

It is easy for us as individuals to lose track of what we are living for. We get busy doing all the things that have to be done, until we are startled into the reality that life is passing us by and we have not been aware. Now is a time to wake up to a renewed sense of what is important in our life and creative work. There is a great amount of alienation and loneliness today... one of the most important things we have to offer others is a means by which to experience compassion..

With heart and mind open, the artist can make use of works of art to enable his audience to enter a spiritual plane of consciousness and commune with whatever one's interpretation of God or Spirit or Wisdom is. When we connect with God and Spirit and Wisdom, and feel her waters rush over us, our hearts fill with the desire to reach out to others with true compassion. Matthew Fox sees wisdom and creativity as inseparable.

*Wisdom and creativity go together according to our deepest spiritual traditions. Knowledge of itself produces neither creativity nor wisdom. Wisdom has to do with our relationship to the whole, to the cosmos, to nature, to both the feminine and masculine powers of nature.<sup>1</sup>*

As artists, if we ever expect to accomplish anything in this life, we must possess a hopeful, persevering and energetic disposition. Every time we pray or meditate or find our spiritual center, we engage in a renaissance of the mystery and commune with Sophia, who comes

from a whisper deep in our souls, commanding us to join a “*community of spiritually creative people that is global,*” according to Allyson Grey.

During our New York Intensive, Allyson also told us to produce works of art that would “*leave a record that we were here, and we made a difference.*”

Through a journey to a spiritual dimension initiated by an interaction with works of art born of compassion, we realize that we too must engage in a conscious effort to move toward a more compassionate and peaceful world, and “to make a difference.” There is a spiritual energy flowing from the beginning of the beginning, and mystic artist Alex Grey believes “***we are expressions of this spiritual energy.***” We need to see ourselves as vehicles of compassion and relate to this “***great community of the universe***” in a way that is a reflection of that infinite compassion..

There is a Buddhist story about a poor man living in a shack, and beneath his home is an inexhaustible vein of gold. Because the man is ignorant of this wealth, he remains in poverty. If he would only attend to his own dwelling, he would likely discover this hidden wealth. In a sense, this is the mission of the artist who wishes to realize his own ability and bring compassion to his work and his audience. The artist needs to unveil his true artistic nature, and there discover a wonderful source of wisdom, compassion, and power to bring his artistic vision to bear on the world

At our Intensive, Alex Grey told us that we must “**rethink the way we see the world and open up a more loving attitude toward the web of life**” and that we must “**surrender to love, God’s secret name.**”

If one wishes to be an artist, and loves his or her work, an amazing reservoir of creativity will open its doors.

*Someone once asked George Washington Carver how he discovered so many different uses for the peanut. “Whatever you love opens its secrets to you,” the great inventor replied.<sup>2</sup>*

Once the secrets are opened to us, Alex Grey tells us to “**transcend our rational, conceptual minds and get ready to transcend the great mystery.**”

One needs to have confidence in one’s own spirituality and artistic ability to share that “great mystery” in a unique, meaningful way. One should not try to replicate the artistic vision or works of others, but rather trust their own inner wisdom for inspiration. The mind must be empty and open when approaching a blank canvas. Alex Grey tells us that in our creative process, “**we are receiving information on a scale beyond our ability to process.**” There may be some “plan” as to what is about to unfold in the creative process, but there is no predicting what will happen once brush meets canvas.

Grey says that for the artist, “**the creative act must be in alignment with their soul’s mission,**” and part of that mission is to “**align your creativity with a spiritual source and receive creative energies from**

**a higher source.**” If one is passionate about their work, and is completely open to receiving “*the secrets*” from these higher realms, the ensuing process will be both fresh and spontaneous.

Matthew Fox offers the following reflection of Aquinas on the creative process bringing forth the Holy Spirit, “*The same Spirit who hovered over the waters at the beginning of creation hovers over the mind of the artist at work.*” In bringing forth the Holy Spirit in artistic endeavors, the artist must ask several questions, according to Alex Grey... **“What can I infuse with vitality that will inspire and serve others?” “Is there love hovering around it?” “Do I love it?” “Is it evolving my body of work?” “Does it further extend me as an artist or a person from where I am now ethically and aesthetically?”**

These questions are similar to those asked by students of the Dharma, whether by a teacher, or through introspection. Artistic expression and meditation practice are similar in many respects. An artist stares at a canvas or a lump of clay and begins a journey into the unknown, hoping to create an original expression of their being, while risking that they may produce a work of art similar to works of others they have seen or studied. A person who sits in meditation could end up pondering the words of one of his teachers or someone he has studied.

*There is nothing wrong with such responses. But we recognize their secondary nature, their failure to reach the peaks of primary*

*imaginative creation. Great Art and Great Dharma both give rise to something that has never quite been imagined before. Artist and meditator alike ultimately aspire to an original creative act.*<sup>3</sup>

The artist, like the person who meditates, must try to transcend their ordinary “regular reality” consciousness to explore the depths of creativity and compassion. One needs to remove oneself from the ordinary, mundane thinking process and enter a spiritual realm in which one communes with the creative visionary thinking process. This is only possible through a meditative practice, or artistic endeavor. The process itself is not the end product, but rather a means by which the artist can change the mind’s ability to pursue their creative consciousness, and see a different reality, one that they can transfer to some form that can be shared with their audience, and a form that moves that audience toward a more compassionate vision.

The artist who is successful in opening to the mystery inherent in each moment will manifest a transformation of understanding that will then free the energy of compassion within. Compassion will be the natural product of an artistic expression born of the depths of the soul of the artist, where the artist is in touch not only with his own, innate spirituality, but the spirituality inherent in other people, and the rest of the Universe.

We must strive to develop a “spiritual resonance” of wisdom and compassion which emanates from ourselves to others on our spiritual journeys.

*His Holiness the Dalia Lama believes “Everything starts with us, with each of us. The indispensable qualities are peace of mind and compassion. We can reject every form of religion, but we can’t reject and cast off compassion and peace of mind.”<sup>4</sup>*

Hildegard of Bingen reminds us, “*There is wisdom in all creative works.*”<sup>5</sup>

How to create artistic expressions that are an embodiment of wisdom and compassion is the greatest challenge faced by an artist. Matthew Fox believes this blend is essential to commune with one another through our artistic endeavors.,

*Wisdom and compassion; compassion and wisdom: wouldn’t such energy revitalize Western religion and civilization, forge new links with non-Western traditions, create gentler and more dialectical relationships to earth, to body, to pleasure, to work, to the artist within and among us? God as mother, as Julian insists, is “all wisdom.”<sup>6</sup>*

Any artistic creation is similar to meditation practice, and an artist cannot rush the process of creating meaningful works. At our Intensive, Alex Grey allowed us in his studio, and we were able to see one of his “works in progress.” This work may be years in the making, but length of time to create an artistic expression drawn from the inner depths of the soul that enables others to experience a deepening of their own spirituality, as well as a sense of the love and compassion needed to produce such a work, is unimportant. Joseph Goldstein speaks to this premise in his book *Insight Meditation*.

*Munindra-ji used to say that in spiritual practice, time is not a factor. Practice cannot be measured in time, so let go of the whole notion of*

*when and how long. The practice is a process unfolding, and it unfolds in its own time. It is like the flowers that grow in the spring. Do you pull them up to make them grow faster? ... we do not need any particular length of time for this process of letting things be.*<sup>7</sup>

Stilling the mind and furthering one's artistic practice through silent communion is essential. The life of contemplation is inextricably interwoven with the life of compassion. The fruit of solitude is increased sensitivity and compassion for others. This is the very essence of *via Creativa*. Many search for the path to mental and emotional equilibrium, a balance of wisdom and compassion. Our goal should be clear, to create and maintain a constant relationship with the "mystery of the now," where one might experience a communion with compassion.

If an artist wishes to be in communion with the mystery, or Spirit, one of the best ways to do so is through meditation. Our mission is to dwell in love, compassion and Spirit, not merely remove ourselves from it through our thought process, only to pay an occasional visit. To dwell in love, compassion and Spirit means taking up residence there. It is through opening ourselves to inner wisdom that we make this journey.

*We could call this final period of the right of passage...something Like the "reaping of wisdom." ...There is no thin mental understanding that the initiate is reaping. It is the getting of wisdom, the knowing that comes from the core of the Mystery. The more open one is, the*

*deeper the potential for experiencing the truth. A greater altruism, a deeper compassion, and fuller trust in life itself are the fruits that seem to come as people go through this process.*<sup>8</sup>

From the core of mystery, the artist realizes, as Alex Grey said during our Intensive, that “**art is a reflection of universal consciousness,**” and that we are “**the same ocean of pranic energy.**” Grey speaks of the “**one layer of sacred interconnectedness**” that births a “**void clear light from which everything emerges.**” This is the clear light from which our artistic vision is translated to canvas. We simply need to unveil that which has been birthed in our creative consciousness.

*A wonderful painting is the result of the feeling in your fingers. If you have the feeling of the thickness of the ink in your brush, the painting is already there before you paint. When you dip your brush into the ink you already know the result of your drawing, or else you cannot paint. So before you do something, “being” is there, the result is there.*<sup>9</sup>

It is important that the artist arrive at a balance with their creative expressions, a blend of wisdom and compassion, one might say. For regardless of the intent of the artist, the purpose must be for an artistic expression to move his or her audience, and the world, toward compassion. This, too, is the very essence of *via Creativa*, and the precursor to a spiritual transformation for both artist and audience. *The Sufis have a saying, “Praise Allah, and tie your camel to the post.” This brings together both parts of practice: pray, yes, but also make sure you do what is necessary in the world. Have a life of meditation*

*and genuine spiritual experience and, at the same time, discover how to manifest that here and now.<sup>10</sup>*

The artist whose purpose is to produce an expression born of compassion and wisdom that will lead others on toward that same realization is truly enlightened. Their work becomes a teaching tool, like any good dharma. The artist moves from being an “*enlightened being*” to a more expansive role, that of “*enlightening being*.” I offer this description of that role from *The Flower Ornament Scripture*,

*Enlightening beings are like lotus flowers,  
With roots of kindness, stems of peace,  
Petals of wisdom,  
Fragrance of conduct.  
Enlightening beings turn the wheel of teaching  
Just like what the Buddhas turn;  
Conduct is its hub, concentration the spokes;  
Knowledge is their adornment, wisdom is their sword.<sup>11</sup>*

I see works of art as a visual representation of energy. A painting may serve as a conduit for life-force energy. It is most important that the artist is to bring to his audience an awareness of the interconnectedness of everything in our cosmos, and to bring them to an awareness of the compassion that fills our universe.

If an artist can realize this goal, he has the ability to rediscover religious mysticism, and discover great wonder and unveil incredible mystery on a moment by moment basis. The artist must move toward

a sense of wholeness where his work incorporates energies that support and sustain our spiritual journeys.

When an artist approaches a blank canvas, he draws from imagination, mystery, Spirit, or a myriad of other inspirations to **“speak to the soul of humanity”** as Alex Grey says. Grey believes that **“art we view and make can transform us.”** He says the artist must draw from the **“eye of the intellect”** and the **“eye of the spirit,”** and that **“the artist needs to open as many eyes as possible when working.”** And from what boundless source is the artist to draw his or her inspiration?

Grey offers the following observation from Kandinsky in *Sacred Mirrors*: *“The artist must not only train his eye but also his soul, so that it can weigh colors in its own scale and thus become a determinant in artistic creation.”*<sup>12</sup>

Master Seppo was one of the great masters of Zen who lived about 850 c.e. in China. Seppo had this observation about the boundless source, which describes eloquently the creative vision of the artist...

*“All this universe is in this eye of mine.”*<sup>13</sup>

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1 Fox, M. (2002). Creativity: Where the Divine and the Human Meet. New York, NY, Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, p. 98.

2 Ray, P. H. and S. R. Anderson (2000). The Cultural Creatives: How 50 Million People Are Changing The World. New York City, NY, Harmony Books, p. 242.

- 3 Smith, Jean, Ed., (1997). Everyday Mind: 366 Reflections on the Buddhist Path. New York City, NY, Riverhead Books, January 20.
- 4 Fox, M. (2000). Original Blessing. New York, New York, Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, P. 366 2
- 5 Fox, Creativity: Where the Divine and the Human Meet, p. 67.
- 6 Fox, Original Blessing, p. 25.
- 7 Smith, January 12.
- <sup>8</sup> Ray, P.H. and S.R. Anderson, p. 285.
- 9 Smith, November 11.
- 10 Ibid., May 25.
11. Ibid., September 14.
- 12 Grey, A. (1990). Sacred Mirrors: The Visionary Art of Alex Grey. Rochester, Vermont, Inner Traditions International, p. 13.
- 13 Baran, J. (2003). 365 Nirvana: here and now. Hammersmith, London, England, Element, p. 174.

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