
AN ENCOUNTER WITH THE LAWS OF CREATIVITY

by

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In the course of building up my practice as a freelance psychotherapist I have become aware of a phenomenon which I think has some deep and exciting implications which I would like to share. There have been three occasions when I have felt deeply discouraged in my attempts to build up a clientele. The first time this happened was the most stark example of what I want to describe. Despite having done all the 'right things' such as advertising myself in various ways and places and putting out to colleagues and tutors that I was looking for work, I found my small practice was in danger of dwindling. I was tempted to take this as feedback that I was not suited to the work that I was doing or that I was sabotaging myself in some subconscious way - perhaps I secretly did not **want** to be seeing more clients. Either way it felt like a grim and discouraging picture. I became deeply preoccupied with thoughts of finding other sources of income or another profession which gave me a more positive response. I decided at this time to make a last ditch effort, to sort of throw myself at the mercy of one of the senior tutors of my training course and appeal for advice and, more to the point, referrals. I made an appointment to

see him in a week's time (seven days). By the time the appointment had arrived six people had contacted me with a view to becoming clients. (All six of these people actually did become regular clients). Between the time of phoning the tutor and going to meet him, I had done nothing. It seemed to me like a kind of miracle that somehow I was rewarded for all my efforts to find work at the moment I reached a point of desperation, when over a period of months of great effort I had made no apparent progress at all.

These events were very impressive to me, yet they made no real sense within the categories I was using to understand life. I recognised however a similarity to the way certain other events happen - like trying hard to remember the name of a person or of a book, having it there on the tip of my tongue, struggling away without success, then giving up, only to find the name surfacing in my consciousness when my attention had moved on to something else.

I began to notice what seemed to me like a universal law, examples of which seemed to be all around. A woman in one of my partner's dance

classes for example, had tried for many years to get pregnant without success. Each year she would cautiously pay for only one term's classes at a time figuring she did not want to waste a whole year's fees if she needed to drop out because she was pregnant. Finally she gave up hope and symbolised this by paying her whole year's fees in advance. She became pregnant a few weeks later.

Marion Milner writes about her discovery of this kind of experience in her book 'A Life of One's Own'. She learned how not to 'try' when sewing:

"I had been brought up to believe that to try was the only way to overcome difficulty ('Oh Miss Smith, this sum is too difficult'. - 'Well, dear, just try it') and, trying meant frowning, tightening muscles, effort . . . At first I found great difficulty in restraining my head from trying to do my hand's work for it, but whenever I succeeded the results startled me; for at once there came a sense of ease and I was able to work at maximum speed without any effort . . ."

A more exalted example of this principle comes from Peter Caddy, one of the founders of the Findhorn community in Scotland. While serving in the RAF in India he took a two-week trek into the Himalayas in the hope of meeting a spiritual master called Ram Sareek Singh. Each day he visited the 'holy stations' in the area and he sent his servant out to make enquiries, but he could discover nothing about the holy man. At the end of the

expedition he gave up hope. On his final evening in the area when most of the members of his expedition had already fallen asleep, a group of holy men gathered silently outside his bungalow. These men were in turn joined by Ram Sareek Singh himself.

It seemed then that my experience of surrendering and only then receiving the result I was seeking, was widespread and often encountered in a vivid way by people moving toward spiritual goals or personal growth. I wanted next to know how this process worked and whether there was a way of reaching the desired end result without first reaching a point of feeling desperate. I have discovered two writers who address themselves in detail to this subject. The first is John G. Bennett, a follower of Gurdjieff, who wrote a short book called 'Creative Thinking'.

Bennett distinguishes between two aspects of the mind which he calls the 'automatic mind' and the 'creative mind'. The automatic mind operates rather in the manner of a computer. It stores past experience and associations. If we have a problem, it is analysed, compared and associated with our past experience in an attempt to come up with the best solution. It is entirely natural and appropriate to deal with life issues in this way.

But what if we are trying to do something which we have never done before? How can we access information which we have never put in? The solution lies beyond the automatic part of the mind and in what Bennett calls the creative mind. He maintains that in order to

have access to the creative mind, the attention must first be withdrawn from the automatic. It is no good trying harder and harder and becoming more and more preoccupied with looking for a solution when the solution actually goes beyond our present experience. The attempt to try harder and harder is in fact a way of closing off to creativity. In my case I tried until I exhausted myself and gave up. Bennett likens this mental state that I reached, to a vacuum which sucks in a solution from the creative mind.

"The . . . clash of 'must' and 'cannot' . . . produces a vacuum state, a suspension of one's own thinking".

Later he continues:

"With that exhaustion the pressure of the habitual emotional state is diminished and the mind becomes for a moment free. Often in that moment of freedom, the necessary spontaneous vision arises in the mind".

Is there any way of reaching a creative conclusion without first becoming desperate and miserable in the process? Clearly nothing will come of nothing and an effort needs to be made if a result is to be reached, but maybe there is some way of giving up before desperation point and allowing the creativity to do its work?

"There has to be an emotional involvement which produces despair if you do not get the answer, but it cannot be simulated. It is no use pretending to be desperate; if you are not desperate, it does not work".

Bennett however does put forward the idea that this 'mental vacuum' state can be reached in other ways than by desperation. He refers to the Gurdjieff concept of self-remembering, self-observation, or self-consciousness. As I understand this concept, it involves standing apart from one's own experience, separating consciousness from its contents, a kind of meditative state. By entering into this state of what might be called enforced non-involvement, Bennett suggests that you can await the creative solution. He stresses that it is very important to have your attention firmly focused on your goal in order not to settle for anything less than a full solution.

"Something significant is wanted: not just any ideas - these will come anyhow and it is necessary to deny oneself and refuse to take second best".

and:

"If the power of your thought is strong enough to refuse anything but what you are actually determined to have, it will come; that is the nature of this power".

Bennett concludes his book by commenting on what he feels is the nature of this creative force.

*"It is in the nature of creativity that it will not allow itself to be **used** by man. It belongs to a higher lever on the hierarchy of reality than our ordinary human selves, and our place is rather to serve the creative power than to make it serve us. It will do things for us because it is in man's nature, or destiny to be a creative*

factor in the universe. Man is so made that he can be a channel of the creative power, but it is not at his disposal".

Here I feel that Bennett becomes insufficiently clear to be very helpful. He speaks of fulfilling goals through the 'power of your thought' yet also of the creative power not allowing itself to be 'used by man'. He speaks of the 'hierarchy of reality' - presumably he is referring to the body of his and Gurdjieff's writing - but he does not specify what he means or give a reference.

In the area of how this creative 'channeling' might occur, I have found the writings of an American musician called Robert Fritz very illuminating. Fritz's focus is comparable but significantly different to that of Bennett. Bennett's understanding seems to go something like this - you have a problem, you focus on the desired result while cultivating a state of mental detachment or self remembering; a mental vacuum is produced, which draws in a solution.

Fritz's understanding is more like this: you have a problem, you focus on exactly what your problem is **and** you focus on the desired result, you formally choose the result you want, then you 'move on' and occupy your mind with another subject.

Fritz lays little stress on mental detachment or self remembering. It is enough to move on, to read a book or go for a walk. All that is necessary to reach a solution is to withdraw attention from the issue in order to allow room for the creative forces to work. Instead he focuses his attention on the gap between the

'vision' (i.e. the result you want to create) and the 'current reality' (i.e. what you now have). These are the two poles between which there is a 'structural tension'. He maintains that this structural tension will resolve itself naturally, spontaneously and in favour of the vision so long as we allow the tension to exist. The temptation is to look for solutions or to alter our vision to something more 'realistic' and obtainable, to do things which will bridge the gap rather than let the structural tension itself do the work.

*"The discrepancy between current reality and vision is to be **cultivated** not avoided. The discrepancy is of major importance in using structural tension properly".*

In order to reach a creative result, the attention belongs on 'what' you want and not on 'how' to get there. If you focus too much on how rather than what, you reduce the structural tension and deprive yourself of the natural tendency of tension to resolve itself.

"If you attempt prematurely to resolve the tension you have established, you weaken your ability to create the results you want".

What Fritz is describing is a change of orientation to one's own experience - a shift away from a reactive/responsive way of relating to circumstances to a creative way. Problems in life are not necessarily best dealt with by reacting and responding to them, by looking for logical solutions, or by wrestling with each difficulty in turn as you strive toward your goal. This can

actually be a way of **hindering** progress because the focus of energy shifts away from the goal and onto the difficulty. This can lead to stagnation rather than to progress.

The creative orientation is a visionary orientation. It is a seeing of the goal **despite** the apparent impracticality of reaching it. This is not to be confused with idle daydreaming or escapist fantasy because the creative visionary view of life takes full account of current reality. It does not gloss it over. You take full account of the gap between what you have and what you want to create. The focus remains on the goal and not on the way to the goal.

There is an impressive exercise which demonstrates this fact. You put two people in a large room by the wall opposite the door. You instruct one person to walk out of the door and the other person to try to stop them. The person may or may not reach the door but there will be a great deal of energy spent in the struggle between them. You then set the exercise up again, this time telling the person who is trying to reach the door to focus their attention on the door and not to allow it to be distracted by the struggle. The likelihood is that the person will reach the door with minimum effort despite all efforts by the opponant to stop them. Try it.

The path to reaching a goal cannot often be predicted. To focus on a particular path or process limits openness to other possible ways. Not only this but the path can sometimes be downright contradic-

tory to expectations. Sometimes the first necessary step toward reaching a goal can be a large step backwards. Focus on **how** to get there in this case is more than futile. It actually sets up additional barriers. Says Fritz:

"In the creative process, there are times when things fall apart organically. This occurs when the path of least resistance leads to the disintegration of old forms and the spontaneous formation of new ones. Strongly intentioned people are often insensitive to shifts and changes in the organic process. They attempt to impose their control on the natural play of forces".

To refer back to my own experience of trying to build up a clientele, there is one aspect of my experience which I feel neither Bennett nor Fritz had dwelt on sufficiently to satisfy me. How is it to be understood that there is no apparent causal connection between the fact that I 'gave up' trying to find work and that six clients contacted me during the week? I had no personal contact of any kind with these people and so they had no way of knowing that I had 'given up'. Jung would probably call this synchronicity - the two facts are significantly connected, but not by causality. This of course is not an explanation but only a label and a recognition that this kind of experience can exist.

It seems easy enough to accept this on a personal or intra-psychic level. If I give up on an old ineffective maladaptive way of thinking or viewing life, then maybe I am open

to a new effective way. But how can this happen on an interpersonal level? I do not know the answer to this but in conclusion I would like to quote some remarks of R.D. Laing from 'The Politics of Experience' which seem to have relevance here.

"We seem to live in two worlds, and many people are aware only of the 'outer' rump. As long as we remember that the 'inner' world is not some space 'inside' the body or the mind, this way of thinking can serve our purpose . . .

Bertrand Russell once remarked that the stars are in one's brain.

The stars as I perceive them are no more or less in my brain than the stars as I imagine them. I do not imagine them in my head, any more than I see them in my head.

The relation of experience to behaviour is not that of inner to outer. My experience is not inside my head. My experience of this room is out there in the room.

To say that my experience is intra-psychic is to presuppose that there is a psyche for my experience to be in. My psyche is my experience, my experience is my psyche".

References

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