



Visions of Creativity

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The most beautiful thing we experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science.

Albert Einstein

A 1974 Togo postage stamp. A portion of a Picasso painting titled Mandolin and Guitar painted 1924.

Creativity can be defined as the process whereby a person creates something new and original. When we think of creativity we naturally think of people such as artists, authors, actors, photographers and filmmakers. However, while there are certainly different types and levels of creativity everyone has the natural inborn ability to be creative no matter what they do. Most of us are creative every day, but we don't realize it. Creativity can be found in a sales person adding a new twist to a sale's pitch, in a financial planner choosing an investment portfolio for a client, in a teacher designing a lecture for their students, or in a cook modifying a favorite recipe. Creativity is an ongoing regenerating experience in all that we do.

Creative people draw upon the flow of inspirational ideas that comes from the depths of their own being. Information obtained from the world around us may provide us with some of the details needed to make real whatever we create, but true creativity precedes manifestation and can only arise from tapping into the unencumbered parts of our minds where images, thoughts and visions come forth naturally in unique and innovative ways and combinations. Many creative people, both ancient and modern, have described this creative flow as an inspirational sensation, much like a flowing stream where their minds naturally surge with unimpeded imagination. Just as one image, idea or vision comes to mind, another follows and soon they merge and form a surge of inspirational ideas.

Creative ideas often come when we least expect it. They just seem to pop into our consciousness from thin air. However, we can't just decide to be creative, and when we feel pressured to be creative due to a deadline or someone's demand, that is when it is least possible to be creative. At such times it is all too easy to get stuck in a non-creative rut and we experience the anxiety and pressure generated by internal self-doubt, judgments or criticisms. When our rational minds intervene in our creative flow and begins to judge, dissect and analyze what we do, creativity stops dead in its tracks. It can only resurface when we relax and allow it to come in its own accord without external or internal pressure. Anxious over thinking and structuring of our thoughts dictated by the rational parts of our mind quashes creativity and is destined for failure. Rather, letting go and allowing whatever comes to mind to arise in our thoughts, without judgment or censorship, is the key to creativity.

Creativity is essentially the inspiration to bring into existence something new, a new solution to a problem, a new method or device, a new artistic object or form. Creative people rely strongly upon what they believe is their intuition. They are able to suspend rational thought and tap into a spacious void, or emptiness or openness within their minds and then wait for the inspirations to flow, trusting they will appear. Many people attempt to describe the source of creativity within their own cultural context. For example, in the South Pacific creativity is ascribed to mana, a word that describes a type of power that emanates from supernatural sources. To them, creativity is seen as a gift from a mystical realm. The ancient Greeks felt that creativity was a gift periodically bestowed upon humankind as a result of supplication to nine special goddesses called Muses. When one received creative inspiration it was said the Gods were visiting or inhering within them the requested gift. Mana, or gifts of the Gods are, of course, a way people have tried to explain the capacity for touching into a mysterious realm within the mind where imagination and inspiration flow.

We all have the ability to be creative and when we are, the experience is something akin to giving birth to new visions. These "illuminations" seem to come out of the blue in the form of mental images in our minds. Once seen, each image in turn generates another image, which in turn generates another and another. Every image or idea that comes to mind is connected to every other image and all are parts of the whole creative package. These visual pictures are the building blocks or pieces for our creative endeavor and once they arrive they can be put together to create the whole.

When approaching a creative project the first task is to form a mental intention for what you want to create. For example, when I lead a workshop, I create the intention to design a wonderful seminar where people experience a shift in some area in their lives where they feel stuck. While it is wise to attempt to sit down and make notes of all of one's ideas, once the intention is made ideas can come at any time. For example, I have ideas pop in my mind while brushing my teeth, walking the dog, cooking dinner and other unexpected times. To be creative we do not need to lock ourselves in a windowless room in isolation and have food shoved under the door. Creative ideas

will come in their own time and in their own way. An architect told me that once she focuses her mind on the intentionality to create, all sorts of ideas come to her as she is driving her car down the freeway. Even though she is concentrating on the road, another part of her mind is actively engaged in generating tons of ideas.

Once all of the ideas and images have arrived, it is time to consider all the options and decide which ideas stay put and which are thrown out as we assemble the final creation. So, placing our intentionality on a creative endeavor, allowing the flow of images to come, considering the options and creating the final result is all part of the creative process.

Images of Darkness and Light:

Images of Darkness and Light is a wonderful imagery exercise for getting the creative juices to flow when one feels stuck. It comes from the body of work of the leading theoretician in the field of Eidetic Image psychology, Dr. Akhter Ahsen. This exercise relaxes one's mind and opens one to the creative flow.

Imagination begins in the dark. Darkness is the primordial source of all creation. It is in darkness that our imagination roams free. When one feels pressured to create or, is self critical or stuck, one can go beyond the ego constraints of their mental and emotional obstruction to a calm, centered place within themselves from whence imagination freely flows. The pressure to be creative at work in order to make money or please our bosses inherently kills our creative imagination. Children are also expected to think resourcefully and produce in the classroom, but many are too nervous or insecure due to the pressure placed on them by critical parents or insensitive teachers, resulting in them tensing up with fear and having their natural learning abilities inhibited. When the creative flow starts to dry up whether, for an adult or a child, there is a diminished ability to trust one's own instincts and ideas; and self esteem plummets. However, the creative block is all a facade. One does not run out of ideas. There is a rich vein of primordial images that are always in our mind and are accessible through putting our inhibitions aside, relaxing, trusting and letting them come. The following Image of Darkness will take you to that source from where your creativity flows.

IMAGE OF DARKNESS

- See yourself in total darkness, descending into a very dark space in which there is no light, a rich darkness, pitch black.
- 2. Feel yourself enveloped in the darkness and let a nourishing feeling of calm pass through you. Relax your body and your mind.
- See that darkness is the source of all creation, that ever thing starts in darkness, it's rich and full, not empty.
- Walk in the darkness, feeling the darkness, getting comfortable with it.
- You can't see in the darkness, so as you walk use your instincts to guide you. Your senses can't help you, so let your feelings and intuition guide you.
- Walk in the darkness, guided by your intuition, with a feeling that you know things intuitively.
- Let your feelings flow as you walk...
- Now reach out and open a window.

- Explore what is beyond the window.
- Breathe freely and explore that place in an active way.
- How do you feel about what you are seeing?

Source: Akhter Ahsen, 1987. "ABC of Imagery." New York, Brandon House, Inc.

Joshua, a 14-year-old boy, told me that he was having difficulty writing papers for school. He could easily complete quick assignments such as math worksheets, but when required to write a long paper with his original thoughts he would get tense and then procrastinate. He said, "I have trouble finding an idea to write about. I sit down to the work, a resistant feeling comes over me and then I procrastinate and distract myself. I start to text friends, get on Facebook, and waste time by eating a lot of snacks. Next thing I know, it is time for bed so, then I hurry up and write anything down that comes to mind. My work is then not very good. I feel like I am not very creative."

I had Joshua go through the steps of the Image of Darkness, and this is what he said:

"As I descend into total darkness and it envelops me, at first I feel neutral. There is no stress. As I continue walking and use my instincts in the dark, a feeling of faith, trust and peace comes over me. I feel good and not threatened in any way. My senses are guiding me. I feel calm and the place I am walking through is relieving. These feelings help me be more relaxed and more comfortable. I now am feeling good being myself. I can do what I want without being threatened, or judged so this darkness is a good and happy place for me."

I then asked Joshua to open a window in the darkness. He said, "I open the window and feel a fresh breeze and I feel a sense of something new and refreshing and open. As I explore what is out of the window, I see there is a clean environment that makes me feel good. I now breathe in the air and as I explore more I realize I can be more free. I can use this space and I value it. This is a place that is fulfilling and it is making me feel good overall."

I asked Joshua to comment on his experience and what he had gained from going through the Image of Darkness. He said, "When I feel free to be myself and I am not judged it is a different feeling than when I am writing a paper. With the image you gave me I feel free and myself. I see myself writing the paper and I feel that no one will judge me. I hold nothing back. As I am writing the paper I don't hold back and I just let it all go. When I am in the dark space being myself I don't find myself resisting by feeling that "I am not going to do that." No one is watching me. I am at peace and I have the space mentally to write it."

Joshua went home and called me that night. He told me that when he sat down to write a paper due for school and his thoughts, ideas and images came through freely. ■



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