

Thrive

Creating a Thriving Spiritual Life Week Five

Possibility and Potential

The week we'll take a look at the payoffs of staying stuck, and what it might look like to move into our potential and no longer make others the cause of our own limitations. We'll explore how we can curtail our own possibilities by placing limits on what we can receive and achieve. We'll unpack the cost of settling for appearing good instead of being authentic.

Limits

Drawing on Source, Spirit, God, the Creative Power of the Universe, we are in the position of having a much larger resource pool than we ever imagined. But we tend to predetermine how powerful God's life is in us. We unconsciously set a limit on the kind of assistance we need, and how much we can receive from Spirit, from Life. We are stingy with ourselves, and doubtful of the Creator's expression in us.

I'm not offering you a magic wand! But sometimes it might feel that way. Mostly, I'm talking about a "conscious partnership" where we work slowly, gradually, clearing away the debris of our negative patterning, clarifying the vision of our creative soul, learning to accept the small pieces of that vision, and then the vision seems to fall into place. Julia Cameron puts it this way: "Pray to catch the bus, then run as fast as you can!" It's both. Prayer, listening to our creative souls, Source's life in us, and then do the work.

For this to happen, we are invited to believe we really can catch the bus. Faith, instead of self-doubt. If we learn to think of receiving God's good as being an act of deep connection – cooperating with the Creator to manifest goodness in our lives – we can begin to let go of having to sabotage ourselves. Scarcity thinking is part of the problem. We limit the flow of life in us by anthropomorphizing God, Source, into a capricious parent figure. Letting go of the stingy, always-checking-to-see-if-we're-doing-the-right-thing, idea of God, and embracing the Source of Life, as an Energy Flow that *likes* to extend itself, we become more able to tap our creative power effectively. Listening to our Creative Soul, that image of God in us, we are guided on our path. And we must not predetermine how it shows up for us. "We must learn to let the flow manifest itself where it will – not where we *will* it."

Julia Cameron tells a story. "Cara, a writer, spent far longer than she should remaining in an abusive agent relationship because she thought it would be creative suicide to sever that professional tie. The relationship was plagued with evasions, half-truths, delays. Cara hung in, afraid to let go of her agent's prestige. Finally, after a particularly abusive phone call, Cara wrote a letter severing the relationship. She felt as if she had just jumped into outer space. When her husband came home, she tearfully told him how she

had sabotaged her career. He listened and then said, “A week ago, I was in a bookstore and the owner asked me if you had a good agent. He gave me this woman’s name and number. Call her. She got on the phone and connected immediately to the new agent’s sensibility. They have been working together, very successfully, ever since.”

Creativity, creative soul work, is a spiritual issue. Progress is made by leaps of faith, some small and some large. As the ideas emerge from our creative souls, no matter what fields we’re drawn to, we must in good faith clear away our inner barriers to acting on them, and then on an outer level, take the concrete steps necessary to trigger our synchronous good.

Too good to be true, yes? Then ask yourself what next step you are evading. What dream are you discounting as unlikely or impossible? What payoff are you getting for remaining stuck at this point in your expansion.

Here’s a little exercise to add to your Morning Pages. At night before bed, list the areas in which you need guidance, help. And then in your Morning Pages, write down what comes to you. *Ask for answers* before bed, *look for answers* in the morning. Be open to what you find.

Finding the River

For four weeks now, we have been excavating our consciousness. We’ve noticed how often we think negatively and fearfully, how frightening to believe our creative soul is speaking and we can follow it. We’ve begun to hope, and fear that hope, too. This is a slow shift. With each day we become more true to our creative soul, and more open to the positive. We find we’re able to tell more of our truth, hear more of other people’s truth, and encompass a far more kindly attitude toward both. We are becoming less judgmental of ourselves and others. The Morning Pages, gradually loosen our hold on fixed opinions and short-sighted views. We see that our moods, views, and insights are transitory. We acquire a sense of movement, a current of change in our lives. This current, this river, is a flow of grace moving us into our right livelihood, companions, and destiny.

Let me quote Julia Cameron here. “Dependence on the creator within is really freedom from all other dependencies. Paradoxically, it is also the only route to real intimacy with other human beings. Freed from our terrible fears of abandonment, we are able to live with more spontaneity. Freed from our constant demands for more and more reassurance, our fellows are able to love us back without feeling so burdened.” Listening to our creative soul, we feel safer. And feeling safer, we speak a little louder, “I want to apply for grad school, I want to talk to my boss about changing my job description, I think I want to...”

Creative Soul recovery is the process of finding the river and saying yes to its flow, rapids and eddies. We startle ourselves by saying “Yes” instead of “No” to opportunities. As we pry loose from old self-concepts, we find that our emerging soul may enjoy all kinds of things. By holding lightly to an attitude of gentle exploration, we can begin to lean into creative soul expansion and expression. “No” becomes “Maybe,” “Maybe,” becomes “Why not?!” and our lives open up to the possibilities, and our soul potential is tapped. This attitude is the result of, and leads to, trust.

Have you found that the more you do Morning Pages, the kinder you are to yourself? Feeling less desperate, we are less harsh with ourselves and with others. This compassion is one of the first fruits of aligning our creative soul with its creator.

Julia Cameron: “As we come to trust and love our internal guide, we lose our fear of intimacy because we no longer confuse our intimate others with the higher power we are coming to know. In short, we are learning to give up idolatry – the worshipful dependency

on any person, place, or thing. Instead, we place our dependency on the source itself. The source meets our needs through people, places, and things.” Yes, we must do the footwork, but it rarely pays off in a linear fashion. Julia Cameron says, “Time and again, I have seen a recovering creative do the footwork of becoming internally clear and focused about dreams and delights, take a few outward steps in the direction of the dream – only to have the universe fling open an unsuspected door. One of the central tasks for creative recovery is learning to accept this generosity.”

In 1982, I was feeling a call to ministry, and thought of attending Anderson School of Theology in IN, or Asbury Seminary in KY. Then out of the blue, a friend said, “Tim, have you looked into Princeton Theological Seminary?” My immediate reaction? Too far, too prestigious, too progressive, too intimidating, and surely too expensive. But a seed had been sown. I did some research, and then a weekend opened up for me, so on a whim, I drove to Princeton Theological Seminary in NJ. I arrived unannounced, I made no appointments, I figured I’d just talk with students and professors to get a feel for the place. I had no idea that I arrived on the weekend that the new incoming president was on campus to address the professors, staff, and the student body. I learned way more than I ever expected, was impressed with the range of students from all over the world, and professors took the time to respond to my questions and tell me about the school. It was an unexpected turning point, a gift of generosity by Source.

The Virtue Trap

Our creative souls need downtime, time to do nothing. Protecting our right to such fallow time takes courage, conviction, and resiliency. Such time, space, and quiet will often strike our family and friends as withdrawal from them. It is. But they need it, too. Withdrawal, a time alone, is necessary for our creative souls. Without it we become like caged animals. And from this point in the creative soul recovery process, you might see that before you started the course that’s exactly what you felt like – a caged, cornered animal! Our creative souls need solitude, periods of recharging, space. Our family and friends may respond negatively. At first we can turn our ire on them. “Don’t interrupt my Morning Pages!” Woe to the spouse who doesn’t take the hint, or the child keeps interrupting! But if our warnings are ignored, we turn our ire on ourselves. “I’m gonna kill myself if I don’t get some me time!!” But we want to be virtuous, a good spouse, a good parent, a good friend and family member. And we start to undervalue the creative soul recovery process, and we undervalue ourselves.

Julia Cameron calls this the Virtue Trap. She says, “For many creatives, the belief that they must be nice and worry about what will happen with their friends, family, mate if they dare to do what they really want to constitutes a powerful reason for non-action.” An example: A young father with a serious interest in photography, yearns for a place in the home to pursue his interest. The installation of a modest family darkroom would require dipping into savings and deferring the purchase of a new couch. The darkroom doesn’t get set up but the new couch does.

Many recovering creatives sabotage themselves most frequently by making nice. There is a tremendous cost to such virtue. Many of us have made a virtue out of deprivation. We have embraced a long-suffering creative anorexia as a martyr’s cross. We strive to be good, nice, helpful, unselfish. We genuinely want to be generous, of service, of the world. But what we really want is to be left alone. When we can’t get others to leave us alone, we eventually abandon ourselves. To others we may look like we’re there. We may

act like we're there. But our true self has gone to ground. And we don't bring who we really are to the world.

Afraid to appear selfish, we lose our self. We become self-destructive. Because this self-abandonment is something we do unconsciously, we are blind to its poisonous grip on us. If we cannot bring our creative soul, our true self, to our lives, we are being destructive of our true nature. And if we cannot allow others to do the same thing, we are harming their true nature.

The Virtue Trap is seductive. Bent on being good husbands, fathers, mothers, wives, teachers, colleagues, whatever, we have constructed a false self that looks good to the world and meets with lots of worldly approval. You're praised for being patient, willing to defer your needs to meet the needs or demands of another. And that's hard to give up. Virtuous to a fault, we have buried the true self, our creative soul, the self that didn't get much approval as a child. "Don't be selfish!" Our true selves, our creative soul, can be a disturbing character, healthy and occasionally anarchistic, who knows how to play, how to say no to others and "yes" to itself.

At four years old, Yehudi Menuhin was enraptured by first violinist Louis Persinger, in the Curran Theatre. He asked his parents for a violin and to be taught by Louis Persinger. His wish seemed granted when a family friend bought him a toy violin made of metal with metal strings. He broke into tears, threw it on the ground, and would have nothing to do with it. Yehudi became one of the most accomplished violinists in this country. His creative soul knew early, how to say no to others and yes to itself.

Yes, it can come across as ego. But we must attune our ear to the deeper truths of our creative souls. Our creative soul wants to come to life, and it will announce itself abruptly at times. Don't dismiss those moments out of hand. When you feel selfish, ask yourself, "Is this my soul trying to get my attention?" The example of Joseph in the Bible comes to mind. He shared a dream with his brothers where the brothers were bowing down to him. Ego, ego! They were mad at him, thought he was full of himself, and sold him into slavery to get rid of him. Ingrate! But Joseph's soul knew something deeper about his gifts that would lived into.

We often listen to other people's ideas of what is self-destructive without ever looking at whether their soul, and our soul, have similar needs. Caught in the Virtue Trap, we refuse to ask ourselves, "What are my creative soul's needs? What would I do if it weren't too selfish?" Are we self-destructive, destructive of our creative soul, made in the image of God? This is difficult to answer. It requires that we know something of our true self, and often, that is the true self we have, over time, been systematically ignoring and harming. But let the story of Yehudi and Joseph remind you to listen for and discern what your creative soul needs, and how it shows up in your desires, dreams, and outbursts of what seems like ego, but maybe it's your creative soul.

The Virtue Trap Quiz

Answer these questions in a stream of consciousness fashion. Don't think about it too much, just write down what comes to you.

1. The biggest lack in my life is...
2. The greatest joy in my life is...
3. My largest time commitment is...
4. As I play more, I work...
5. I feel guilty that I am...
6. I worry that...

7. If my dreams come true, my family will...
8. I sabotage myself so people will...
9. If I let myself feel it, I'm angry that I...
10. One reason I get sad sometimes is...

Weekly Tasks: These tasks explore and expand your relationship to Source.

1. The reason I can't believe in a *supportive* God/Universe/Flow is...(list five grievances/reasons)
2. Start an Image File: If I had faith or money I would try... List five desires. For the next week, be on the look out for images of these desires. When you spot them, clip them, download them, print them out, draw them, photograph them, *collect them somehow*. With these images, begin a file of dreams that speak to you. Add to it continually for the duration of the course.
3. Ten ways I am mean to myself are... Just as making the positive explicit helps allow the positive into our lives, making the negative explicit helps us to exorcise the negative.
4. Wish List. Speed writing is a great way to evade the Censor. Speed write twenty responses to "I wish..." Wishes are just wishes, so be frivolous, be outrageous, let your wishes come to the forefront. After you've written twenty wishes, which of them has a note of truth to it. How might you begin to make that wish come true?

Check In:

1. How many days this week did you do your Morning Pages? Are you "liking" your Morning Pages? What are you finding that is valuable by doing the Morning Pages?
2. Did you do your artist date this week? What did you do and how did it feel? Have you done something adventurous yet for your Creative Soul Date? Why or why not? How did it feel?
3. Did you experience any synchronicity this week? What happened?
4. Were there any other issues this week that you consider significant for your soul recovery? Describe them.