for your creative soul.
- c. List three actions you could take to comfort the creative child within.
- d. Make three nice promises to yourself. Keep them.
- e. Do one lovely thing for yourself *each* day this week.

Check In:

- 1. How many days this week did you do your Morning Pages? Has reading your pages this past week changed your writing? Are you still allowing yourself to write them freely with no judgment?
- 2. Did you do your artist date this week? Let yourself do an extra one. What did you do? How did it feel?
- 3. Did you experience any synchronicity this week? What was it? How are you beginning to feel about synchronicity?
- 4. Were there any other issues this week that you consider significant? Describe them.