

# Thrive

## Creating a Thriving Spiritual Life Week Four

### Integrity and Authenticity

The work we've been doing over the past three weeks, is settling in and some changes are being noticed and felt. This new sense of self is both empowering and unsettling. This week, we will work on integrating our new self-awareness, and becoming more comfortable with who we are becoming.

This week we will also add a quite challenging practice – reading and media deprivation!! Yes, you will be asked not to read or watch media for a week, except of course, this material. It's an eye-opening exercise, so please don't skip it! And it's only for a week. You can do it!!

#### Sorting Out Our Feelings

The work we are doing with Morning Pages and the others Tasks are helping us make distinctions between our *real* feelings and our *official* feelings, how we *really* feel and the feelings we show to the *public*. When I said to my college friend and to my seminary professor that I don't really get angry, it was a way of avoiding my true feelings, and a way to put me in a better light. I was more interested in how other people felt about me, than getting in touch with my real feelings. We do this by saying, "I'm alright, I'm okay," or "No, it didn't really bother me much."

Part of the reason Morning Pages are so revelatory is because they allow us to be as honest as possible with our feelings. Morning Pages help us stop denying what we truly feel. But have you noticed, that when you sense a deeper clarity about your feelings we can often neglect our Morning Pages, or what we write in them is not the whole truth about our feelings. We are running up against expectations – our own and the world's – because our own sense of self can be shocked to realize, for example, "Am I really *that* mad?!" or "I am so full of grief!" As Julia Cameron puts it: "In short, extreme emotions of any kind – the very thing that Morning Pages are superb for processing – are the usual triggers for avoiding the pages themselves."

If we are to be creative in our life, we must see what's really in us and be honest about it. We must get to know that creative soul/self of ours as it really is in all its thoughts and feelings. "I feel this way...and that way...and this way...No one else need agree with me, but this is what I *feel*."

Again the words of Julia Cameron: "The process of identifying a *self* inevitably involves loss as well as gain. We discover our boundaries, and those boundaries by definition separate us from our fellows, not as better or worse, but as individually unique. As we clarify our perceptions, we lose our misconceptions. As we eliminate ambiguity, we lose illusion as well. We arrive at clarity, and clarity creates change."

You might yourself saying, "I have grown tired of this job," and at first it's troubling, but then it becomes a call for action and change. Or "This relationship is not working for me,"

leads to “maybe we should go to couples therapy” or it leads to, “It’s not this relationship I’m bored with, I’m bored with myself!” As we gain this kind of clarity, we often feel great sorrow and grief. Change always brings a sense of loss. Faced with the very changes that our own good work has set into motion, we often want to go back to the way things were. We don’t want to feel the discomfort and pain of change. We’ll throw a tantrum, and we are tempted to sabotage our creative soul recovery. This is normal. Thanks to the Morning Pages we learn what we want, what God wants, and ultimately become willing to make the changes needed to go in right direction. But not without the temptation to drop the whole thing. This is the moment the Sanskrit word *kriya* points to – a spiritual emergency or surrender. The Chinese word for “crisis” does the same thing. It’s made of two symbols joined together, one means “danger,” the other means “opportunity.” You can’t rescue a brother who needs to do the work himself. You can’t stay with an emotionally abusive lover. You can’t work at a job that demands 80 hours a week. You can’t ignore that your soul wants to teach instead of work a corporate position.

The Morning Pages point the way to reality: this is how you’re feeling. What do you make of that? And what we make of that, is our creative soul comes to life.

As we lose our vagueness about our self, our values, our life situation, we become more available to the moment. It is there, in the particular, that we contact our creative soul, and the Creator. Until we experience the freedom of solitude, we cannot connect authentically. In the solitude we meet our truth and we meet ourselves; we meet ourselves and we meet our soul-expression. We become original because we become something specific: an origin from which good work and real life flows. You are becoming your authentic self.

### **The Loss of the False Self**

As we gain – or regain – our creative soul, we lose the false self we were sustaining. The loss of this false self can feel traumatic. “I don’t know who I am anymore. I don’t recognize me.” But you are your own promised land, your own new frontier. We were taught to explore who we were *supposed* to become; now we are exploring who we were *made* to become. So some spring-cleaning is appropriate. “By tossing out the old and no longer workable, we make way for the new and more suitable. The old you is leaving and grieving, while the new you celebrates and grows stronger. There is both tension and relief. Long-frozen feelings thaw, melt, cascade, flood, and often overrun their container (you).” We may find ourselves volatile and changeable. Because we are.

Conversely, you might feel like you’re not changing at all. Julia Cameron has a wonderful metaphor for this. Like you’re in a plane, and you’re flying at incredible speed, but in the plane it feels like you’re not moving at all. But by doing your Morning Pages and the practices you are changing.

What we’ve been doing, these practices, is wiping the mirror. Each day’s Morning Pages take a swipe at the blur you have kept between you and your real self. As your image becomes clearer, it may surprise you. You may discover very particular likes and dislikes that you hadn’t acknowledged. Conditioned as we are to accept other people’s definitions of us, this emerging creative soul can seem to us like self-will run riot. There’s always that chance. But that will show up in your Morning Pages, too, and you’ll recognize it. But usually, it’s your soul coming to life.

### **The Gain of Our Creative Soul**

The snowflake pattern of your creative soul is emerging. Each of us is a unique, creative individual. But we often blur that uniqueness with sugar, alcohol, drugs, overwork, underplay, bad relationships, underexercise, over-Netflix, undersleep – many and varied forms of junk

food for the soul. The Morning Pages and the Tasks help us to see these smears on our consciousness, that cover over our creative soul.

Over time we'll notice changes. We will find an increase in personal energy, bursts of anger, and flash points of clarity. People and things may have taken on a different sense of meaning and value. Life will have a different sense of flow. We'll feel no longer stuck, but not sure where we're going yet. We may long for the time when there was little sense of possibility, when we felt more victimized, when we didn't realize how many small things we could do to improve our own lives.

The Morning Pages symbolize our willingness to connect with soul, with Spirit, with the Source of all life. We'll find ourselves more deeply connected with purpose, with good energy, we'll feel more aligned with ourselves, and with Spirit.

### **Buried Dreams**

As recovering creative souls, we often need to excavate our past for shards of buried dreams, desires, and delights. This is a little exercise for us to do. This is an exercise in spontaneity so do this exercise quickly.

1. List five hobbies that sound fun.
2. List five classes that sound fun.
3. List five things you personally would *never* do that sound fun.
4. List five skills that would be fun to have.
5. List five things you used to enjoy doing,
6. List five silly things you would like to try once.

What struck you by completing the above lists? What deep long forgotten chord in you was struck?

### **Reading and Media Deprivation**

This is going to be difficult. But it's only for a week. Many of us fill a good bit of our day reading the news on our cell phones, or watching media on our televisions. Like greasy food, it clogs our system. Too much of it and we feel, yes, fried. Give it up for a week.

Without these media distractions, we are once again thrust into solitude and the sensory world, where we can hear our own inner voice, our creative soul's desires, the still small voice of God. This is the purpose of silence in monasteries. We will find a new outflow of our own thoughts and feelings, our own creativity, our own life emerging out from underneath the clatter and the noise. Our own creative soul, our own thoughts and feelings, will loosen up and begin to flow.

Julia Cameron says, "The nasty bottom is this: sooner or later, if you are not reading and engaged with media, you will run out of work and be forced to play. You'll light some incense, or paint the bathroom you've been intending to paint for years, you'll dance in the living room with your partner; you'll pick up the guitar or play piano again; you'll apply for grad school; you'll volunteer at a non-profit you're passionate about. You'll feel better, perhaps a bit more excited, about your life.

Ten years ago I gave up my television. I felt a little left out when people talked about something on Netflix. But I spent so much more time painting in my studio, writing music, recording my first CD, writing my first book. And my life was the better for it. I now have a television, but it doesn't have me.

### **Weekly Tasks:**

1. Environment: Describe, in one paragraph, your ideal environment. Town? Country? Swank? Cozy? Rustic? Then find one image, drawn or clipped, that conveys this. Put it on your mirror and ponder it every day this week. What do you notice? How does it make you feel?
2. Time Travel #1: Describe yourself at eighty. What did you do after fifty that you enjoyed? Be very specific. Now, write a letter from you at eighty to you at your current age. What would you tell yourself? What interests would you urge yourself to pursue? What dreams would you encourage?
3. Time Travel #2: Describe yourself at eight. What did you like to do? What were your favorite things? Now, write a letter from you at eight to you at your current age. What would you tell yourself?
4. Use your life pie from Week One to review your growth. Has that tarantula changed shape yet? Have you found yourself more active, less rigid, more expressive and clear? Be careful not to expect too much too soon. Growth must have time to solidify. You are building healthy habits for your creative soul one day at a time.
5. Look at one situation in your life that you feel you want to change but haven't yet. What is the payoff for you in staying stuck? Why haven't you made the change? Be as clear as you can.
6. If you break your reading and media deprivation, write about how you did it. In a tantrum? A slipup? A binge? How do you feel about it? Why?

**Check In:**

1. How many days this week did you do your Morning Pages? (Tantrums often show up as skipping the Morning Pages) How was the experience for you?
2. Did you do your artist date this week? What did you do and how did it feel? Would you do it again? Why or why not?
3. Did you experience any synchronicity this week? What was it?
4. Were there any other issues this week that you consider significant for your soul recovery? Describe them.