

Chapter 9: The Learning Meditations

Addressing the Spirit Through Creative Process

As the concept of Lovewell was taking form in my consciousness, I was compelled to instill into the philosophy a code, a procedure, or a ritual that would set the right tone for creativity. I wanted something that would center and calm the participants and enable them to become more receptive to new ideas. It needed to be something that would quiet the noise from the outside world, create a safe space, and encourage a vulnerability that would, in turn, allow a more compassionate heart and a more open mind. It was a major goal of mine to establish an environment that promoted cooperative collaboration and invited a free flow of ideas without fear of destructive ego-driven criticism or harsh competitiveness. I had enough of that as a professional actor, director, writer, composer, and producer in the consumer-driven Arts and Entertainment Industry. My experience taught me that many good projects were being destroyed and vast amounts of creative energy and money continued to be wasted through colossal displays of pride, arrogance, greed, ignorance, and insecurity. There were also vast resources destroyed by quieter displays of covert hostilities stemming from pride, arrogance, greed, ignorance, and insecurity. These are, therefore, some of the areas addressed in the Learning Meditations.

Of course, constructive criticism is an essential element in establishing and maintaining high artistic standards, but there are ways of optimizing quality without demeaning the participants or damaging their spirits. I had been through musical theatre writing workshops where the “objective” criticism was so harsh and ruthless that no one could survive without permanent damage to their self-esteem. Experience has taught me that schadenfreude (malicious enjoyment of another’s misfortunes) does not create an

atmosphere conducive to creativity.

I wanted to devise a way to address matters of the spirit within a creative arts methodology without entering into the polarization and fractiousness often engendered through religious debate. Lovewell Institute could provide a forum for sharing ideas, feelings, and experiences containing spiritual overtones without the need to necessarily tie them into a specific theology. This kind of exploration of philosophy, aesthetics, and ethics deals with many of the same subjects and phenomena as theology and religion but allows each participant to maintain his or her own religious affiliation without making that affiliation the focus of discourse.

So how was I going to create this nurturing atmosphere of trust and honor? As I walked under the tall Kansas cottonwood trees preparing for Lovewell's first official workshop and searching for an answer, I flashed upon some ancient Eastern philosophical meditations I had read about in the *Life and Teaching of the Masters of the Far East* by Spaulding (1964, 1972a, 1972b, 1976a, 1976b). I felt that the philosophical approach described in Spaulding's five-volume study would help me meet the objectives I outlined for the "ritual" centering exercise that I was developing and adapting into an educational application. Building trust and honor is a process, and I felt that the first step in cooling down the flagrant energy of teenagers would be establishing a sense of *presence* in them. Sustaining attention on the present moment is often not easy at any age and especially difficult for young creative artists. However, if the students know that their future as an artist depends on their ability to sustain focus on abstract situations, then they will be more highly motivated to engage in exercises that build that skill.

Establishing Presence

Eastern philosophy emphasizes meditative and contemplative techniques

(Spalding, 1964, 1972a, 1972b, 1976a, 1976b), and children growing up in American culture get little training in achieving these states of consciousness. My life-long interest in spiritual transformation introduced me to numerous practices that promote expanded thinking and meditative states. My challenge became how to integrate some of these principles into a methodology of creative process training. Most young artists are drawn to Lovewell out of a love for art and a desire to learn how to create it. *Experiencing* art leads a child to the threshold of *making* art (Alexander, 1987; Campbell, 1995; Dewey, 1934). The Learning Meditations offer students an opportunity to acknowledge and access the same state of mind that they experience when they witness a great work of art. Wilber (2000), a noted American philosopher, integral psychologist, and practicing Buddhist, commented on this state so familiar to artists and those who appreciate art:

Great art suspends the reverted eye, the lamented past, and the anticipated future: we enter with it into the timeless present; we are with God today, perfect in our manner and mode, open to the riches and the glories of a realm that time forgot, but that great art reminds us of: not by its content, but by what it does in us: suspends the desire to be elsewhere. And thus it undoes the agitated grasping in the heart of the suffering self, and releases us--maybe for a second, maybe for a minute, maybe for all eternity--releases us from the coil of ourselves. (p. 542)

The Learning Meditations help guide the student into a mental state of *presence* that facilitates both experiencing art and creating art, a state that Csikszentmihalyi (1990, 1997) called *flow*, and Campbell (2001) called *esthetic arrest*. Each day of every Lovewell project begins with this exercise and uses it to focus the attention and intention of the students on their creative capacity aligning it with the achievable goals of the day. This practice has been so effective that other arts groups and programs familiar with this

technique have adopted the Learning Meditations and integrated them onto their programs.

Seeing Through the Eyes of an Artist

Part of my goal is to help students *see* the world through the eyes of an artist. This heightened sense of observation and integration occurs as any great artist absorbs the phenomena in his or her universe and reflects it in their craft and their work. Altering our perceptions, transforming the way we look at simple things, are tools of the trade for any artist. Bypassing the thinking part of the brain and speaking directly to the heart and spirit is another aspect of being an artist. Wilber (2000) offered a relevant observation:

Great art grabs you, against your will, and then suspends your will. You are ushered into a quiet clearing, free of desire, free of grasping, free of ego, free of the self-contraction. And through that opening or clearing in your own awareness may come flashing higher truths, subtler revelations, profound connections. For a moment you might even touch eternity; who can say otherwise, when time itself is suspended in the clearing that art creates in your awareness. (p. 541)

This is the state of mind that the Learning Meditations foster. They encourage the participants to perceive the world as an artist perceives it, full of wonder, beauty, discovery, and possibilities. The students are not asked to believe the statements made in the Learning Meditations, they are simply asked to *contemplate* the ideas and philosophy brought forward as they would contemplate a work of art. The Learning Meditations are designed to stimulate thinking, feeling, and intuitive knowing that benefit the creative process whether or not the students agree with them.

Learning to see through the eyes of an artist is a skill that can be applied to almost any task and any profession. The perspective of an artist is not exclusive to the arts, and

this skill can be transferred to many other applications. In the context of a Lovewell workshop, the arts are used to teach this form of perception. The sense of *presence* and the ability focus on abstract symbols and ideas are valuable proficiencies in any context.

The Learning Meditations have become a cornerstone of the Lovewell philosophy and the main ingredient that sets the Lovewell Method apart from all other interdisciplinary arts pedagogies and theatre programs. They are most effective when accompanied by appropriate music or meditative sonorities prerecorded or played live by an artist/instructor or student. In the following paragraphs, I break down the seven meditations word by word and phrase by phrase in an attempt to analyze and examine the meditative content of each. Similar to the way mantras or poetry set up themes and images to be contemplated, these meditations, in the hands of a skilled Lovewell instructor, set the focus on creativity and cooperation. Because the intention of these meditations is to steer the attention inward towards deeply personal attitudes and perceptions, and because it is important to create a sense of unity in the group dynamic, I will describe the meditations here as I often do to the students and staff, in the first person plural.

The Seven Meditations

Within me there is boundless creative power. This affirmation temporarily directs our attention away from the sources we have been programmed to rely on for our identity--our celebrities, our parents, teachers, bosses, politicians, religious leaders, and heroes. We are invited to enter into present time awareness. The din of daily activity usually prevents us from hearing the voice of inner wisdom. There is a difference between reacting and responding, and this exercise helps discern that difference. I have observed that people often react rather than respond. In this Learning Meditation, “Within

me” sets the intention of connecting with one’s inner source of wisdom and judgment. It invites the students to make thoughtful responses rather than knee-jerk reactions. It slows down the clock that requires quick judgments.

The phrase “there is” brings us into present time and helps us contemplate the meaning of this meditation in the immediacy and stillness of a protected environment. “Boundless” may be considered a lofty concept but actually quite worthy of examination in a world culture engulfed in the countless limitations imposed by current trends in terrorism, nationalism, consumerism, economic imbalance, and the relentless depletion of essential natural resources. “Creative power” is one of those immeasurable concepts that needs to be deconstructed, analyzed, and explored experientially in order to be understood. I resonate with Csikszentmihalyi’s (1990, 1999) theory that creative flow is a state of consciousness. From spending time in classrooms and with my own four children, I have observed that the creative impulse occurs naturally in young children. It appears that creativity is then systematically processed out of most children starting around the age of 7 by an unimaginative educational culture that seats them in rows of chairs and drills them on how to pass standardized tests. Eden (2004) addressed this unfortunate situation in his article *Left Brain Right Brain*:

Experiments show that most children rank highly creative (right brain) before entering school. Because our educational systems place a higher value on left brain skills such as mathematics, logic, and language than it does on drawing or using our imagination, only ten percent of these children will rank highly creative by age 7. By the time we are adults, high creativity remains in only 2 percent of the population. (p. 6)

There is much to say about education reform as it relates to the arts, but the point

here is that creativity is a birthright. It most definitely can be rekindled or rehabilitated by focusing attention on it and engaging in activities and exercises that consciously employ the rigors of the creative process.

The concept of *power* is framed within a creative context in this Learning Meditation. Power is normally associated with physical strength, material wealth, charisma, or military might. Here we ask the students to consider creativity as a power that has spiritual and intangible implications in addition to the commonly accepted physical and social implications. Artists often view power as a generic negative force because western culture often uses political or economic power to squelch new “threatening” ideas, blow up the enemy, or to silence the whistle-blowers. Artists are frequently the scapegoats for dissent and controversy in our society. So learning about a source of power that is available to young or old, rich or poor, Black or White, educated or uneducated is a very exciting concept for some who feel they have been left behind or disenfranchised by personal or social injustices. The Lovewell Method does not frame this power in a religious context but rather in a personal context of self-expression and the internal realization of what creativity is. True creative power cannot be marginalized once it is felt and activated.

When the various aspects of this meditation are explained and broken down into understandable chunks as I am doing here, the students have an opportunity to connect at any level they choose with any component that resonates with them. The “aha” moments add up. The consistency of reviewing all seven Learning Meditations as a daily discipline gives the students the chance to explore in depth over an extended period of time their personal associations with these themes. Young minds cannot be taught concepts like dignity, honor, and integrity without at some point in their education being guided inward

toward the source of these core values. They have to see for themselves the worth of these ideas, not just blindly acquiesce because law or dogma legislates them to act a certain way. Students seem to benefit most when these complex ideas are internalized, integrated, and then applied to their everyday lives. The Greek philosophers' invitation to "know thyself" is inscribed on the gates to the temple at the Oracle of Delphi at Mount Parnassus. I believe that phrase has become a legendary educational axiom because of the immutable truth it embodies. By learning to trust the boundlessness and inexhaustibility of our personal creativity, we learn to know and trust ourselves.

I am now at this moment all that I need to be. This is probably the most difficult Learning Meditation for most people to accept and integrate. It is especially difficult for teenagers who are searching for their own identity by being hypercritical and judgmental. Many teenagers criticize themselves as much as they criticize their parents, friends, and teachers. I have observed that many teenagers are not happy with themselves the way they are. There always seems to be something wrong with them in their own judgment, something that they would readily change if they felt they could.

We are conditioned by years of parents, teachers, and coaches telling us we are not doing as well as we should. We are constantly bombarded with media images of the perfect body, the perfect mind, and the perfect prescription remedy to fix it all. We are told we need to look better, feel better, eat better, sleep better, and perform better. How can we be content with who we are and still strive to improve? How can being "all that I need to be" help me become all that I *want* to be? These are some of the hard questions that participants confront when contemplating this Learning Meditation.

The act of *striving* seems to occupy a significant amount of energy units in the hard drive of our contemporary collective brain. *Striving* can motivate and energize a

person to higher levels of performance, but without balanced alternative periods of restful alertness and relaxation, it can often lead to burnout and frustration. I have noticed that *striving* usually functions in the aggressive mode and does not normally create a receptive state of mind. The source of striving, in my opinion, is a feeling that we are not enough, that we lack something we need in order to be acceptable, something that other people possess. Unchecked, it can become a debilitating sort of envy. Our modern culture appears to proliferate this kind of paralytic envy.

While researching ancient healing methods during a doctoral seminar in Oaxaca, Mexico, I learned that *envidia* (envy) is considered a folk disease in that region. Avila (as cited in Avila & Parker, 1999) was a registered nurse with a master's degree in psychiatric nursing and blended these medical skills with traditional Aztec healing techniques. She operated a health care center in New Mexico as a professional *curandera* (healer). In their book, *Woman Who Glows in the Dark Woman: A Curandera Reveals Traditional Aztec Secrets of Physical and Spiritual Health*, Avila wrote eloquently about her approach to treatment for the common phenomenon of *envidia*:

We can choose to focus on feelings of impotence because someone else has what we do not have, allowing envy to eat away at our hearts until it has become a destructive, debilitating force in our lives, or we can do the work that needs to be done in order to achieve what the object of our envy has achieved. Sometimes that means going back to school, or working hard for a promotion at work, or leaving a bad relationship and seeking a healthier one. When we use envy as a mirror, we can achieve our goals at work, school, and in our personal life faster. (p. 52)

So it would seem that envy is a double-edged sword. It fuels our constant battles of contentment versus striving. Intense striving puts certain blinders on consciousness, a

kind of filter that can shut out subtleties, nuances, and new perspectives. A persistent agenda of “overcoming shortcomings” often eclipses a larger agenda of achieving peace of mind. It is the delicate balance between striving and self-acceptance that this Learning Meditation was designed to illuminate.

Opening ourselves up to new ideas requires making some space available in our moment-to-moment conscious awareness. My experience is that it is very difficult for innovative concepts and visionary thinking to enter a space cluttered with yesterday’s obstacles, irrelevant details, and other people’s negative opinions. Affirming that “I am now at this moment all that I need to be” temporarily calms the mind and clears the path for an inspired view of one’s pure potential. One of life’s primary challenges is to unveil the mystery of why we exist. This meditation encourages *listening* at a deeper level and tuning into the intuitive realm of consciousness. I remember at one point in my development struggling to discern the difference between the endless chatter of “mind tapes” (external) and the pure voice of soul-sourced intuition (internal). I have discovered that hearing the intuitive “inner voice” is a skill that can be learned.

Trusting one’s inner voice usually requires rehearsal. If the truth of this affirmation seems unattainable to a student, Lovewell staff artists find it helpful to employ a well-known basic acting technique (Stanislavski, 1989). Acting is believing, and actors trained in the Stanislavski method learn to “act-as-if” until they reach a critical mass of understanding or comprehension of the character and dramaturgical situation that allows them to embody the truth of the moment. During this Learning Meditation, a student can act-as-if he or she is truly “all that I need to be” until authentic feelings of peace and self-worth enter the consciousness. Often, these feelings and sensations can be sustained and become part of a new identity. This observable process has created a

rationale for actual training in self-respect and self-confidence.

Wanting to “be a star” is often perceived to be an ego-driven reaction to certain childhood conditions; however, turning that desire and ambition into mastering one’s craft can be a healthy transformation. This Learning Meditation can help transmute negative emotions into useful tools. Self-acceptance seems to act as a magnet for new and more benign ideas.

Many artists feel that if they are not suffering some kind of dramatic pain, they cannot *create*. It is, after all, society’s artists who agree to absorb the culture’s pain and reflect it back to its source for scrutiny. This is part of an artist’s job description and a formidable occupational hazard. Artists often fall prey to the dangerous habit of creating painful situations in order to feed their art and then getting trapped in the pain. This self-perpetuating cycle can become a kind of addiction. It is a downward spiral that is often considered necessary in order to create valid art. This Learning Meditation reminds artists that there is enough pain and suffering already existing in the world and in their own lives (which they can freely appropriate into their own art) that they need not consciously or unconsciously generate more.

Ultimately, self-esteem must be self-taught, especially to creative types who tend to question everything. I have observed substantial changes in students’ attitudes and behavior as a result of meditating on this concept and acting as if this idea of “I am now at this moment all that I need to be” is true (even if only for a few moments each day). This Learning Meditation seems to at least temporarily remove the filter that is between self-prescribed limitations and true personal potential. The students appear to become less driven and more perceptive. I think this exercise frees-up internal mental and emotional space for more current and immediate incoming data. This is just my theory based on

what I have seen. The students get their minds off their own needs and on to an expanded awareness of the people and things surrounding them. The Lovewell Method employs this Learning Meditation in order to address and examine the concept of a critical balance between self-perception and outer perception, a challenge every creative artist will eventually encounter. I have found that artists who trust themselves are more cooperative, more productive, usually more successful, and have the distinct advantage of consciously experiencing the wonders of creative process.

I visualize perfection daily until I breathe it into expression. With this Learning Meditation, I ask the students to utilize the act of breathing as a metaphor for internalizing the creative process. I simplify and break down the breathing process into three basic steps that parallel an artist's creative process. This is a natural fit for young artists who are not yet consciously aware of the procedure they go through while producing their creative output. Conscious awareness of breathing is at the core of many practices such as yoga, tai chi, and transcendental meditation. These traditional breathing exercises are designed to connect the mind, body, and spirit metabolically. Controlled breathing is used in natural childbirth methods; vocal and instrumental techniques; athletic disciplines such as distance running, swimming, and weight lifting; and a host of spiritual practices geared toward deep relaxation and higher states of awareness.

So how does this metaphor work for the creative process? Here is my theory. Examine the three steps involved in one complete cycle of breathing: inhaling, holding, and exhaling. Simply put, our bodies take in oxygen, hold it in our lungs as we transform it into carbon dioxide, and then breathe it back out into the atmosphere that uses it as an essential element in the photosynthesis process. How does this apply to artists?

First, an artist "breathes in" the world around him or her. This represents the artist

breathing in impressions of their exterior world--their parents, siblings, friends, teachers, neighborhood, popular culture, life experiences, and world events. While this data is held in the consciousness (and subconsciousness) of the artist, it is absorbed, filtered, examined, analyzed, evaluated, categorized, integrated, and embedded into their creative archives. As the artist weaves this data into his or her creation, the data are given structure and form. The artist then infuses his or her natural gifts and skills, inspired and informed viewpoints, and passionate feelings into the artistic product. Extending the metaphor, all of this magic occurs during the “holding” or transformative stage (oxygen into carbon dioxide, raw data into art). During this stage, the artist puts an imprint on the data, a signature or imprimatur that reflects a unique and individualized expression.

Next, the artist “exhales” a creative product--manifests and crafts an artistic expression that is released into the exterior world and inevitably met with various kinds of feedback usually in the form of positive or negative reactions. As the artist observes the reactions, he or she is further informed as to the nature of the creation--is it honest, is it provocative, is it disturbing, or is it enlightening? Does it offer some new insight into the human condition, does it allow us to see the humor in our foibles, or does it ease our pain? Does the art shake us out of a rut, make us angry, and motivate us to effect change or simply cause us to cherish something we have taken for granted? These are questions of aesthetics in the best sense of the word, and these students are learning to construct a philosophical infrastructure that will guide them for the rest of their lives. They are identifying core values and how those values relate to society and the world outside. If they become professional artists, they will have to find their audience and the audience will have to find them through this conscious relationship of outflow and inflow. This Learning Meditation helps the artists to mindfully monitor the source of their data, to

define the nature and quality of their data, to determine the means by which the data are processed, and to assess and evaluate the effect the final creative product has on its audience.

In preparing for this meditation, students are instructed to find their own spaces within the workshop facility, assume comfortable body postures, and begin to observe their own breathing pattern. Then, the participants are guided to think about the specific data sources they use on a daily basis. These data are the raw material out of which their creations will evolve. They are then guided to observe the particular style or “spin” they give this data--their unique filtering system that shapes and molds the information into a perspective that can be articulated through one or a combination of the arts disciplines (music, theatre, dance, design, writing, etc.). What are some areas in which they have had success or failure in the past, humor, pathos, persuasion, reality, or fantasy? What is their natural reaction to the world around them, and how is it usually reflected in their art? Is it disgust, glee, defiance, wonder, or reverence? What is their prevailing attitude, bubbly, brooding, intense, carefree, or clowning? Students are encouraged to identify certain honest traits about themselves without being judgmental.

The other primary aspect of this Learning Meditation is “visualizing perfection.” It is extremely important to realize that this refers only to personal perfection, not to the outside world’s criteria for perfection. Personal perfection is the best that we can expect from ourselves. Visualization is a technique used by many domains to improve performance and increase effectiveness. German gymnastic teams have used this kind of visualization with great success. Using this technique, the athletes are instructed to sit quietly and visualize every muscle movement and bodily action involved in their gymnastic routine. They picture themselves clearly executing the moves with precision in

every split second of the presentation. It is considered a very effective technique and has contributed to their continued success in the World Olympics (International Society on Comparative Physical Education and Sport, 2002).

In Lovewell workshops, this visualization exercise is applied to the creation and performance of an interdisciplinary work of art. Lovewell instructors ask the students to visualize a specific moment, any moment, of the production in which they can form a mental image of their specific contribution clearly and completely onstage. If they can see themselves in the context of what they do well (and with the most confidence), combined with the goals and objectives of the group project, then they will connect the dots and automatically apply a higher level of motivated cognitive thinking in solving how to get from where they are to the point where they need to be in order to manifest the visualization. This exercise is not a panacea, but it is another effective tool in the accomplishment of the goals and mission of Lovewell Institute.

This visualization exercise is especially effective when guided by well-trained instructors who know the process and grasp the nuances of how to draw on the innate multiple intelligences and motivations of the students. The Lovewell faculty is trained to be vigilant and selfless in facilitating the realization of the students' visualizations. This is the kind of learning that puts the content areas within a context that is relevant to the student and encourages self-directed learning and development of reasoning skills that directly fits the description of problem-based learning (Savin-Baden, 2000).

I am pure energy and awareness. This affirmation is intended to temporarily take attention away from concerns of the physical world and redirect it towards a deeper sense of inner awareness, the awareness of being aware. Getting in touch with this authentic self-awareness is the opposite of self-consciousness. Self-consciousness is actually seeing

oneself through other people's eyes and worrying about what they may be thinking (a common trap for teenagers). Self-awareness is standing guard at the portal of consciousness and monitoring every event being perceived by our sensory and extrasensory preceptors. The Lovewell Method facilitates this shift of consciousness to a more self-actualized state (Maslow, 1970) by following a discrete procedure.

First, we ask the students to acknowledge any physical concerns--have a talk with the body. If something hurts or draws attention to itself, we assure them that they can return their attention to it after the exercise. Next, as they rest quietly, we ask them to allow their "awareness center" to move out of the body and hover above the head. There are no specific rules or requirements here except to concentrate intensely on that spinning center of energy and awareness and move it slightly outside the body, preferably just above the head. We caution the student not to go too far. Just as some dreams are difficult to awaken from, it is occasionally difficult for an artist learning about deeper self-awareness to return focus to full group awareness. The staff monitors this activity by closely observing the emotions of the participants during the exercise. Staff artists are trained in body language, and that is also a factor in monitoring the students' well-being during this activity. Lovewell has been utilizing this meditation since 1990 and has never encountered any problem with students returning their focus to the group.

Folk wisdom teaches us that we will never know total silence because there are two sounds that follow us incessantly throughout our lives: our heartbeat and the very high-pitched whirl of our nervous system. I once spent a long night alone in a small isolated cabin on a desert plateau in New Mexico. Experiencing this kind of deafening silence, I became acutely aware of those two sounds, my heartbeat and my nervous system, and the heightened awareness induced by that kind of stillness. This sort of

sustained quiet solitude is not encouraged by our present culture or hardly even possible in the din of our daily lives. That is why I believe it is so important to structure activities like these Learning Meditations into the curriculum of this creative-process-based arts education methodology wherein self-knowledge is such a primary learning objective.

The fourth Learning Meditation is intended to acquaint the student with the concept of the quantum universe and help introduce the “new physics” ideas concerning the flexibility of time and space. Understanding the basic principles of these theories stimulates the imagination and liberates the mind from limitations imposed by two- and three-dimensional thinking. Chopra (2003) spoke of this issue in his book, *The Spontaneous Fulfillment of Desire: Harnessing the Infinite Power of Coincidence*:

Although the phrase “quantum leap” has become common in everyday conversation, it actually has a very specific meaning. . . . All creativity is based on quantum leaps and uncertainty. . . . This is the nature of genius, to be able to grasp the knowable even when no one else recognizes that it is present. . . . So intention, imagination, insight, intuition, inspiration, meaning, purpose, creativity, understanding, all these have nothing to do with the brain. They orchestrate their activity through the brain, but they are qualities of the nonlocal domain, which is beyond space and time. (pp. 81-84)

Learning how to expertly navigate time and space helps artists and performers develop higher levels of awareness and perception. This, in turn, leads to better communication skills. Efficient energy and time management are also characteristics that all creative artists must develop as they progress in the mastery of their craft and the creation of their products and processes (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, 1997). Identifying, acknowledging, and meditating on the implications and applications of quantum thinking

prepares the path for integrating students into a holistic and globally unifying thought system.

All my needs will always be supplied by my understanding of creativity. This meditation is a vehicle for nurturing and developing self-trust. It affirms the intention to be resourceful and self-reliant. These words address the practical applications of the creative process in that they focus attention on an alternative source of imaginative solutions. Some call it “thinking outside the box.”

I usually illustrate this affirmation with a modern parable about a 10-year-old boy on a bicycle. He arrives at the top of a hill overlooking the road he is taking as it winds down the hill and under an overpass. Looking down he sees police cars, tow trucks, and traffic backed up for miles in both directions. The state trooper at the top of the hill tells the boy not to try to weave between the cars because a large truck has lodged itself under the bridge and cannot move either way. Everyone will either have to wait it out or take a long detour. The 18-wheeler was too tall to fit under the bridge and remains hopelessly stuck as welders with acetylene torches ponder how to take the top off the truck to dislodge it. Finally, the boy asks the trooper a simple question, “Why don’t they just let the air out of the tires?” The trooper thought for a moment and headed down the hill toward the bridge. He returned in about 15 minutes as the men down below were letting air out of the tires of the 18-wheeler. Soon, the truck backed out, turned around, refilled the tires and the traffic was once again flowing smoothly. When the trooper asked the boy how he thought of his solution, the boy replied, “I don’t do good in school, but I know a few things.”

This Learning Meditation is beneficial at any level of comprehension because it offers the notion that if we *intend* to find a better way to solve a problem, we can innately

develop the capacity to actually find better solutions. Applied creative process offers new ways to adapt, grow, and collaborate to sustain our society in an ever-changing environment. This is the spirit of invention and innovation that has always mapped the human path out of darkness and ignorance. This is that elusive intangible commodity called ingenuity that we, as a culture, must nurture and protect for future generations. Csikszentmihalyi (1997) addressed the importance of protecting and rewarding creative children:

It is possible that children who were more curious ran more risks and so were more likely to die early than their more stolid companions. But it is also probable that those human groups that learned to appreciate the curious children among them, and helped to protect and reward them so that they could grow to maturity and have children of their own, were more successful than groups that ignored the potentially creative in their midst. If this is true, we are the descendants of ancestors who recognized the importance of novelty, protected those individuals who enjoyed being creative, and learned from them. Because they had among them individuals who enjoyed exploring and inventing, they were better prepared to face the unpredictable conditions that threatened their survival. (p. 109)

One summer, the League of Professional Theatre Women gave a scholarship to a teenage girl from Spanish Harlem in New York City to attend a Lovewell Workshop in Salina, Kansas. She came to America from Nicaragua where insurgents had recently killed her father. Her mother brought the family to America and found herself working several jobs to support them. After a few weeks of practicing the Learning Meditations every day during our workshop, the girl volunteered an example of how she related to this particular one. She remembered sitting in the window of her tenement building,

writing poems, and listening to the ice cream truck passing every day, wishing that she could afford to run out and buy a cone like the other kids. Her mother had forbidden them from wasting money on nonessentials. She devised a plan whereby she would write a poem for the ice cream man and attempt to barter it for a cone. The next day she made the offer. The ice cream man readily accepted and each day she wanted a cone, she would create another original poem for him. She no longer felt so poor.

That example is from a child's perspective of how the principle is applied. My experience is that the principle of this Learning Meditation can function on many levels as one consciously develops the ability to focus attention, intention, and awareness on ways of manifesting one's visions and fulfilling one's desires.

I have a kind thought for everyone: May we create today in the spirit of cooperation and joy. Life in modern society is complicated enough. Collaborative interdisciplinary theatrical projects are complicated enough. This Learning Meditation addresses the issues of human dynamics and effective social interaction. It is far from a warm and fuzzy touchy-feely invocation. During the Lovewell process we do not naïvely expect everyone to love each other or attain some divine level of enforced compassion. We do expect, however, a high degree of mutual respect and decent social behavior and have endeavored to establish those conditions in all of our workshops and classes. Sometimes, it is a fine line between our cherished ethic of freedom of expression and that of acceptable conduct, but over the years, Lovewell has achieved considerable success in this area. Artists are notoriously ill behaved or misguided as witnessed by a host of colloquialisms such as the temperamental artist, the crazy artist, the angry artist, the mad artist, the self-involved artist, the angst-ridden artist, the starving artist, and the struggling artist. Lovewell asks young artists to reconsider these stereotypes and learn some

techniques for successful collaboration and socialization that disprove those stereotypes.

Yes, there is a certain apparent contradiction in Lovewell's mission of cultivating individuality as an artist and yet conforming to etiquette as a social being. However, upon closer examination, this is more of an irony than a contradiction. Many of the greatest artists in history were those who learned the important lesson of letting the art itself express the messages of radical reform or noncompliance with existing norms, while the public persona of the artist was that of an acceptably (if often eccentrically) socialized professional artisan. It worked well for Bach, DaVinci, Brahms, Verdi, Raphael, Dali, Stravinsky, Gershwin, Balanchine, Copeland, Sondheim, and a host of other major artists who defied the stereotype of the unsocialized rebel artist (even though their work may have been revolutionary).

The point of this is certainly not to force young artists to conform to meaningless social restrictions but to emphasize the point that bad behavior is not a prerequisite for good art and that heavy attitude and chronic bad behavior often interferes with the message being conveyed through the art. The Lovewell process instills confidence that it is indeed possible to be productive on large-scale collaborative projects in an atmosphere of harmony and cooperation.

The purpose of this Learning Meditation is to create an environment where egos do not interfere with the creative process or the joys of moment-to-moment productivity and personal accomplishment. After a few days of being guided through the exercise by a Lovewell staff member, the students start volunteering to share their thoughts and reactions to each meditation. Through activities like this, the Lovewell Method helps the students become aware of their own influence on the group dynamic. Hard work and intense creative effort do not necessarily have to be agonizing or confrontational. When

rehearsal tension is building and emotions are running high, I have often heard some student or instructor simply call out, “Number 6, remember number 6.” When this occurs, we take a moment to collectively diffuse, shake off the tension, and then get back to business. The sixth Learning Meditation conveniently replaces a substantial amount of behavior policy within the Lovewell culture. I remind students and staff that the better the group is at honoring this intention with all the mutual respect that it implies, the less need there is to be encumbered by extensive rules, restrictions and regulations.

Now let me in silence reaffirm why I am here. This statement’s function is profound as it relates to the group dynamic in the context of a Lovewell program. It aligns individual purpose with the common goals of the group. On a personal level, the affirmation reconnects the student with self-motivating intentions that have been developed consciously or unconsciously over the years. On a group level, it allows the leader to guide the focus of all of these disparate motivations into a unified common goal, to create a meaningful collaborative piece of interdisciplinary art that expresses the passion, intelligence, insight, and humor of each member of the collective group. It also helps develop a unified synergistic voice for the group. Witnessing how many diverse ideas and personal missions merge into one unified goal gives the students an opportunity to grow in an understanding of the concept of true collaboration and cooperative behavior. It affords insight into synergy as an active process rather than a lofty concept. In modern society, it usually takes disaster or war to create events of mass cooperation and clarity of a common goal. It is a valuable learning experience to participate in an alternative type of emotionally charged “community spirit” event. But, instead of being triggered by disaster, the Lovewell experience is motivated by an exhilarating creative process and product reflecting the truth of humanity to itself.

This is how Lovewell administers the seventh Learning Meditation. The phrase is stated verbally by the leader and then repeated verbally by the group. What follows consists of two parts. First, there is a long silence during which the participants scan their mental and emotional files for relevant data for reasons why they find themselves devoting considerable effort and time to this program and its guided activities. Individual answers to “why I am here” are not divulged, coached, or questioned. The leader assures the group that there are no wrong answers and the “why” can change from day to day. The only provision is that each student takes a few moments to focus on the personal reasons for being there.

The second functional aspect of this affirmation is that it provides a transition from the internal focus of the creative process to the external focus of the *implementation* of the ideas. In concluding this exercise, the leader shifts the focus of this quiet group energy to the matters at hand and announces the agenda of the things to be accomplished that day and a strategic plan of how to accomplish them. The students are encouraged to reflect upon their potential individual contributions to the challenges of the day. They are asked to consider aligning their personal goals with the goals of the group.

There is much more to be said about the applications of this Learning Meditation. The compelling issues of personal mission and purpose usually surface only at moments of great confusion and frustration, those crisis times when we find ourselves asking, “What am I doing this for?” or “Why have I gotten myself into this?” Participating in this meditation on a regular basis, facilitated by a well-trained instructor, encourages the practice of conscious maintenance of motivational and inspirational resources. This kind of self-questioning often leads to clarified intentions and a stronger sense of self-reliance. It has the effect of “sending the light ahead” in that it directs conscious attention to

immediate goals and to where one is headed in the present moment.

“Now let me in silence reaffirm why I am here” is a searchlight illuminating the innermost regions of our psyche that contain the core elements of our reasons for living.

Identifying and exploring these reasons for living is a vital part of any complete education, especially an education that attempts to build character and self-awareness.

Krishnamurti (1981) summed up this point concisely in *Education and the Significance of Life*: “We cannot understand existence abstractly or theoretically. To understand life is to understand ourselves, and that is both the beginning and end of education” (p. 14).