

THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING CREATIVE AS A SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

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Many artists describe experiences¹ that seem to arise spontaneously out of the act of creating. These are the experience of receptivity or allowing, the experience of relationship, and the experience of shifts in ordinary awareness.

The experience of receptivity is described as one of allowing or trust, trust(ing) what is coming to do, allow(ing) this fullness of who I am. It is this experience of spontaneous allowing, of letting be, that is felt as spiritual. When I experience this connection with my Higher Self or God...it feels like allowing. When it is flowing well, it becomes a spiritual experience.

There is a sense that, in letting go of one's will or judgment, one can experience another guiding force, or spirit. This can even be experienced as a sense of something other than myself forming the images.

The spontaneous experience of relationship is experienced initially as the artist begins to relate to the brush, the paints, the canvas, the image. This brings an experience of connection that can expand to include a relationship with one's self, nature, others, the Source, or Divine Creation itself. It is the experience of connection that brings one to know a larger more abundant reality, to have a sense of communion, to be connected to the Source. It is this experience of connection, of oneness with a larger world, that is seen as spiritual.

The experience of being creative can bring spontaneous shifts in awareness. These shifts can be felt mentally, emotionally, or physically. They can be sensed as shifts in time, space, or meaning. It is this sense of altered awareness that is seen as spiritual. It is spiritual in that when I am in my best creative mode I am in a different form of consciousness.

Many artists describe the intention to cultivate these spontaneous aspects of the experience of being creative. It is this act of intention that makes being creative a spiritual practice. Being creative as a spiritual practice has less to do with the context within which I am working. It is the intention that my process of painting be a spiritual practice that makes it so. One can cultivate the experience of receptivity by stepping aside and let(ting) the painting happen through me, or go(ing) deeper than the distractions of the day, let(ting) them go and get(ting) to that place of peace. One can cultivate the experience of relationship, by catching it in the moment, by struggl(ing) trying to get connected, by staying with the joy of connection, the pain when the connection is lost, and the search for new

ways to communicate. One can cultivate shifts in consciousness by let(ting) go of the verbal mind and respond(ing) to more subtle inner impulses, by practic(ing) 'seeing' differently. While intention is described as important to the practice of being creative as spiritual practice, there is also an understanding that being creative is inherently spiritual; creative practice...can't help be spiritual by the very nature that creation is the greatest mystery of all. There is an understanding that the act of painting itself brings one spiritual connection; the very process of painting for me involves the stopping of thinking, an expansion of awareness, and a broadening and deepening of consciousness.

Through the ongoing practice of being creative, one begins to have an enduring sense of these experiences of intention/ reception, relationship, and shift in one's sense of self/ life/ world. Intention and receptivity endure. As I grow personally and spiritually I believe my experience of creativity as spiritual practice changes. What remains is intention and desire. Ongoing practice brings an enduring sense of relationship. Staying true to my own necessities of form in the midst of unexpected conditions and overwhelming choices is constantly challenging, a continuing and vital engagement. Out of the momentary shifts in awareness that come with practice, an enduring sense of personal change emerges. The creative act is a transformation of the soul, spirit, and ego. This experience of the enduring is seen as spiritual.

Out of this sense of the ongoing, one begins to experience one's life as a creative and spiritual journey. One begins to see oneself as artist/ messenger, the bridger of worlds, one who is willing to trespass into and across the boundaries. When one is aware of the hunting of oneself through the creative act, then life itself becomes a spiritual practice. One begins to experience one's creative acts, one's life itself as a participation in the creative act of the Divine spirit of which we are all a part.

The experience of being creative leads to spontaneous experiences of receptivity, relationship, and shifts in awareness, which are identified by these artists as aspects of the spiritual. With continuing creative practice and spiritual intention, these spontaneous experiences can become more than momentary; they can become ongoing. Out of this sense of the ongoing, the experience of being creative becomes a spiritual practice. Out of the experience of being creative as a spiritual practice comes an enduring sense of the journey of life as both creative and spiritual.

Notes

- 1) Sunnie D. Kidd and James W. Kidd, *Experiential Method: Qualitative Research in the Humanities Using Metaphysics and Phenomenology* (Bern: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 1990).