

***Sweet Muse, Wherefore Art Thou?\****

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Today, I want to speak about the spiritual and relational aspects of creativity, and the creative muses in lives.

I used to believe that creativity was the domain of select, “gifted” individuals associated with “the arts” – great painters, writers, poets, musicians.

There’s probably a few of us here who’ve had our creative esteem crushed at some point by a person or persons who cavalierly, and perhaps even cruelly dissed our attempts at artistic expression...all it takes really, is one comment like “*What is that supposed to be!?*” or “*Maybe you should only move your lips without actually singing with the others, dear*” ... to pretty much seal one’s resolve to never sing, or draw, or sew, or whatever again.

As adults, we can become even more inhibited.

It breaks my heart that people deny their creativity because they are leery of rejection, ridicule, or being discounted. So they don’t sing, they don’t serve church Boards, they don’t share their one wild and precious lives with others.

I know what it’s like. Turfed out of Miss Petz’ choir in elementary school, it was forty years before I dared to sing in a choir again. You know what? Turns out I *can* sing! I may lack technical skill, can’t read music, but I’ve got a heck of an ear, and what’s more important, I get joy, connection, and deep spiritual satisfaction when I sing. How then, can I keep from singing?!

Sister Corita Kent said creativity belongs to the artist *in each of us*. I am convinced she is correct.

Our “art” is not narrow or confined to a single discipline or profession or form of expression like painting, writing, or weaving... our “art” and ways of creative expression are practically limitless. Creativity is expressed through art, but also in science, sports, engineering, technology, medicine, the humanities, and the tasks of everyday life.

*Living* with purpose requires creativity. The caveat is, we need others in this process to find meaning. Our inspiration to create something is shaped to some degree by the experience and relationships we have with *everything* and *everyone* in our environment, in our lives.

So what is a muse anyway? And how does it tie into the broad concept of “creativity”?

Most of us have a vague notion that a muse is some kind of invisible spirit that dumps creative inspiration into one’s mind.

A genius. A daemon. An independent force in your psyche that directs your creativity, and to which you deliberately hand over ultimate responsibility for your work.

So, the muse, or the spirit says do, and you do? How does this work? How do we “do” with a muse?

In Greek Mythology. The Muses were the nine daughters of Mnemosyne (memory) and Zeus who were seen to bestow artistic gifts and talents in the creative arts and sciences. Each daughter protected a particular area -Thalia for comedy, Calliope - epic poetry, Terpsicore - dance, Urania - astronomy, and so on.

The more modern definition sees the muse as a female spirit or power inspiring poets and artists. It suggests a kind of spiritual medium of Infinite wisdom and boundless possibility working through a human’s creative channel. Gee! Wouldn’t we all like to conjure up one of those when we’re stuck for words, ideas, or solutions.

In the West, the muse or genius model was abandoned around the time of the Renaissance, in favor of a new view: now, instead of *having* geniuses, certain heroic individuals *are* geniuses. With creativity being all on the self, that muse-less, ego-centric perspective kicked off a culture-wide cycle of creative stress and burnout.

The modern view without the muse places too much responsibility on the individual, who feels a constant pressure to reach or live up to impossibly high standards. It leads to the temptation of narcissism, of taking too much credit for success. Perhaps it’s not surprising that post-Renaissance artists earned a reputation as mentally unstable egomaniacs.

Elizabeth Gilbert did a brilliant 2009 TED talk\* devoted to resurrecting the muse/genius model of creativity. She emphasized how the muse model can save a person’s soul by taking away the awful, paralyzing burden of responsibility for the outcome of creative efforts. \*

[http://www.ted.com/talks/elizabeth\\_gilbert\\_on\\_genius](http://www.ted.com/talks/elizabeth_gilbert_on_genius)

We all know that the surest way to block creativity is to force it by insisting that you *must* be creative. What pressure, what weight, what loneliness.

Engaging the muse as one’s co-creative partner, however, requires no small amount of humility...and I think we consider humility a spiritual virtue.

In *The Artist’s Way* – a fine, popular book on creativity– one of the techniques that author Julia Cameron recommends for overcoming creative block and maintaining a state of flow is the practice of gratitude...another spiritual value.

Are you beginning to see how creativity has a clear spiritual dimension?

How can *a muse* or muses help nurture our creative and spiritual lives?

(omitted from presentation on Jan. 8)

A prolific internet writer on creativity and the muse, K. Ferlic\* writes:

*The muse is the manifestation in the physical world of what needs to be experienced in order to manifest what we desire to create. The muse is what draws one forward into the external world.*

*Seeking the muse is the alternative path to enlightenment and unconditional love, for it awakens us to our own true and internal creative abilities. \**

[http://ryuc.info/common/recreating\\_oneself/path\\_of\\_the\\_muse.htm](http://ryuc.info/common/recreating_oneself/path_of_the_muse.htm)

Where do you seek your creative muse (s)?

I believe the muse exists not as a personal, identifiable genius or spirit in our lives, inspiring us to great creative work... rather, I think the muse lives in our relationships, our openness, our passion, our love, our hope, our trust, and our goodness; to receive the muse's genius, we must humbly connect our own ideas, imagination, inspiration to those of beings and sources all around us, past and present. I'd say the muse is the power of liberation that some thing, or some one generates in us so that we feel safe, believe in ourselves, and risk self-expression.

Even when alone, we bring a world and a lifetime into our creations; therefore, we are all *co-creators*; our muses intertwine in these endeavours, in the process of creative interchange which has the potential to lift us up, and bring joy, fulfillment, and well being.

Make no mistake, it can get messy, ugly, intense. Co-creating is not always warm and fuzzy like a movie of the week. Frustration, disagreement, and unwillingness to share our sandbox, or power, or recognition... can make co-creating a little bumpy. To regain equanimity, peace, serenity, we must agree to hold each other accountable. We forgive, we encourage, we affirm, we practice patience, as we try to live in love and continue to co-create.

What does our creativity have to do with spirituality, and ultimate meaning, or God? Today, I want to introduce two significant contemporary theologians who shook things up in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Gordon Kaufman, was a renowned liberal researcher, writer, and professor at Harvard Divinity School who had a profound influence on constructive and systematic theology.

Before you all close your eyes and have a snooze, let me try to convince you of why this is important and interesting and relevant to our UU movement.

What Kaufman did was rework the notion in the bible of God as Creator, to the idea of God as "creativity"... Creativity as a mystery that somehow was involved in the initial coming into being of the universe, in evolutionary processes, and in human symbolic creativity.

The work of scholars like Kaufman, Jerome Stone, and others gave legitimate traction to our movement as it approached the point of consolidation of the Unitarian and Universalists churches in 1960.

With the passing of a resolution at the General Assembly in Syracuse New York that year, the Unitarian Universalist Association was born (and the Canadian Unitarian Council in Canada), and as a result, a new experiment in religious pluralism began. The existing professions of faith – the creedal statements of both the Unitarians and the Universalist church were dropped in favor of a statement of principles and purposes. The seven principles we talk about today, and the broad sources we now draw from, which *include* the bible, but now extend to world religions, literature, art, earth based spirituality, social ethics, humanism, words of great thinkers and leaders, and more. Our theological territory no longer had borders.

Thinking of God as creativity (instead of as The Creator) brought theological values and meanings in sync with modern cosmological and evolutionary thinking.

For Kaufman, the word "God" is the construct we hold in our minds, a construct that has developed over the centuries.

Kaufman thought of God as "ultimate mystery". At the core of this image of God as mystery and serendipitous creativity was Kaufman's deep commitment to nonviolence, justice, and human flourishing.

In the 1920's Alfred North Whitehead, a British mathematician developed a process philosophy to express how we understand the nature of matter in light of science in light of discoveries in physics. From that, Process theology evolved.

Instead of the eternal, omnipotent, God of Creation, Process Theology suggested a God that is not different from all other reality, a God that is not static and unchanging; a God that functions as the lure which draws all things, all persons, all realities toward their ultimate fulfillment and unfolding.

More simply, God is "*that which sustains the processes by which the world is continuously being created.*"

While Gordon Kaufman re-worked the established view of God as Creator to God as serendipitous creativity, another shift in thinking was stirred up by a fellow at Union Theological School.

Henry Nelson Wieman, part of the Chicago school at Union claimed that through the scientific method one could discover "God"—that is God as, *"that creative good which transforms us in ways in which we cannot transform ourselves."*

Wieman sought to clarify the nature and workings of "God," which he defined as *"that Something upon which human life is most dependent for its security, welfare, and increasing abundance."*

His was a naturalistic world-view. In religion, just as in science, said Wieman, there are not two realms of reality, namely, natural and supernatural. There is but one dimension of reality, and it must be studied through the observations of the senses. This does not mean there is no god. For Wieman, God is a natural creative process or structure—superhuman, but not supernatural. He said, *"God is the integrating process at work in the universe.... the growth which springs anew when old forms perish."*

So, Process theology offers one way of thinking about God, as a verb, not a noun. God as process!

Weiman saw part of that process as *creative interchange*, a relationship, a communication on a deep and profound level that went beyond just the human, but not to supernaturalism.

"Creative Interchange occurs when we find one or more people with whom we feel comfortable enough to engage in that kind of interchange which creates in each an awareness of the original experience of the other person."

Creative interchange is a way of integrating diverse perspectives so that people can understand each other, learn from each other, be corrected by each other, form a community with each other, and live in peace with each other.

We are truly co-creators of our lives, never fully in control. We need each other if we are to get through life; in the good times as well as the bad times.

All religions teach of the interconnectedness of all life, and Weiman's "Creative interchange" is one way to describe a way of thinking about it, of acting on it, participating in it. For to be a true participant, one must be willing to give up the charade of ego, must be willing to truly, humbly, deeply share of all that one has, and practice gratitude through it all...

Looking beyond theology, I recently discovered the work of renowned researcher and psychologist, Ellen Langer whose focus is on mindfulness and artistic nature\*. If you have a chance, look at some of her TED Talks. In her book, *On Becoming an Artist: Reinventing Yourself Through Mindful Creativity*, she expresses that creativity is not a rare gift for a special few, but rather an integral part of everyone's makeup. Dr. Langer suggests we often undervalue ourselves and undermine our creativity. \* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4XQUJR4uIGM>

I want to recall Corita Kent's words from the reading earlier.

*“Creativity belongs to the artist in each of us. To create means to relate. The root meaning of the word art is “to fit together” and we all do every day. Not all of us are painters but we are all artists. Each time we fit things together we are creating – whether it is to make a loaf of bread, a child, a day... Nothing is a mistake. There’s no win and no fail, there’s only make.*

Friends, let us be brave co-creators in the work and play of our lives and of this spiritual community. Let us seek the creative genius, the muses within and all around us, that inspire, motivate, illuminate the brilliant masterpieces that await creation. May we be steadfast partners with *God as Wieman described: “that creative good which transforms us in ways in which we cannot transform ourselves”*

May it be so, blessed be. and Amen.

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