

Thrive – 3rd Edition

Creating a Thriving Life
Week Nine – July 12, 2021

Compassion and Enthusiasm

This week we'll take a deeper look at our internal blocks to creativity, and heal some of the shame we have around these issues. We will talk about the importance of correctly identifying what we think is in our way. We'll ask ourselves to name things more precisely. And we will explore the importance of having compassion for ourselves on our creative soul journey.

The Power of Words

Julia Cameron suggests that one of the most important tasks for our creative recovery is to call things – and ourselves – by the right names. Do you remember: *Sticks and stones can break my bones, but words can never hurt me?* We said this when a classmate said something mean. But inside those words cut, especially if they came from our parents or people important to us. *You never finish anything*, was something my Dad used to say to me when I was younger. In my difficult moments, I still hear it in my head. I made a list of the things I've finished, in order for me to say, to the Dad in my head, *I finish all kinds of things*. Maybe more importantly, I say it to me: *Tim, you finish all kinds of things*. Naming things correctly, includes recognizing *what* belongs to *who*. When I look back, my Dad's words were more about *him* than *me*. That distinction gave me more internal freedom.

The word *projection* is important to understand. To a great degree we project our own issues onto other people. Others project their issues onto us. This is a gift if we can see it. It's a way to see our own issues. Jesus' words come to mind. "Why do you see the splinter in your neighbor's eye, but don't see the log in your own eye. Take the log out of your eye first, then you can help your neighbor." The key to this short aphorism is that both splinter and log are made of wood. It is the same issue. For most of my life, I named myself as the culprit: I didn't finish anything. But overtime I began to see this as my father's issue more than mine.

The book, *The Four Agreements*, also speaks to this. The 2nd agreement is "Don't take anything personally." When someone points at us, we might wonder, "What is going on in them?" It doesn't mean there is no truth in what the person is saying about us. There might be a splinter of that issue in us, worth taking a look at. But the image of a log in the eye is hilarious! It suggests strongly that the one who pointed out the splinter in our eye, has a log in their own!

Paulo Friere, a Brazilian educator and philosopher, wrote, *Human existence cannot be silent, nor can it be nourished by false words, but only true words, with which people transform the world. To exist, humanly, is to name the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem and requires of them a new naming. People are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection* (Pedagogy of the Oppressed: 30th Anniversary Edition, p. 149). He also said, *Language is never neutral*. How we name things, ourselves, is important.

The descriptive words and names we use keep us, and others, in boxes. Julia Cameron offers an example. We want to be creative, but struggle to do so. Our problem? We call ourselves *lazy*. *Lazy* is a blanket statement that keeps us stuck. Julia suggests that if we look closer, we are *blocked*. Blocked by regret, self-doubt, grief, jealousy. This is not being *lazy*. It is *fear*. Fear of failure, fear of success, fear of abandonment, fear of being responsible for our lives. It is our fear that produces procrastination, and with enough procrastination we call ourselves lazy.

Fear is what blocks our creative soul. The fear of not being good enough, the fear of not finishing, the fear of beginning at all. There is a cure for fear. The cure is love. We use love for our creative soul to cure our fear. If we can pull back from describing ourselves as lazy, stupid, a failure, broken, we can see more clearly we are scared. Oddly enough, when we can admit our fear, we get below the disabling labels, and find the *courage* to face our fears.

“You Aint Broken,” by John Common.

Life can be so mean and cruel, make you feel like such a fool
Take you back to middle school, lost your way, lost your cool.

You left your heart open wide, someone shoved a knife inside
So you filled the hole with wounded pride, no one knows the scars you hide.

You’re not a lover, you’re not a friend, you won’t ever trust again,
Took your bitter medicine, washed it down with could’ve been’s.

But when you come to something tough, and you don’t think you’re strong enough
Remember...

You aint broken, you aint broken, you aint broken, you’re just scared.
I know you wanna hide, I know you wanna run, but when you wanna run, stay right there,
You aint broken, you’re just scared.

Enthusiasm vs. Discipline

Our creative soul is not a driven, disciplined automaton, exercising sheer willpower, with a bolster of pride to back it up. “Look how disciplined I am!” This is self-will. Our creative souls need enthusiasm more than discipline. Enthusiasm is not just high emotions. It is a commitment, a loving surrender to our creativity and God’s. Enthusiasm means “filled with God.” Enthusiasm is the creative energy of the Creator, in whose image we are made! Enthusiasm is grounded in play, more than work. It is joy, not duty that leads us forward. Our creative souls come to life by treating work as play. We love ourselves by having kindness and compassion for the fear we feel, and by finding what gives us joy. What we are joyful about we will do with enthusiasm.

Creative U-Turns

Our relationship with our fear, is like a roller coaster – up and down, all around. Or sometimes we don’t even get on the roller coaster. That’s when we’re stuck, and usually, there are payoffs for staying stuck. Julia Cameron calls this a “Creative U-Turn.” She puts it this way: “A productive, creative soul, is quite often a *happy* person. This can be very threatening as a self-concept to those who are used to getting their needs met by being *unhappy*.” Saying, “I’d love to try that, but you see, I have these crippling fears...” can get us a lot of attention and sympathy. We can often get more sympathy as *crippled* creative souls than as *functional* ones. Those of us addicted to sympathy in the place of creativity can become increasingly threatened as we move toward

becoming more functional. Many recovering creative souls become so threatened that we make U-turns and sabotage ourselves.

We usually commit creative hara-kiri either on the eve of, or in the wake of, a first creative victory. The glare of success (a song, a business idea that took off, funding came in, the opportunity to work with a mentor, etc.) can send the recovering creative soul back into the cave of self-defeat. We're more comfortable being a victim of creative blocks, than risking having to consistently be productive and healthy.

On January 21, 1997, in the margin on p. 154 in *The Artist's Way*, I wrote, "Is it possible that I seek sympathy through being a creative cripple instead of being a functional artist?" I was on the road to being a painter, and the road got scary. I was facing my own creative soul U-turn.

In dealing with our creative U-turns, we must first extend compassion to ourselves. *Creativity is scary*. Whenever we move toward our creativity, there are U-turns. Sometimes these U-turns are best seen as *let's give it another go*, like when a skittish horse goes around a jump, we circle back around, gathering courage, and give it another try. All creative endeavors have these sorts of U-turns. From her own interviews with creatives of all kinds, Julia Cameron says of successful creatives, "As much as talent, the capacity to avoid or recoup from creative U-turns distinguished their careers." A successful creative life is *always built on successful creative failures*.

Blake Edwards, a well-known director of comedic films, spent seven years not making films after his best script was taken from him, altered by the star actor's wishes, and botched in production. He returned to directing when he concluded that *creativity, not time*, would best heal his creative wounds.

So let us have compassion for ourselves. Creative U-turns are born from fear – fear of success or fear of failure. It doesn't matter which. The net result is the same. To recover from a creative U-turn, or a pattern of many creative U-turns, we must first admit our fear, and do our best to name those fears as clearly as we can.

Our talent, our creativity, is that young and skittish horse. This horse is very talented but it is nervous, inexperienced, or anxious as heck to show what it can do! It will make mistakes, be frightened by obstacles it hasn't seen before. It may even bolt, try to throw us off, feign lameness. Our job, as the creative jockey, is to keep our horse moving forward and to coax it into finishing the course. As good jockeys do, they will slipstream behind an experienced horse. You want to start a nonprofit? Find someone who has done so successfully and build a relationship. You want to get more gigs? Befriend a musician who is playing out regularly. We tend to want to be creative loners rather than ask for help. Faced with our own creative U-turn, ask ourselves, "Who can I ask for help about this U-turn? What did they do to face their fears?" Then ask. And, once we admit the need for help, be on the lookout – help arrives.

Weekly Tasks:

Blasting Through Blocks. To live into our creativity, we must be functionally free of resentment (anger) and resistance (fear). Blocks are seldom mysterious. There is fear beneath them, or there is some payoff we're receiving for staying blocked. Blocks are recognizable creative defenses against what we perceive to be (rightly or wrongly) as a hostile environment. Remember, "You aint broken, you're just scared." Asking ourselves these questions can get us moving:

- a. Ask your creative soul to list any and all fears about the desire or goal before you. Again, it doesn't matter if your fears sound lame. Let yourself see them, recognize them, name them.
- b. Ask yourself if that is all. Have you left out any itsy-bitsy fear? Have you suppressed any "stupid" anger? Get it on the page.

- c. Ask yourself what you stand to gain from *not* going toward your desire or goal. For example, “If I don’t do this, no one can criticize me.”
- d. Make your deal. The deal is: “Okay, Creative Force, Source, God, you take care of the quality, I’ll take care of the quantity.” Sign your deal and post it where you’ll see it.

Read Your Morning Pages. Go back and read through your Morning Pages over the last 8 weeks. Do this with two colored markers, one to highlight insights, and another to highlight actions needed (or do this any way you want!). Do not judge your pages or yourself. This is important. Yes, they might be boring, or painful. But consider them a map. Take them as information, not an indictment.

- a. Take Stock: Who or what have you consistently been complaining about? Where have you procrastinated, taken a U-turn? What have you allowed yourself to change or accept? What steps have you taken toward to desire or goal.
- b. Take Heart: Many of us might notice an alarming tendency to see in our Morning Pages black-and-white thinking: “He’s terrible. He’s wonderful. I love her. I hate her. It’s a great job. It’s a terrible job,” and so forth. Looking back on them now, how might you now name what you felt and thought. Be precise.
- c. Acknowledge: The pages have allowed you to vent without self-destruction, to plan without interference, to complain without audience, to dream without restriction, to know your own mind. Give the Morning Pages credit for the changes and growth they’ve fostered.