

Chapter Eleven

CREATIVITY IV

Our essential nature is not personal. Neither time nor age nor the cynicism or bitterness of others can harm the love-fire that gives life to music, painting, sculpture, and rapture in all of its forms. That within you and me which sings its song of beauty, and needs to be realized in our daily lives, is the spirit-life.

LU

The gap between completion of one phase and the new beginning of another can be daunting, but if we retain courage and intelligence, we see that life itself never stops and there are always options. Always.

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SL The Money Question

As for "pride," no person of artistic commitment need feel humiliated about needing money, or not having enough to spend on non-essentials — your commitment is to far loftier goals. As artists, you and perhaps your husband as well, already pay a hefty price to a society that values greed more than service, material gain more than creativity, taking and hoarding more than producing beauty and sharing it.

The non-competitive, creative, gentle ones of this world constitute humanity's only beauty and its only hope for a better world. They lead the way, even as you do, and need not feel ashamed because they live surrounded by a mendacious low-life society that to this day remains the same avaricious and hard-hearted society as Van Gogh's. Better to use one's money to buy paints and canvases rather than coffins. As Jesus said, "Let the dead bury the dead. Come follow me." That doesn't mean into Christianity; it means into an awakened state of enlightened consciousness. . . .

You two live quiet lives given to nature's serenity; you have sensitive minds, hearts and souls; your calling involves love, kindness, happiness, bright-light moments of joy (that can be expanded into a way of daily life, given the right conditions). The rest of the world — the world of George Bush, Christians/Muslims, and your husband's power-tripping brothers — is best evaded and ignored. You and J have a calling for a much higher way of life. Love, creativity, gentleness, and walks by the ocean are very much a part of it. This way of life needs to be nourished and protected. Cleaning the house with love in your heart and a quiet mind is worth everything.

Feel no shame about money. Live for love, beauty and creativity.

SL The Spirit-Life: Joy is the Only Truth

Sometimes in the night, even when all around us is going well, or even when it is not going well, there are times when it feels good to reach out to one who sees and knows the person we truly are.

Through our e-mails across the ocean, you and I exist without bodies, without daily miseries, without other people praising or condemning us. You and I exist within a pure realm, where our hearts sing in all their beauty. Yearning, yes. Anger, yes, Frustration, joy in little things, great fulsome ideas, sweet little things in the garden, the way the wind bends the reeds, the way a breeze caresses the waters. And, yes, there in these sweet moments we can be who we truly are.

Let the mad world assault our innocent eyes and hurt us. Let misery and insanity speak its mind. Let those whose pain and confusion desire only our own misery pierce our vision and penetrate our hearts. It doesn't matter. Our hearts are strong enough to absorb and endure. Let them cast their stones and do whatever they must to kill creativity's spirit. Our love of beauty has a power all its own. There is nothing that can destroy who we are. Our essential nature is not personal. Neither time nor age nor the cynicism or bitterness of others can harm the love-fire that gives life to music, painting, sculpture, and rapture in all of its forms. That within you and me which sings its song of beauty and needs to be realized in our daily lives is the spirit-life. That spirit-life in melody, in a smile, a glance, a color splashed across a canvas or embodied in a free-flying melody, is the creative spirit that infuses the universe, including you, including me.

You and I, dear S, have, finally, only one true song: touch with love the living creatures in our garden; gently rescue the mouse from the cat (whose being is only its innocent nature, not malice); rise above the misery of our parents and the indifference and well-meaning incomprehension of those who would love us but cannot ascend to the madness and majestic ecstasy we know in our writing and gardening and ocean walks, and in our painting, sculpting, and transcendent music.

John McLaughlin, one of your own great guitarists, once said to me in an interview, "What else can you do? Follow your heart." He said it in a quiet hotel room where we talked. But he meant follow your heart with your song, with your painting, with your writing, on stage, or in a lonely room — follow your vision.

Fear is the great blockade. Fear of failure. Worse, fear of success and our inadequacy in the face of it. Fear of loss, abandonment. Fear of misunderstanding. Fear of those who envy and criticize us. All of it, in its multitude of forms, is a way of testing the creative spirit. That spirit needs only our assent. Give it our assent, and we give it wings.

There is no reason to stop. No reason to doubt ourselves during those times in which the energy leaves us. There is no reason whatsoever to abandon that within us which is, in fact, greater than us. The beauty we bring to humanity through our art is infinitely more important than our personal depressions, our personal fears, our personal sense of inadequacy. Our only duty, our highest meaning in life, is to give to ourselves and others the sense of what it means to swim with the seals, to hold a wounded bird in our hands, to release the golden fairies to the wind, to go blind with ecstatic cumming in the ecstasy of life private, personal, public, social — in every way we can.

Joy is the only truth. Depression is only a pause, in which the wellsprings of creativity renew themselves.

Let us take time, a moment's rest in early morning's sunrise. Let us embrace these insights as our own. Gather strength each day. Shed the miseries of others like water from our creative feathers. Refuse to let them conquer us. Do whatever we can and whatever we need to in order to let our spirit fly into the air like the very birds we see sweeping across the waves and rising on the wind.

And so, my friend, I sing to you in this night.

One of my favorite painters — Albert Pinkham Ryder. Check him out!

DS Action dispels doubt; vision generates interest; interest sustains action

Terrific observations on creativity and the link with family activity/stability. I think you put your finger on a vital point: the contrast between impulse/momentum and steadiness/focus. Both are needed for creativity (or family, in your case), and balance is the key.

First, impulse/momentum to generate energy, ideas, and the "clay" (content) you'll be working with. Then, steadiness/focus to shape, mold, and polish the clay into form. Neither works without the other. Each works beautifully in harmony *with* the other.

Impulse: focus. Momentum: steadiness. Sounds to me like you've got a good understanding of it.

Motivation precedes both. When in doubt (the mind doubts) take action (the heart leaps). Once you leap into the fray, your mind will serve the heart's vision, yes? All works well. Action dispels doubt; vision generates interest; interest sustains action — at which point, you're off to the races!

SL From Influence Into Originality

I think ol' Albert P. Ryder welcomes you and your enthusiastic appreciation with immense pleasure. He was a lonely fellow, I rather imagine, eccentric and moody, and certainly one of a kind as an artist. He needed a friend then, even as he can use a friend, companion, and fellow traveler now. He would be delighted to know that

his images are awakening in you a sympathetic vibration, generating new energy almost a hundred years since his demise (only a couple of weeks after his 70th birthday).

You are not plagiarizing when you feel his influence. To the contrary, you are tapping into the same or similar energies he tapped into. Even as he qualified those energies with his own personality and gave them to the canvas, so you can and should do the same. The energy he tapped into, that you tap into now, will express itself, not in his way, through *his* personality, but in your way, through *your own* personality. We all have teachers or guides. Absorb his images, emotional vibration, psychological intensity, and sense of color and mood (which is the same as yours, which is why you are responding to him so intensely). You are, in effect, learning about yourself as you bring him into your heart/mind/soul.

Then close your eyes, see what you see, and begin to paint, knowing he is with you as a friend and confidant. From your experience of him and his work, you can springboard directly from him into your own unique domain and paint from there. It may begin as one of his images or a part of one or a suggestion of one, but as you improvise (even as I do in music), everything will transmute into your own voice and your own vision. Trust that impulse — from influence to its transmutation into originality — and all will be well.

Indeed, jump in with both feet, a joyful heart, and all your paints and brushes! Go for it with joy and love, without fear or hesitation, and give yourself over to the process with passion and conviction. It is yours for the taking AND for the giving! Every creative gesture brings more light, love, and laughter into our reeling world.

To enliven your journey, maybe go take a re-read of my little prose poem, "Listening Song." Even as Albert Pinkham Ryder may be your helper, inspiring you to take the leap into the sky of your own mind-heart, so Odysseus was mine.

SL

One More Time?

Am back to the sense that I should return to the recording studio before I burn out. Because of shaky egoic strength, that thought requires all the fortitude I've talked about in previous letters. There is the steady inner pressure to fulfill my responsibility to the music, and yes, to myself and to whatever listeners the music might manage to attract and nourish.

It is only egoic weakness that makes me balk — fear of inconsistency, inability to attain the heights, debilitating self-consciousness, merely partial success in mind-state/feeling-state performances, or — gasp! — abject failure. Those fears would reduce me to hapless inertia if I allowed them full sway. If I were to do that, I know I would regret it for the rest of my life.

Hence, the intensifying sense that sooner or later one inevitably burns out. I can't simply keep dreaming about recording and remain satisfied with the egoic power that dreams generate. More accurately, I don't want to remain in a deluded zone until there's nothing left but ashes and memories of how great the music once was.

So. . . this year may be the time, the place, the year that brings forth perhaps my ultimate and final song. Perhaps not final; perhaps just one of many.

SL

Creativity and Facing One's Limitations

I feel good that I recently had courage enough to go into the studio, sit at the piano, face myself, confront my limitations, and give it a go.

I had hoped for more than I could attain, but as I pointed out in *Blue Melody*, there is forever a gap in artistic endeavors between vision and attainment. It is one of the most depressing backlash realities of the creative effort, perhaps not for all, but certainly for myself. I know Da Vinci talked about the same thing. And for that matter, so did Jack Kerouac [see the chapter on Control & Acceptance]. Knowing this does not make me feel much better.

In anything I do, when I am forced to confront my limitations, they pain me deeply, not merely because of egoic considerations, but because the work itself falls short. My greatest regret in life is my lack of genius. That lacking is profoundly depressing, even though I am aware that the reaction of depression is a kind of crime against the best in one's self. Regret and depression of this kind is an absolutely futile combination of neurotic comparisons and self-indulgent vanity. Depressing or not, creative limitation is something that must be acknowledged, accepted, integrated and transcended.

The acceptance part involves giving one's self credit for taking the leap, for making the effort in the first place, and for giving it the best one could in that particular moment at that particular time in one's life. Self-acceptance and self-appreciation are essential for mental health and creative energy. Self-criticism is a subtle form of arrogance, whereas patting one's self on the back is a form of well-deserved praise, encouragement, and psycho-spiritual nourishment. Not always easy to get to that, but it is profoundly important.

For myself, the only transgression is wasting time through fear, regret, and self-condemnation. Sometimes that cannot be helped, of course. I know that well. But in that case, love and compassion are in order, not more self-condemnation, which leads only to more fear, more doubt, and more regret. Taking one's self to a good therapist, as I did at one time, can be the greatest favor one can ever do for one's mental health, emotional well being, and creative realization.

For me, my novel *Diamondfire* and this second CD, *Gathering Light*, for better or worse feel like my last efforts. Wish they were better, but, hey, creativity always reaches as high as it can, until it envisions a height it simply cannot quite touch.

Potentially, there is no end to evolutionary growth. And so we keep growing until we fulfill our potential — or give up — at which time we create the opportunity to generate new and different visions that spark off new and different energies. Maybe they lead in new and different directions too.

The gap between completion of one phase and the new beginning of another can be daunting, but if we retain courage and intelligence, we see that life itself never stops and there are always options. Always.

We are forever free, even when we think we are in bondage to circumstances or to our past; and that very freedom gives us choice and responsibility. Hard to remember if one falls into the pit of depression, regret or fear; easy to remember if one chooses to open the right kind of book or listen to certain kinds of music or generate enough energy and initiative to talk to the right kind of person.

Anyway, I feel good about taking care of Sonia's material future, getting the web site done, writing *Diamondfire*, and recording this second solo piano CD. If there's more gas left in the tank, well and good. If not, that's okay too. I've done the best I can.

Nothing much to brag about in terms of results, but there's a beautiful photograph here and there, an impassioned poem once in a while, a meaningful letter now and then, two or three lovely recorded melodies (and dozens of magnificent living room piano improvisations that have flown up into the air and gone, absorbed by

whomever has been present, sometimes only me and Sonia, at other times a few friends).

I am grateful for all that has happened, for all that I am, and for all who have been willing to appreciatively receive my efforts and perhaps find a little value in them.

O **My Private Wincing**

When I confided to you that I felt myself coming up short in the genius department, I suppose I should have also qualified a little more clearly what I meant.

When you go back and read my Bio, take note of what I have said and done since my days with Tim Buckley. Indeed, I did a great deal with Tim, and am most well known among Tim fans as his guitarist and good friend. Tim valued my insights, which was flattering. And in writing *Blue Melody* I felt as if I created a book which honored him and his life and work and lived up to his view of me, even as I lived up to myself and my high ideals in writing it.

Outside of the Tim context, many others have given me high praise in other domains. As a music journalist with *Down Beat* and other magazines, I was regarded internationally as a world-class listener, interviewer, and writer, first in the jazz field, then in the New Age and Spacemusic fields. Flutist Paul Horn chose me to help him write his autobiography, *Inside Paul Horn*, and gave me high praises. As a photographer — well, you enjoyed some of my photos when you checked my site.

As a poet here in California, I traveled widely, giving highly entertaining readings. And now, as a pianist and poet, I've been enjoying rather extraordinary praises from a number of talented, accomplished, and very bright people. One of the best and

brightest among them recently called me “unfathomably brilliant,” which again is flattering, and is in accord with numerous enthusiastic responses I’ve received throughout the course of the past 35-plus years since Tim.

So in that sense, in terms of creative service to others and some of the wonderful connections I have established throughout the course of the years, I feel quite pleased. It is nice to know that there are those who appreciate me and my various talents and my multiple creative efforts. Not a huge audience, not a million or ten million receivers around the globe, but a few, and they are the receivers I have tried to reach. So I feel good about that.

My private wincing, which I have not shared with others except Sonia, comes from the recognition that I am not at the same level as the Everests of consciousness: Buddha, Jesus, Lao Tzu, Krishnamurti, Osho, Ken Wilber and a number of others of that caliber. No matter how deeply I penetrate into the complexities of human nature, no matter how clearly I see into myself and the human mind, and no matter how well I may articulate my insights, I will never find a place among those luminaries.

Same thing with poets and novelists: Shakespeare, Whitman, Blake, Dylan Thomas, Goethe, Dostoyevsky, Joyce, Faulkner, Kerouac, Hesse, et. al. I deeply and profoundly appreciate these people, see what they accomplished, understand the depths and heights of their brilliance, empathize with their struggles, respect their enormous contributions to humanity — but I will never be one of them. No amount of yearning or work will get me there.

In a way, it is a silly regret, even arrogant and petty and rather stupid in its adolescent whining about something that is as factual and unalterable as a stone, or a sand dune, or an ocean wave. It just is. What difference does it make? The immortals are who they are. I am who I am. We all do whatever we can, the best way we can. The kind of regret I feel is as futile as it is shamefully narcissistic and unenlightened. So I set it aside, don’t fret about it very often or very much, and just

move along, giving and sharing as much as I can in the most aesthetically musical ways I can manage — music in everything I say and do.

Thank you so much for helping me work my way through these things.

SL Remembering This Sacred Living Now

The late great country singer Waylon Jennings recorded a wonderful Jimmy Webb song in which he sings, "If you see me getting smaller, don't worry, I'm in no hurry. . ." I suppose I can say the same. Don't worry about my various passing moods. I'm not disappearing into a vacuum, and even if/when I do, it won't be because I'm calling a halt to certain things. In fact, I'm calling a halt to various ways of being and doing simply because I have explored, created, and soared to whatever heights I could attain in their respective contexts.

With music, for example, I've flown as high as I could — in the living room, on stage in live performances, in the recording studio. Same thing with writing. Having done so for many years, these are some of those things that have completed themselves. There are others, and it's okay.

All of us do as well as we can, take it as far and as high as we can, and do it for as long as there is something left to do. When there is nothing left, it's done. That's all. Kind of simple, actually. If I have regrets, they have nothing to do with what I was able to do, only with not attaining what I had envisioned and hoped for. Sometimes that gap between the dream and its fulfillment gnaws at me in the night. However, I'm aware that letting go of self-induced suffering is one of life's greatest challenges. Knowing that, I continue liberating myself from the vanity of useless negativity. The process has to do with attention, awareness, acceptance, and remembering this sacred living Now.

I speak only for myself. All of us have to face ourselves every day. How we cope with what we find indicates the degree of love, compassion and consciousness we have attained. It's a personal matter and varies from person to person. It involves the degree to which we recognize that we are individuals, yes, but we are also individuals having a universal experience. That's what our life is. The quality of it depends on the degree to which we awaken to it and come know it as a living reality. In essence, that's what enlightenment is.

And so I keep on keepin' on, moving onward and upward as well as I can, learning how to accept limitations I would never have known if I had not done everything I could to grab the brass ring on the merry-go-round *each time around*. At the moment, self-acceptance is a bit problematic, but, as I say, the liberation process continues.

Enlightened masters like Buddha, Jesus, Osho, and Krishnamurti, or artists like Van Gogh and Rodin and Miro, or musicians like Bach, Chopin, Glenn Gould — or Tim or Miles Davis or Keith Jarrett — all had what it takes; they all succeeded in grabbing the brass ring as they passed by. Some do, some don't. I yearned to enter that pantheon as a brother and a friend, and took it as far as I could. Did okay here and there. Glad I did what I could. Wish I had done more. Acceptance and compassion are important.

In the long haul, all of us do the best we can with whatever talent, intelligence, and skills we have. When we depart, we leave behind whatever beauty and wisdom we have managed to generate. Then those who follow aspire, create, share, and vanish, leaving behind their offerings just as we did. Life is beautiful this way — exciting, uplifting, poignant, and immensely creative in all of its multifarious expressions.

AS The Last Hurrah: Dropping Identities

You asked why *Gathering Light* is my third and final offering. Wonderful question.

I'm at a new stage in life. Have explored to the hilt everything I have ever been interested in. That's a good feeling, because I'm not sitting around wishing I had done this or that. Somebody once told me, "You regret only the things you didn't do." Well, I've made some mistakes and have regrets about a few of those ("I should have taken this turn instead of that one"), but I feel good with the fact that at least I have given my totality to whatever the interest, direction or passion was at the time, mistakes or successes being simply by-products of well-intended actions in domains I found interesting, attractive or exciting for one reason or another.

As a result, I am cleaning house, so to speak. Am dropping identities. That is, I know myself now, and I know my limitations. I've taken each of my interests and passions as high as my capabilities and labors were able to soar, and that feels good. In each case — writing, reading, listening, playing, various other passions — I've been to the top of whichever mountain I was climbing. And in each case, I reached a height beyond which I could see but not attain, a height I could envision and almost touch, but not express in its totality.

That state is double-edged: On the one hand, Great, I did the best I could, and I can sleep well knowing that. On the other hand, the best I could has rarely if ever matched the most I envisioned and aspired to. Even Leonardo Da Vinci felt that way. "I have offended God and mankind because my work didn't reach the quality it should have."

That "should have" part, that gap between the vision and the expression, comes with the territory. Every artist knows it, I suppose, and for most of the artist's lifetime, that continual aspiration to attain those heights-beyond serves as a creative

springboard: More, better, higher. More, still more. Higher, better, more. One keeps on keepin' on for as long as one can generate new ideas and suffer one's limitations.

And so I said in one of my fliers, "As an author, musician and poet, I have soared as high as I could in each context. Musically, I have taken the energy-stream as far as I can, whether in the living room, in live performance, or in the studio." In each context, I have been able to fly to a certain height. Alas, in other contexts, I have not necessarily been able to attain the same or greater heights. A vision might be realized in the living room, but not necessarily in other settings, such as a recording studio (which is, after all, a self-consciousness-producing context).

And so it goes: Do the best one can in every context, and don't compare today's heights with yesterday's. Easy to say, but not easy to do, because the vision of what might have been, could have been, and perhaps should have been, remains. After a certain point, one realizes that there are certain realities that are just as factual as a giant rock in the garden, even more so. A giant rock can be moved or eliminated. One's nature, talent, and creative magnitude is simply what it is.

To say these things as a young man would be naive, ignorant and foolish. It would be self-limiting and premature. To say it at my age is a different matter. It does not come from fear or ignorance but from self-knowledge. It does not bespeak of giving up, because I have given my all. It does not emerge from despair, but from a certain kind of clear-sighted recognition.

Action has been good. I am proud of what I have accomplished. Time now to learn how to simply Be.

Much luv, L

CT A Song in the Midst of Gunfire

Hi, C,

Thanks for your kind words acknowledging my on-going support of creativity (in general) and various artists (in particular).

It is my view that every creative gesture, whether happy or sad or angry or joyful, is rooted in love, affirmation, and the celebration of *all* of life, not just our humanoid two-legged variety. If we didn't have music and musicians and other artists, we would be left in a blood-drenched desert, completely dominated by the likes of the Village Idiot George Bush and his ilk.

But you and the other musicians, writers, poets, painters and dancers all over the world bring nourishment, vitality, joyful energy, hope, and psycho-spiritual renewal to our woeful and increasingly agonized planet.

Do whatever you can to survive and flourish, C. Your every gesture of creativity is life-enhancing, whether a smile in the midst of darkness or a song in the midst of gunfire.

Keep-keep-keepin' on!

All the very best,

Your friend, L