

Art?.....
..... 15

6) Wherefore Art?

.....
..... 21

a. Art's Underlying Purpose

7) Art Heals

.....
..... 37

- a. Music to Soothe Body and Soul
- b. Paint (and Sculpt) Away Your Pain
- c. Drama: The Healthy and Acceptable Way to Act Out
- d. Dance Through the Dark in Order to See the Light
- e. Write Your Way to Health

8) Discover the Artist Within

.....
. 72

- a. Inhibition is a Four-Letter Word
- b. Are You a Shadow Artist?

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

- c. Why and How to Develop Your Artistic Talent(s)
- d. Give Yourself Permission to Create
- e. Meditation is the Key to Opening the Doors of Mysteries

9) Strive for Excellence

.....
..... 112

a. The Art of an Eloquent Tongue

10) Reach Out: Connect Minds, Hearts, and Souls

..... 122

- a. Music: Wings for the Spirit
- b. Drama: The Pulpit of The Future
- c. Dance: Hidden Language of the Soul
- d. To Story—To Poem—To Essay—To Write
 - i. To Story
 - 1. Fiction
 - 2. Memoir
 - 3. History / Biography
 - ii. To Poem
 - 1. Why Poetry?
 - 2. The Spiritual Role of the Poet
 - 3. What Use Poetry?
 - iii. To Essay
- e. Art: Common Language of Human Existence
 - i. Photography: Capturing Divinity

- ii. Sculpture: A Parable in Three Dimensions
- iii. Architecture: The Material Theater of Human Activity
- iv. Painting: Silent Poetry

11) The Standard for Human Action
 189

12) The Wisdom of the Review Process
 193

13) Promote Spiritual Transformation at the Community Level: Development of the Arts

 197

- a. Art Indispensable in School Curriculum
- b. Appreciate the True Worth of Artists and Craftsmen
- c. Encouragement: Essential to Success
- d. Criticism is Easy; Art is Difficult
- e. Why to Utilize Art and Artists
- f. How to Utilize Art & Support Artists

14) Beauty Enhances and Enriches the Spirit
 233

- a. Ugly Art Can Be Beautiful: Art and Justice: Twin Triggers of Human Transformation
- b. Ugly Art Can Be Beautiful: The Arts: Non-Lethal Weapon to End War
- c. Ugly Art Can Be Beautiful: The Wall & the Call: Public Art and Social Change
- d. Ugly Art Can Be Beautiful: Dramaturgy for Social Justice
- e. Ugly Art Can Be Beautiful: Writing to Right Wrongs
- f. The Necessity of Beauty in Your Life

15) Art and Science—a Symbiotic Relationship
 259

16) There's a New Era Coming—the Arts will Usher it in
 265

End Notes

 268

- ?
- ?
- ?
- ?
- ?
- ?
- ?
- ?
- ?

Dedication

In Memory of Roger White...my eternal muse, whose prose and poetry stirs my soul,
enhances my presentations, and awakened the sleeping creator within me. Roger opened
for me an entirely new avenue on my spiritual and creative journey.

In Memory of Ludwig “Lou” Tuman...whose Mirror of the Divine, Art in the Bahá’í World

Community challenges current thought on The Arts and delineates the vital importance

The Arts play in our lives, both individual and communal. Reading and re-reading that

thought-provoking tome stirred and impelled me to begin a deep, intensive search into

the Bahá’í teachings on The Arts. Lou’s work informed my development of various

workshops on Art and Spirituality and much of the material in this book.

For Ladjamaya Green and Anne Gordon Perry...artistic collaborators and beloved friends

who believe in me and consistently encourage my artistic pursuits. These dearly cherished and appreciated women are true soul sisters.

In Memory of Joan Fallert...whose writing workshops through Santa Barbara Adult Education inspired and encouraged me. She led me to fall in love with, and develop a

deep respect for, the English language. I learned more, much more, from Joan Fallert than

I had in all my secondary school English classes.

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i

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

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ii

Appreciations

It’s been said that “It takes a village to raise a child.” Due to the love and the labor it

takes to birth a book, that tome becomes like a child to the author. But it’s a rare author

who accomplishes the task alone. For me, the journey to writing this treatise included

a village of cherished collaborators and supporters along the way.

The gestation period for this volume began so many years ago that it’s

included several different writing groups whose members listened, suggested improvements, and offered enthusiastic encouragement. The Writer's Way, comprised of authors from Carpinteria, Montecito, Santa Barbara, and Goleta, California helped cultivate the project I'd conceived. After relocating to Eloy, Arizona, four different writing groups nurtured it: the Inklings, which meets at the Vista Grande Library in Casa Grande, Pen & Prayer Writers Collective, which was based at the Desert Rose Bahá'í Institute, The Write Life, a writers retreat that took place annually at the Desert Rose Bahá'í Institute, and Write On..., the writers club at Robson Ranch, the community in where I reside in Eloy, Az. Each offered invaluable input.

Barbara Badger and Susanne Perry took the time to read the manuscript in its entirety and offer suggestions, which were welcome and many utilized. My deepest appreciation to both of them for their time and their sage advice. Susanne Perry went a step above and provided additional material that served to enhance the manuscript and even read a subsequent draft in its entirety.

Ladjamaya Green's English teacher's eyes provided line editing which caught many minor errors.

Peter Terry encouraged me to trust my own work when others suggested major changes: "This is your book, not theirs. Leave any changes to the wisdom of your professional editor."

A special shout out to David Langness, who edited my numerous and sundry submissions to bahaiteachings.org, much of which is included in this volume. His encouragement to go ahead and submit the manuscript, without first reading it,

iii

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

demonstrated a level of trust that surprised and encouraged me, providing a calm confidence that hadn't previously existed.

Thank you to Robert Bassett for sharing the letter he received from Ruhiyyih Rabbani, and to the many authors who so graciously gave permission to be

quoted.

The invaluable support of my husband of 60 years, Don, and his belief in me and my work, as well as his patience in my pursuits, sustains me and helps keep me moving forward.

Deep gratitude to Jonah Winters for his technical assistance and offer to post this manuscript on bahai-library.com where it can be accessed and read for free by anyone interested in tapping into their inner creative self.

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iv

Bahá'í Terminology

Bahá'u'lláh

Prophet-Founder of the Bahá'í Faith

The Báb

Forerunner of Bahá'u'lláh. Prophet-Founder of the Bábí Faith

'Abdu'l-Bahá

Eldest son of Bahá'u'lláh, appointed in His Will as The Centre of the Covenant, and the leader of the Faith after Bahá'u'lláh's passing

Shoghi Effendi

Eldest Grandson of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, named in His Will and Testament as the Guardian, and the titular head of the Faith after Abdu'l-Bahá's own passing

Universal House of Justice

The International Administrative Body for the worldwide Bahá'í community

Feast

Spiritual gathering at the beginning of each Bahá'í month that incorporates devotions, consultation on community issues, and socializing

Fireside

An informal gathering, usually hosted in a Bahá'í home, where an individual shares their understanding of some aspect of the Bahá'í Faith, followed by discussion.

Local Spiritual Assembly

Annually elected body of nine individuals who administer the affairs of the local Bahá'í community.

v

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Mashriqu'l-Adhkár

Bahá'í House of Worship

Ruhi Classes

A systematic study program, used internationally, that combines learning and action, to include service to the community-at-large.

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vi

PREFACE

Preface

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As you peruse the pages of this book, you'll find it addressed to you—directly to YOU.

Every effort has been made to avoid generalities, except in the several chapters that pertain to the community. The majority of the work isn't written to—or about—“they” or “we” or “us” or any other generic populace. The intent: to create a personal conversation with the reader—to reach out from my heart to yours.

The important takeaway is that your life will be richer, more satisfying, and more productive when you integrate all aspects of your life with Art, likely effecting a transformational spiritual experience.

So indispensable is Art to your spiritual and emotional wellbeing that throughout this volume you'll find references to “The Arts” rather than “the arts.”

For many years I, like most Bahá'ís who study our Sacred Writings, frequently came across copious references to The Arts. The abundance of their numbers neither registered nor caused me to perceive any implication of their intrinsic importance, most likely because they were scattered throughout the various volumes I studied. Though

somewhat cognizant of their relevance, the level of their import hadn't yet sunk in. Then in the 1980s and 1990s, compilations¹, mostly from the Bahá'í World Centre, on various aspects of The Arts began to appear, and as I began to study them all grouped together, I

¹ 1988, Guidance to Poets, compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice

1991, "Arts and Crafts," in The Compilation of Compilations, vol. 1, pp. 1–8, compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice

1991, "Writers and Writing," compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, published in The Compilation of Compilations, vol.2, pp. 407–14, first written or published 1980.

2000, "The Importance of the Arts in Promoting the Faith," compiled on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, in The Compilation of Compilations, vol. 3, pp. 18–45

2001, Arts and Architecture, compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice

2004, Arts, compiled by the Continental Counselors of Europe

Extracts from the Bahá'í Writings on the Subject of Art, Compiled by Anne Gordon Perry

vii

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

experienced an epiphany. Not only was it a flash of the mind, but it even included physical reactions. The closest I can describe it is how you might feel when you realize you're falling in love: blood rush, increased heartbeat, something akin to tingling throughout the body, and an incredibly giddy sense of joy.

This new consciousness quickly developed into a passion for the subject, and I began to offer fireside talks, short presentations, and workshops on the topic of Art & Spirituality.

The more I presented the material, the more I yearned for a more comprehensive compilation of these references, these gleaming gems set into the crown jewels of our Sacred Writings. After discussing the idea with Anne Gordon Perry, we decided to

collaborate on creating one. I gathered as many quotations as I could find and then sorted them into categories. Due to time constraints and other pressing priorities, we let it lapse.

What the project did accomplish was to inspire me to develop a more in-depth Arts-related workshop: *The Arts: A Key to Spiritual Transformation*. This began as an all-day program and then developed into a full weekend effort, and eventually grew to encompass two weekends, that included hands-on artistic elements and discussions. The positive feedback received far surpassed anything from previous workshops. More than one person confided that they finally felt free and guiltless in pursuing their artistic inclinations. The joy of the participants was unmistakable.

So impressed with the workshop materials was classical pianist Mark Ochu that he described it as: "...by far the most comprehensive and definitive in its area. It leads the participants through the artistic process so that even the most confirmed non-artist will discover the artist within and experience the 'Ah Ha' of being an artist." He further asserted the workshop should be: "...the first prerequisite for any Bahá'í community wishing to usher in the masses." Mark closed out his comments saying: "It is a gift to the world. It receives my highest recommendation."

Though workshops are an effective way to share the wonder of *The Arts*, they reach only a limited number of people, and time constraints limit the amount of material that can be covered, so the information from the workshop has been expanded and compiled into this book in the hopes it will reach a wider and more diverse audience, especially you.

viii

PREFACE

Perhaps you will be moved to take the information in this volume and create your own workshop, blog, or other presentation. At the least, it is my fervent hope that you will come away with a whole new understanding of and commitment to the incorporation of "The Arts" in your life. May it aid in your own spiritual transformation.

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ix

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

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CHAPTER ONE

C H A P T E R O N E

It's Time to Unlock the Door to Your Creativity

“Creativity is the natural order of life. Life is energy: pure creative energy.” ~ Julia Cameron

our creative self yearns for release. You can't be whole without it. How do you know

Y this? Ask yourself if you feel:

- Discontented?
- Stifled?
- Inhibited?
- Joyless?
- Bland?
- Stagnant?
- Unfulfilled?
- Restless?

Something is missing—but what?

Did your talent(s) remain undiscovered during childhood? Did buds of creativity begin to spring forth but were stifled by parents or teachers who lacked the interest or

understanding of how to be a nurturing gardener? Did they not tend the seeds in your talent garden, or worse, did they consciously discourage it, thereby blighting any chance for it even to bud?

Do you think you have no talent? Or if you realize you do, are you so self-conscious or frozen by fear that you don't dare explore it? Do you feel too intimidated to allow your talent to bloom?

The answers lie within you, stored away in the depths of your memory vault, but the key needed to open it and free up the memories may have been misplaced and elusively avoids discovery.

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Through the integration of The Arts in your personal life you will become more inspired and, therefore, more determined to work towards developing the virtues and positive character attributes that beget inner joy and infuse you with positive energy.

The Arts are a key that will unlock and open wide the door of your heart and soul to joy—to wonder—to awe—to the passion for creation and become the catalyst for your spiritual transformation.

Visual artist Jacqueline Claire provides this encouragement for you to consider as you initiate your creative journey:

Creativity is experimental. It is acting on our own rather than worrying how others would do it, or what they will think. Creativity breathes whenever we are open and receptive. When we are willing to play, to daydream, or simply follow what is interesting to us. Every time we respond happily to what is, even when it isn't going according to plan.

These are tiny, loving dance steps with the unknown. Moments of novelty.

Once you begin to traverse the path of creativity, your inspiration and spiritual growth will spread out and envelop all who surround you and even extend into the wider community.

An artist dwells within every living soul. The Bible states in Genesis 1:27, that all humans (that includes YOU) were “created in the image of God.” This is not an anthropomorphic analogy. It means you have the innate ability to mirror forth the virtues and attributes by which you know God. God is All-Loving, All-Merciful, All-Forgiving, the Most Generous, and so forth. You, therefore, strive to emulate that by being loving, merciful, forgiving, generous. Add every attribute of God you can name, and you have that virtue latent within you, just waiting for you to develop it. God is the Creator, ergo, you are a creative being. You can reflect and exercise creativity if you choose to develop that attribute.

Heed the words of the Greek playwright, Aristophanes:

“Let each man exercise the art he knows. “

CHAPTER ONE

Before you can begin to exercise it, though, you must first discover the artist lurking in the shadows of your soul (see *Discover the Artist Within*). This book will help you learn how to coax forth your creative self and inspire and convince you to follow through.

Some of the questions you'll have answered are

- What is Art?
- What is the source of my innate talent and inspiration?
- What is the high station of Art?
- What is the purpose of Art?
- What positive results are derived from Art?
- What is the relationship between
 - o Art and science?
 - o Art and education?
 - o Art and healing?
 - o Art and religion?
 - o Art and life
- Why should I seek to discover the Artist within? And how can I accomplish this?
- How can I work toward the development of The Arts for my own benefit and for the community?
- How will my life be enhanced when I focus on The Arts?

Are you ready to set off on this journey? Do you long to insert the key into the locked door that keeps your creativity hidden and coax it out? Come, let's explore together.

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THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Coax Out and Caper with Your Creative Child

Utilizing the word CREATE, write an acrostic poem.

According to www.weareteachers.com:

An acrostic poem is a creative type of poetry in which the first letter of each line, when read vertically, spells out a word, phrase, or name. Each line connects to that

word, making it an engaging way to express ideas, describe something meaningful,
or play with language.

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CHAPTER TWO

CHAPTER TWO

Art is an Act of Spirituality

“I do not insist on this division between spirituality and art, for I think that even things that are not patently spiritual, if they come from the heart of a spiritual person, are spiritual.” ~ Thomas Merton

The word "spiritual" used to refer almost exclusively to things directly related to one's

religious beliefs. In recent times, it has also come to be used as an alternative to religion.

How often have you heard some say: "I'm not religious, but I consider myself a spiritual person." To address this in depth would remove us from our main purpose, which is how

The Arts can help you effect spiritual transformation. Suffice it to say that viewing,

listening, or reading something artistic can move the spirit, how much more so when one

becomes the creator of The Art. Consider ‘Abdu'l-Bahá’s words on spiritual progress:

“Spiritual progress is through the breaths of the Holy Spirit and is the awakening of

the conscious soul of man to perceive the reality of divinity. Material progress

insures the happiness of the human world. Spiritual progress insures the happiness

and eternal continuance of the soul.”¹

And again, He says:

“That which is truly spiritual must light the path to God and must result in

deeds.

We cannot believe the call to be spiritual when there is no result. Spirit is reality, and when the spirit in each of us seeks to join itself with the Great Reality, it must in turn give life.”²

The preceding passages bring us back to religion. If we have a soul and are truly spiritual beings temporarily inhabiting material bodies, then the source of that spirit must come to us from God through the Holy Spirit—an intangible yet very real connection. It’s via this connection that we receive our inspiration to create. Bahá'u'lláh explains:

“Every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God is endowed with such potency as can instil new life into every human frame, if ye be of them that

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

comprehend this truth. All the wondrous works ye behold in this world have been manifested through the operation of His supreme and most exalted Will, His wondrous and inflexible Purpose. Through the mere revelation of the word "Fashioner," issuing forth from His lips and proclaiming His attribute to mankind, such power is released as can generate, through successive ages, all the manifold arts which the hands of man can produce. This, verily, is a certain truth. No sooner is this resplendent word uttered, than its animating energies, stirring within all created things, give birth to the means and instruments whereby such arts can be produced and perfected. All the wondrous achievements ye now witness are the direct consequences of the Revelation of this Name.”³

Since the power to create comes from one of the Names of God: “The Fashioner,” and you are created in His image, it follows that you too are a fashioner, a creator. You are a creative being. Therefore, The Arts, which seem at first glance to be material, may be used to help transform your spirit.

Many arts require material paraphernalia, but the driving force that makes them into something beautiful, emanates from within your soul—your inner reality reflected into the outer world.

Dancing and singing can occur without any requirement for things concrete, but if you wish to dance for others, you'll choose a costume and perhaps a background that enhances the visual effect. You may add items to use in the dance, like flowing scarves, umbrellas, batons, castanets, or anything else that enhances the movements and promotes its message. You can sing a cappella, or you may decide to select one or more instruments to accompany you, to provide other elements of sound that help penetrate the heart and soul of the listener. 'Abdu'l-Bahá encourages us to:

“Break all fetters and seek for spiritual joy and enlightenment; then, though you walk on this earth, you will perceive yourselves to be within the divine horizon.”⁴

Have you ever felt transported to a plane of exaltation while participating in an artistic endeavor? It once happened for me. Participating in a circle of people performing a simple step to the steady beat of a maraca being shaken by one woman while another prayed aloud, and some without the circle hummed and others drummed, I suddenly felt as if I were floating; my feet were moving but I couldn't feel the floor beneath them. What an ecstatic sensation—as though held aloft “within the divine horizon.”

CHAPTER TWO

As you begin to feel the joy and move toward enlightenment, these qualities become contagious and spread to those who surround you. According to 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

“Life in man should be like a flame, warming all with whom it comes into contact.

The spiritually awakened are like to bright torches in the sight of God; they give light and comfort to their fellows.”⁵

Your own spiritual transformation, effected through your artistic endeavors, brightens your inner light. The more it increases in intensity, the more it radiates out and reaches others. You become their light in the darkness. Those who are enkindled and influenced by your light increase their own spiritual radiance which then envelops even more people

in a never-ending cycle.

Yes, Art is an act of spirituality.

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THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Coax Out and Caper with Your Creative Child

Write your thoughts on how your spirit has been uplifted through the arts,
whether as audience/reader/viewer, or creator.

CHAPTER THREE

C HAPTER T HREE

To Create Is to Worship

“...the perfection of arts is considered as acts of worship.” ~
‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Too often The Arts are considered by individuals and society in general to be of secondary importance—something that can easily be set aside and saved for later—or even discarded altogether to allow more time for recreational activities, sports-related pursuits, or academic interests. The Arts are usually among the first, if not the first, curriculum cuts made when school budgets are tight.

The true value of Art is neither understood nor is its vital importance comprehended. If you are in accord with the opinion that The Arts are of secondary importance, or of no importance at all, I trust that your opinion will change as you study what the teachings of the Bahá’í Faith say about The Arts and learn the high station accorded them therein.

“All Art is a gift of the Holy Spirit. When this light shines through the mind of a musician, it manifests itself in beautiful harmonies. Again, shining through the mind of a poet, it is seen in fine poetry and poetic prose. When the Light of the Sun of Truth inspires the mind of a painter, he produces marvelous pictures. These gifts are fulfilling their highest purpose when showing forth the praise of God.”¹

Praise of God is synonymous with worship. When you utter your prayers, you understand that you are worshipping God. If “all art is a gift of the Holy Spirit,” then

making the best use possible of that gift is your way of honoring the Giver and showing your appreciation. It is both high praise and another avenue for worship of the Divine Creator. 'Abdu'l-Bahá asserts:

“If a man engages with all his power in the acquisition of a science or the perfection of an art, it is as if he has been worshipping God in the churches and temples.”²

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Identical with art as worship is the concept of art as service. Since all created beings are the children of God, when you serve humanity through your creative efforts you are also serving God. Service is another form of worship. 'Abdu'l-Bahá suggests:

“What greater bounty than this that science should be considered as an act of worship and art as service to the Kingdom of God.”³

Read and meditate on these statements and you will perceive The Arts with a new eye.

Re-examine its place in your life and in society so you can explore ways to seamlessly weave it into the fabric of your life, and thereby simultaneously pay homage to God and transform your spirit.

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CHAPTER THREE

Coax Out and Caper with Your Creative Child
How do you use The Arts in your own worship?

If you're not yet weaving them into your prayers and meditations, what will you do to incorporate them?

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

CHAPTER FIVE

CHAPTER FOUR

Art! Who Comprehends Her?

“Art! Who comprehends her? With whom can one consult concerning this great goddess?”

~Ludwig von Beethoven

That query from renowned composer Ludwig von Beethoven shows what an

The impossible task it is to try and understand or define just what is Art. If he couldn't, who can? I imagine if you asked ten people to do so, you'd get ten different answers. Still, let's explore the question.

Everyone has an opinion about The Arts. Some conflict. Is one correct and the other wrong? That seems too much of a presumption. With whom rests the right to decide? Might each concept be valid? Well, yes—at least it is to the individual who proposes the idea. Your perspective is influenced by your experiences; therefore, any work of Art will evoke different responses from different people. Art is-what-it-is to each individual.

Dictionaries contain several definitions of “art,” and many artists have expressed quite eloquently what Art means to them. Your understanding grows with your experience, and that affects your opinions.

A fourth-grade student in Carpinteria, CA USA, expressed the thought that:

“Art is like words without letters.”¹

A profound statement by one so young—perhaps the child has not yet been subject to dogmatic pronouncements by adults. It is like the old adage that "a picture is worth a thousand words," indicating that Art "speaks" to you as you contemplate it and let your mind explore and discover just what it conveys to you, perhaps even to you alone. Let's look at what a few artists answered when asked to define “Art.”

“It is a query without a definitive response, with opinions so large as to fill a library of books. It is something not easily answered without going on a journey of discovery. There are no pat answers.”² – Manuel Luz

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

“Art is not a study of positive reality; it is the seeking for ideal truth.”³ – George Sand

“What is a work of art? A word made flesh, a thing seen, a thing known, the immeasurable translated into terms of the measurable.”⁴ – Eric Gill

Defining Art is fluid because:

“The definition of art has to shift whenever an innovator appears.”⁵ –

Thomas Hoving

Art traditionally refers to works created by artists: visual arts, e.g., paintings, sculpture, or crafts; literature: non-fiction, fiction, poetry, journalism, scripts; all forms of dance; drama and comedy, music, and even the culinary arts. What can you add to this list?

The more passion you have for anything, whether cooking, gardening, mathematics, drama, (I could go on ad infinitum), usually the more intense will be your efforts at improving. You become more adept. This is skill. And as your skill reaches a high level, whatever you undertake can rightfully be termed Art.

Indeed, most dictionaries provide definitions of Art that stress skill, and yes, you should strive always to hone your skills, to excel in your endeavors (see *Strive for Excellence*), but there is so much more to art when you turn Art into a proper noun.

Author Susanne Perry, a former educator, provided an excellent example of how to see Art and creativity in areas you wouldn't normally consider to be “Art:”

“Teaching is a work of art. This belief hit me years ago in a preschool classroom watching an early learning colleague interact with four-year-olds. I dubbed this colleague “an artist working in children.” Picture a potter at the wheel, carefully forming a piece of pottery from clay with skill and a gentle touch. She could approach a group of unruly youngsters, each with their own needs and temperaments, and before you knew it, they would be sharing toys, singing together, reacting to each other with kindness and smiles. Every day I witnessed beautiful, amazing interactions and I was left in awe. There is no catching flies with honey here. The goal was to enable learning but never to gain control of these little people. To truly make a difference with students of any age, infants to high schoolers—maybe even older—requires passion and a reverent respect for what you are doing. That is an art.”

Read, absorb, and consider the information that follows, then develop your own personal

understanding of, and appreciation for, the wonder and awe of Art. You can then form your own definition of this elusive term.

CHAPTER FIVE

CHAPTER FIVE

Whence Art?

“Art is the expression of the immortal part of man.” ~ Ignacy Paderewski

Art is partially defined as skill, or more accurately, skill—when it reaches its highest levels—is Art. Though that's a mere portion of its reality, let us begin with that concept and then move on to innate talent.

Skill evolves through practice. If you wish to develop a particular artistic pursuit for which you hold a deep affinity yet for which you lack natural talent, diligent effort will help you gain the skill necessary to succeed. University of New Mexico neurobiology professor Rex Jung says:

“The more time you devote to developing a skill set, the more raw material you have to draw on and the easier it is to improvise.”¹ – Rex Jung

He posits that the more adept you become at improvisation, the more your creativity grows and enables you to improve your skills in any endeavor. To accomplish this, you must successfully shut off your inner critic and cease to censor yourself in order to freely create.

How much easier, though, when you identify and develop your innate talent(s) and strive to develop them. Your skill soars—from good to great!

But whence the source of this natural talent? Is it simply in your genes? Do you inherit it from your parents and forebears? I'm sure that genetics wield a great influence.

This though, is greatly enhanced when coupled with being reared in an environment in which you are surrounded by others who both practice their Art and nurture and encourage your own talent and ensure you are trained in at least one Art form.

If this was not your personal experience, there can be other sources for your artistic inspiration and encouragement. So, let me ask:

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

- Were you not raised in an artistic environment?
- Have you had little or no exposure to Art?
- Were your attempts at Art discouraged or disparaged by others?
- Despite dabbling in Art, do you yet feel inadequate or that you have nothing new to offer?

Take heart. Even if some, or all, of the above pertain to your situation, a higher point of inspiration awaits you.

Many renowned artists recognized that their talent emanated from a spiritual source. (So does yours.) Some go so far as to claim God is the artist and they but His instrument through which Art flows forth for the benefit of mankind.

“Straightway the ideas flow in upon me, directly from God.”² – Johannes Brahms

“The music of this opera [Madame Butterfly] was dictated to me by God; I was merely instrumental in putting it on paper and communicating it to the public.”³ – Giacomo Puccini

“I myself do nothing. The Holy Spirit accomplishes all through me.”⁴ – William Blake

The talents of an artist, small or great, are God-given. They've nothing to do with the private person; they're nothing to be proud of. They're just a sacred trust . . .

Having been given, I must give. Man shall not live by bread alone, and what the farmer does I must do. I must feed the people—with my songs.”⁵ – Paul Robeson

These statements are not mere efforts at humility. Each artist was cognizant of the Well from which they drew the Water that nourished their talent. Bahá'u'lláh confirms their understanding:

“The light which these souls [the Prophets and Messengers of God] radiate is responsible for the progress of the world and the advancement of its peoples. They are like unto leaven which leaveneth the world of being and constitute the animating force through which the arts and wonders of the world are made manifest.”⁶

Oh, wow! The heavenly light radiates from Zoroaster, Moses, Christ, Muhammad, the

Buddha, Krishna, Bahá'u'lláh, and all the other Holy Ones to all the great artists in the world—including you. Bahá'u'lláh goes on to say:

“Such arts and material means as are now manifest have been achieved by virtue of His knowledge and wisdom which have been revealed in Epistles and Tablets

CHAPTER FIVE

through His Most Exalted Pen—a Pen out of whose treasury pearls of wisdom and utterance and the arts and crafts of the world are brought to light.”⁷

Isn't it exciting to know that you are a recipient of these pearls? Consider these thoughts from an editorial in The Bahá'í Magazine:

“The function of the individual is to become a channel for this Divine force which seeks to remake the planet into a better and happier home for man. In this great endeavor the Holy Spirit—that Light which guided the Prophets and shone forth from them—this Light must be our guide.”⁸

What is it within you that allows the connection with the Light that is radiated from the heavenly realm? 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains that it is your rational soul:

“The first condition of perception in the world of nature is the perception of the rational soul....This human rational soul is God's creation; it encompasses and excels other creatures; as it is more noble and distinguished, it encompasses things. The power of the rational soul can discover the realities of things, comprehend the peculiarities of beings, and penetrate the mysteries of existence.

All sciences, knowledge, arts, wonders, institutions, discoveries and enterprises come from the exercised intelligence of the rational soul. There was a time when they were unknown, preserved mysteries and hidden secrets; the rational soul gradually discovered them and brought them out from the plane of the invisible and the hidden into the realm of the visible.”⁹

'Abdu'l-Bahá asserts:

“By the power of the Holy Spirit, working through his soul, man is able to perceive the Divine reality of things. All great works of art and science are witnesses to this power of the Spirit.”¹⁰

He also says:

“It stands written that he [man] is made in the Image of God. Mysteries that were hidden he discovers; and secrets that were concealed he brings into the light. By Science and by Art he brings hidden powers into the region of the visible world.

Man perceives the hidden law in created things and co-operates with it.”¹¹

You, no matter your gender, are made in the image of God. God is the Fashioner, the Creator. Ergo, you are a fashioner, you were born to create.

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

So now you know that you are a creative being made in the image of God, the Origin and Creator, the Source of your innate artistic talent, whether it's been discovered and nurtured or yet awaits your invitation to emerge. It can also be sent via a connection with souls who have passed from the material plane into the next, the “heavenly” realm of existence.

You may be wondering how to tap into the Source. There are two main avenues: prayer and meditation. Thaya Batdorf explains the prayer connection:

“The power of the Holy Spirit takes the preparations of the artist and molds them into stunning reality. Prayer becomes the bridge between study, idea and execution ensuring that the inspiration will flow through his eye, mind, and hand.

Without prayer the artist must depend solely upon his own self....Man cannot make a tree or a universe. An artist alone cannot create a spiritual vision.”¹²

This connection sometimes comes at totally unexpected moments. I recall falling asleep on an airplane and waking up with a vision of a music video to one of my favorite children's songs. I also, as most writers do, keep pen and paper at my bedside for the times when I awaken with an idea. If I don't write it down immediately, I usually can't recall it later. What a loss. You don't need to leave inspiration completely to chance or remembrance of a dream. 'Abdu'l-Bahá said that learning to meditate can put your rational soul into a receptive state. (See *Meditation Is the Key for Opening the Doors of Mysteries.*)

Another source is what the Bahá'í Writings refer to as the “Concourse on high,” those faithful souls who have moved from the physical plane to the next world of God:

“Know thou, of a truth, that if the soul of man hath walked in the ways of God, it will, assuredly, return and be gathered to the glory of the Beloved. By the righteousness of God! It shall attain a station such as no pen can depict, or tongue describe. The soul that hath remained faithful to the Cause of God, and stood unwaveringly firm in His Path shall, after his ascension, be possessed of such power that all the worlds which the Almighty hath created can benefit through him. Such a soul provideth, at the bidding of the Ideal King and Divine Educator, the pure leaven that leaveneth the world of being, and furnisheth the power through which the arts and wonders of the world are made manifest. ... Those souls that are the symbols of detachment are the leaven of the world.”¹³

Thaya Batdorf suggests:

CHAPTER FIVE

“If the artist does not tap this source, asking the assistance of these souls, he ignores the channels and power for the sustained flow of inspiration that must feed his work. He is assuming he is alone because he stands physically alone. To create a new work of a new cycle he must unite himself to God’s creation through the Supreme Concourse [the Holy Spirit and the many holy souls in the next world]. This is the source of that vitality which forges a new art in the world.”¹⁴

I can personally attest to the efficacy of prayer and calling on the Concourse on high. If, just before going onstage to portray a historical individual, Bahá'í or otherwise, or a character created for a piece that will promote positive principles and attributes, I offer a prayer and a call to guidance from Roger White, whom I consider my Muse, and the character I’m about to portray, when I come offstage I know I’ve channeled that person, I was “being” rather than “acting,”—as though I embodied them—they

spoke through
me. On occasion, when pushed for time I neglected to do so, then realized it
had just
been Jaine onstage, going through the motions and I'd done the author, the
message, the
character, and the audience a disservice.

Whether you've never dabbled in Art, neglected it due to feelings of
inadequacy,
or feel that time given to artistic pursuit is self-serving when there
are—supposedly—
more important things that require your attention, consider this: since your
talent is a
God-given gift, do you really want to say "No, thank you," to your Creator and
decline
His gracious gift?

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THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

CHAPTER SIX

CHAPTER SIX

Wherefore Art?

“...to acquire the sciences and arts is the greatest glory of mankind.” ~
'Abdu'l-Bahá

The Arts appear to be afforded an equal station with science in Bahá'í
Scripture.

Frequently mentioned together, what is said of one usually also pertains to the
other.

'Abdu'l-Bahá tells us their acquisition is considered "the greatest glory of
mankind." 1

This indicates that The Arts are neither a frivolous pursuit nor something to
be relegated

to the bottom of your priority list. Moreover, the Bahá'í Writings not only
encourage

engagement in The Arts. they list it as “a duty.” 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes:

“...in this new century the attainment of science, arts and belles lettres,
whether

divine or worldly, material or spiritual, is a matter which is acceptable
before God

and a duty which is incumbent upon us to accomplish. Therefore, never deny the
spiritual things to the material, rather both are incumbent upon thee.”1

The symbiotic relationship between The Arts and spirituality demonstrates the
imperative of its development in your life.

You're probably wondering, How can art affect spirituality? Alexander Pope

renders

a concise and eloquent explanation in these first five lines from his Prologue to Mr.

Addison's 'Cato'2:

“To wake the soul by tender strokes of art;
To raise the genius, and to mend the heart;
To make mankind, in conscious virtue bold;
Live o'er each scene, and be what they behold:
For this the Tragic Muse first trod the stage.”
Let's consider each line.

“To wake the soul by tender strokes of art;”

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Have you ever gazed at a painting, sculpture, mural, a beautiful architectural edifice or even a cartoon, or something that "spoke to you"—moved you—awakened your soul?

Perhaps a piece of music and/or its accompanying lyrics? Did it occur while immersed in a play which was presented with such excellence, such reality, that you were able to enter into a state of "suspension of disbelief"?⁴ How many people, gazing in person at Michelangelo's Pieta, suddenly experienced the reality of Mary's pain and Christ's sacrifice? Jolted, they comprehended, perhaps for the first time, its impact on them personally and on humanity as a whole. Passion plays have the same effect. Similarly, this has been the case for Bahá'ís on reading poetry or listening to songs about the compelling history of their Faith or following dramatic presentations depicting the persecutions of their fellow believers. Plays, books, poetry, and dance that deal with the raw reality of racial discrimination trigger empathetic reactions rather than just the intellectual, "Oh, isn't that terrible," rational understanding which is often detached from our inner sensibilities.

“To raise the genius, and to mend the heart;”

Let's take the two phrases of this line independently.

“To raise the genius,”

Studies abound that demonstrate a connection between the enhanced ability to

learn—

and retain—what you are taught when the material presented has an artistic component.

Even just having separate arts instruction improves your ability to absorb information

and to develop critical thinking skills. One study found that:

“The Nobel Prize winners and most of the members of the National Academy of Sciences in our study were universally artistic and/or musical, most had several

arts-related hobbies as adults and they utilized a wide range of arts-associated

mental thinking tools... Their less successful colleagues did not share either their

arts interests or their arts-related thinking skills.”³

The second half of that line tells us The Arts help

4 Suspension of disbelief, sometimes called willing suspension of disbelief, is an intentional avoidance of

critical thinking or logic in examining something surreal, such as a work of speculative fiction, in order to

believe it for the sake of enjoyment. Aristotle described it as one of the principles of theater; the audience

ignores the unreality of fiction in order to experience catharsis.

CHAPTER SIX

“to mend the heart;”

Numerous stories depict actual instances of how and when The Arts helped to mend the

heart. These two examples of public arts projects instituted in poverty and crime-ridden

neighborhoods, one in Philadelphia, PA USA and another in Las Palmitas, Mexico, led to

both individual and community transformations.

Challenged to convert an empty, inner-city lot in Philadelphia used mainly for drug deals into an inviting park, Lily Yeh made her work an art project, because,

according to author Peter Michelmore, who wrote about “Lily Yeh’s Magic Village” for

Reader’s Digest. Ms. Yeh understood that “The making of art brings out the humanity in people.”

She enlisted local residents, including neighborhood children, to assist her; they

bagged trash, scrubbed walls, and then, using pieces of broken tile and glass,

much of it
found on the lot itself, created mosaic murals on walls, planters and benches.
Next, they
planted grass interspersed by walking paths which now are crossed by people who
used
to give wide clearance to the area when passing by.

One fellow, initially suspicious of this Chinese American woman's motives for
coming to
an impoverished African American neighborhood, watched her for a while. Wary at
first,
he finally decided she harbored no ulterior motive and then agreed to work with
her. So
motivated did he become that
during the winter months
when work was suspended, he
entered a drug rehabilitation
program so he could return
and become a more effective
participant. The effort spread
to the surrounding
neighborhood.

I visited this one-time
Village of Arts and Humanities, Philadelphia, PA thepenngazette.com slum, now
transformed into a
bright area in which residents
take pride. The dazzling effect of the mosaics, and the choice of angels built
by some of
the participants, made me feel both welcome and safe. I recalled that in
Micheltore's

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

article, he noted, "The village has touched the lives of hundreds of
children, opening their
eyes to a lifestyle far removed from the mean streets." Now "The Village" is
home to a
non-profit association that prioritizes arts-related means to address a variety
of civic
needs and programs.

A similar story took place in the Las Palmitas neighborhood of Pachuca, Mexico.
A group of artists known as the "German crew," along with local residents,
transformed
their uninspired cement and cinder-block houses into a multi-colored mural with
colors
described in an Associated Press article as "...bright lavender, lime green,
incandescent

orange—hues more commonly found in a bag of Skittles...4

Las Palmitas, Mexico, mexicoenimagenes.com

The article about this city-sponsored project includes quotes from an interview with project director Enrique Gomez, whom they describe as "...a tattooed and goateed former gang member who turned his life around when he rededicated himself to graffiti art and muralism."⁵ Gomez said:

"I never thought we would have such a big impact. Before, Las Palmitas was a sketchy area where people avoided going out after dark or interacting with each other. But as the project nears its final stages, you see people talking to each other more, children hanging out on the steep stairways that cut through the neighborhood.

CHAPTER SIX

"Honestly, what surprises me the most is that people are really changing. They are growing, there is more community spirit. People are taking the security of their neighborhood into their own hands."⁶

You might think these were mere material improvements, but hearts had to change for the people to be willing to work together to recreate their neighborhoods. The resultant sense of pride and accomplishment led to new efforts to improve other aspects necessary for the establishment and maintenance of a healthy, thriving community.

Pope's next line reads:

"To make mankind, in conscious virtue bold;"

On the societal level, we need look no further than the anti-war movement of the 1960s and 1970s in the United States. Artists, emboldened by their vehement disagreement with the U.S. government's undeclared but active war in Vietnam, created sculptures, posters, and other artworks that unequivocally portrayed their outrage. Anger erupted in the music and lyrics of the time. All of this in turn roused the populace—mostly the younger generation, but some of their elders as well—to turn out for sit-ins and protest marches, so strong was their frustration.

An unfortunate consequence of this phenomenon was that in addition to turning

against the war and the government they blamed for it, they also turned their ire toward the soldiers. Those who returned from service in Vietnam found themselves treated as pariahs, unwelcome in their own homeland.

Next Pope writes:

“Live o'er each scene, and be what they behold:”

As an artist, you create an outer expression of your inner thoughts and feelings. With few exceptions, it depicts your beliefs. At times your creation may surprise you. It might differ from what you thought you believed and guide you to scrutinize and, perhaps as you “live o'er each scene,” ponder what proves—or what has just confused—those beliefs. You can then make a plan to move forward—to “be what they [you] behold.” The same holds true for your viewer/listener/audience, who may tune in to that which you are trying to say or may find a different truth within it due to their own personal experience.

And all the above leads us to the last line, the artist's *raison d'être*, which needs no further explanation:

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

“For this the Tragic Muse first trod the stage.”

According to the Universal House of Justice:

“...music, art, and literature...are to represent and inspire the noblest sentiments and highest aspirations and should be a source of comfort and tranquility for troubled souls...”⁷

When you tap into your true nature and permit your innate creativity to fulfill its purpose, you feel more whole; it becomes a healing elixir for your emotional and spiritual health. An online article titled *64 Ways to Practice Nonviolence* asserts, “The worst thing you can do to a human soul is to suppress its natural desire to create.”⁸

Such suppression stifles your spirit. Charles Dickens writes, and I agree with him in part:

“The whole difference between construction and creation is exactly this: that a thing constructed can only be loved after it is constructed; but a thing created is loved before it exists.”⁹

It seems he didn't consider the fact that the architect or engineer is also an artist. I imagine that their vision is as special to them as that of a sculptor who sees within a block of clay or stone the image of what is hidden within and longs to free it and bring it forth for all to see and enjoy. What I do agree with is the love of the artist for their art. Will you deny your own true love?

Life lived with fear of violence makes the struggle for spiritual transformation nearly impossible. The elimination of fear and its cause is essential; this is another area where The Arts provide answers. Art is powerful. It can be, and unfortunately often is, used to reinforce stereotypes and prejudices, thereby inducing fear of “the other.” Yet that same power can be put to positive use. Existential psychologist Rollo May explains:

“Art is an antidote for violence. It gives the ecstasy, the self-transcendence that could otherwise take the form of drug addiction, or terrorism, or suicide or warfare. We have seen that both violence and art—and the beauty which is the center of art—yield the experience of ecstasy and self-transcendence. But art and violence are directly opposite in their effects.”¹⁰

CHAPTER SIX

Yes, such is the potential power of Art that though some successfully use it to incite violence, it can when used for noble purpose and with good intent, transform both artist and audience and spur them on to become agents of change.

Art is also a proponent for open society. United States President John F. Kennedy understood this. In a tribute to poet Robert Frost, Kennedy explains:

“If art is to nourish the roots of our culture, society must set the artist free to follow his vision wherever it takes him. We must never forget that art is not a form

of
propaganda; it is a form of truth. And as Mr. MacLeigh once remarked of poets,
'There is nothing worse for our trade than to be in style.' In free society
art is not
a weapon, and it does not belong to the sphere of polemics and ideology.

Artists
are not engineers of the soul. It may be different elsewhere. But in a
democratic
society the highest duty of the writer, the composer, the artist, is to remain
true to
himself and to let the chips fall where they may. In serving his vision of the
truth,
the artist best serves his nation. And the nation which disdains the mission of
art
invites the fate of Robert Frost's hired man—the fate of having “nothing
to look
backward to with pride. And nothing to look forward to with hope.”¹¹

Art helps heal on the societal level partly because it offers a cathartic tool
for individuals,
and individuals are the basis of society. This pertains to you, too, as both an
individual
and as a member of society. This aspect is addressed in the section, Art Heals.

Artist Olafur
Eliasson believes that:

“...one of the major responsibilities of artists—and the idea that artists
have
responsibilities may come as a surprise to some—is to help people not only
get to
know and understand something with their minds but also to feel it emotionally
and physically. By doing this, art can mitigate the numbing effect created by
the
glut of information we are faced with today and motivate people to turn
thinking
into doing.”¹²

Journalist and writing instructor Brenda Ueland confirms the need to tap into
your
creativity.

“Because there is nothing [else] that makes people so generous, joyful,
lively, bold
and compassionate, so indifferent to fighting and the accumulation of objects
and
money.”¹³

What does Art mean to you?

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

If you aren't sure, consider these thoughts developed together by two fourth grade

Carpinteria, CA students:

“Art means a lot of things to people.

“Art lets you express your feelings such as happy, sad, tired, angry and upset. Art shows your imagination and what you think about, like beautiful imaginary or real things and even frightening things! Art shows your personality and what you like.

“What I like about art is that you can do whatever you want. I also like that it's fun, fascinating and there's no wrong way. A world without art would be a very dull place. If there weren't art, there wouldn't be any beautiful pictures and sculptures to admire. Art brings more joy to the world and our lives.”¹⁴
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CHAPTER SIX

Coax Out and Caper with Your Creative Child

Complete the following thought. It can be prose or poetry,

or even a drawing or you can compose a song:

The Arts makes me feel...

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Wherefore Art?

Art's Underlying Purpose

“The purpose of art is not the release of a momentary ejection of adrenaline but rather the gradual lifelong construction of a state of wonder and serenity.” ~ Glenn Gould

Art is not merely for entertainment. That misconception diminishes Art's true purpose

and prevents it from effecting the positive changes that it could produce.

Art enriches

and enhances all your endeavors. It inspires and educates.

You, the artist, are an individual. What is your purpose as an individual—as a

human being—as a child of God? Bahá'u'lláh says it is “to know and to worship God”

and to “create an ever-advancing civilization.” Addressing that concept, an editorial in

The Bahá'í Magazine states:

“When you breathe forth the breath of the Holy Spirit from your hearts into the world, commerce and politics will take care of themselves in perfect harmony. All arts and sciences will become revealed and the knowledge of God will be manifested. It is not your work but that of the Holy Spirit which you breathe forth through the Word.”¹⁵

Leo Tolstoy questions:

“But if art is a human activity having for its purpose the transmission to others of the highest and best feelings to which men have risen, how could it be that humanity...should exist without this important activity, and instead of it, should put up with an insignificant artistic activity only affording pleasure?”¹⁶

Indeed, the Chinese dramatist Cao Yu insists:

“Art for art's sake is a philosophy of the well-fed.”¹⁷

Conversely, British novelist and essayist E. M. Forster asserts:

“Art for art's sake? I should think so, and more so than ever at the present time. It is the one orderly product which our middling race has produced. It is the cry of a thousand sentinels, the echo from a thousand labyrinths, it is the lighthouse which cannot be hidden...it is the best evidence we can have of our dignity.”¹⁸

CHAPTER SIX

Do they really disagree? Or is it merely a matter of semantics. The following statement, attributed to American playwright Lorraine Hansberry, tells us:

“The purpose of art is action. It contains the ‘energy which could change things.’”

On a social plane, art with a message, art that is meant to cause the viewer or listener to think, can be a catalyst for change rather than exist merely as simple ornamentation.

But that does not seem to be what Forster suggests. His quotation suggests that Art, even without a conscious purpose, without thought of what it will say to others, but Art which helps you say what you need to say—is valuable—is important—affords you the dignity you deserve. Is this not an exercise in change? If it helps you

know yourself,
express yourself, then it helps you grow. And growth is change. Your growth,
your
change, cannot help but affect those around you.

Art is a mirror of life as the artist perceives it to be. Whether it be
intensely personal
or a view of society, you, the artist, reflect your own view of reality.

At times, that reality is one of appreciation—of praise. Often it addresses
nature in
the physical sense. This in turn, has a direct effect on your spiritual nature.
The beauty
expressed in your art moves the human soul, both your own and that of another
who
contemplates it.

"Entertainment" in itself is not bad. It can relax you, help you shake off the
stresses
in your life, allow you to forget—for the moment at least—your troubles.
But when it
becomes the norm, and Art that stirs deep into the mind and soul is
marginalized, you
cease to grow. On a larger scale, society stagnates—or worse—declines. The
Universal
House of Justice notes:

“Even music, art, and literature, which are to represent and inspire the
noblest
sentiments and highest aspirations and should be a source of comfort and
tranquility for troubled souls have strayed from the straight path and are now
the
mirrors of the soiled hearts of this confused unprincipled and disordered
age.”¹⁹

A large percentage of rap music, a subset of hip hop culture, contains lyrics
that glorify
violence and denigrate women. Since rap has become so ingrained in society,
Colby
Jeffers, a Phoenix, Arizona USA-based rap artist, counteracts the negative
trend. He
writes and performs his music with lyrics that elevate the ideals of peace,
unity, respect,
and other positive attributes. His online bio explains his philosophy:

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

“Colby Jeffers has a passion for music, education, community building, youth
empowerment, and positive social change. His mission in music is to create
socially

conscious and spiritually focused hip hop that uplifts, educates, and inspires....

“An educator by nature, Colby is also a teaching artist with The Rap Camp, an organization that aims to create positive change through rap. Colby works with young people to help them develop their power of expression and channel it towards noble ends.”²⁰

Musician/author/composer Ludwig (Lou) Tuman explains:

“...the noble status given in the [Bahá'í] Writings to the arts in general strongly suggests that the role of the fine arts in a divine civilization must be of a higher order than the mere giving of pleasure, for if such were their ultimate aim, how could they "result in advantage to man...ensure his progress and elevate his rank?" Surely few would deny that the fine arts do give pleasure and that it may be of a sensual, emotional, or even spiritual nature. Few would deny that the contemplation of beauty provides a special satisfaction. The point here, however, is that such pleasure cannot be the end of fine art but is only a natural part of the experience it offers.”²¹

How do "The Arts" help when used in their highest form? According to Bahá'u'lláh:

“...[arts] will promote the well-being and harmony of all the kindreds of the earth.”²²

“...Arts, crafts and sciences the world of being, and are conducive to its exaltation.”²³

When you wish to advocate for change in order to right a wrong, heal wounded hearts, prevent violence, or foster the advancement of civilization, you will be more effective when you include The Arts in your plan of action. Shoghi Effendi explains:

“Art can better awaken such noble sentiments than cold rationalizing, especially among the mass of the people.”²⁴

To achieve this goal, you can immerse your listener/viewer/reader/participant/audience in aesthetically pleasing surroundings, play calm music, and release relaxing scents to

give them an overall sense of well-being. Or you can have everyone participate—perhaps with all of them singing and/or dancing together. Growing up in a Jewish home, we attended services at the local synagogue. Singing was an integral part of the ritual, at times by the Cantor alone and sometimes by the entire congregation raising their voices

CHAPTER SIX

in blissful praise. Later, joining in Israeli folk dances in the community room following the service, we remained immersed in a joyous atmosphere.

One of my most cherished memories as an adult Bahá'í living in California is the monthly singing devotional that my late friend Kathy Grammer held at her home in Ojai.

A congenial group of women from several communities shared a salad potluck dinner and then sang together for an hour or two using both sacred scriptures set to music and songs with positive messages. The spiritual energy engendered on those evenings infused me with a sense of wellbeing that remained for days afterwards.

After Kathy's untimely passing, Allison Maires of the neighboring city of Ventura, remarked:

“Chanting or singing, as I experience it personally in a group, reaches down into my very cells. On a cellular level I can feel my vibration shifting and coming into alignment both with spirit, and the group I am with. It helps me to balance and ground and feel that precious space of awareness, present to all that is. In this way, I know I am connected not only to all that is in the present moment, but to the ancient truth, and all that the future holds.”

So partly for the group, partly in honor of our beloved Kathy, and partly for herself, Allison volunteered to host the monthly devotionals and we continued our dinners and songs, feeding both our bodies and our spirits, for several more years.

Another way you can achieve the goal of reaching others is to find and share something that stirs brains, hearts and souls, almost slaps them awake so they wish to

personally address a situation that needs correcting. As an example, for four years my friend Ladjamaya Green and I hosted “A Place at the Table:” a monthly film and discussion series at the public library in Eloy, Arizona. This wisdom shared by artist Olafur Eliasson explains what we set out to achieve:

“I am convinced that by bringing us together to share and discuss, a work of art can make us more tolerant of difference and of one another. The encounter with art—and with others over art—can help us identify with one another, expand our notions of we, and show us that individual engagement in the world has actual consequences.”²⁵

We addressed topics such as slavery, racial prejudice, bullying, anti-Semitism, the Navajo Code Talkers, Internment camps for Japanese Americans, documentaries about Supreme

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg and civil rights activist Dolores Huerta, human trafficking, the woman's suffrage movement in the US, health care, emotional freedom therapy, Alzheimer's disease, and more. Conversations followed the films and created a sense of community among the regular attendees.

When asked about the influence, if any, that the series has had for them, all responses were positive and gratifying. Two stood out among the rest: Mary Dondanville responded:

“I have attended A Place at the Table since its inception. It is a place to ponder, debate opinions, sway and be swayed. It is a safe place to discuss ANYTHING in these troubled times. It has opened my mind to new thoughts and allowed me to investigate my own processes.”

And Doris Rasmussen wrote:

“Roger and I were impressed and distressed with the picture of inequality in some of the films of the ‘Place at the Table’.”

Roger and Doris's reactions translated to action. She announced:

“We became members of the NAACP and have signed petitions put forth by non-profits on equality issues.”

It's important to note that both ideas of how to use The Arts, whether to point out the negatives that need to be addressed and recognized, or to demonstrate the hope that depicting successful interventions have brought, are valuable. You don't necessarily have to opt for one over the other. If you only use the positive, you will feel good inside but run the danger of becoming complacent about the trials and tribulations of others. If you only show the problems facing the world, your stress levels will rise. By balancing the two, addressing the ugly and then demonstrating how it can be dealt with in a constructive way, you will feel reinvigorated spiritually and can find the strength to deal with issues without letting them overwhelm you. Lou Tuman explains the purpose of The Arts on three basic planes:

Mystical

To impart spiritual knowledge, attract the souls to the beauty of the All-Glorious, and brighten the flame of His love.

Moral

CHAPTER SIX

To 'represent and inspire the noblest sentiments and highest aspirations,' foster a desire for moral excellence and obedience to the divine teachings and "be a source of comfort and tranquility for troubled souls.

Social

To promote social well-being, harmony, world unity, and universal brotherhood.²⁶

Simply stated, "Art heals."

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THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

CHAPTER SEVEN

CHAPTER SEVEN

Art Heals

"Art is a constant agent of transformation and is indeed the soul's drive to health." ~ Cathy

Malchiodi

Neuroaesthetics, the science of both how viewing art and making Art affect the brain, is the basis for various forms of therapy developed specifically for different fields of art. Rather than use the scientific term, it is usually referred to simply as Art Therapy.

When you immerse yourself in the practice of art—any art form—you stop thinking about your pain and troubles and your subconscious is freed to express itself.

During the creative process you become oblivious to anything else. Afterwards, while perusing the product, it behooves you to consider what you experienced during your artistic process.

What did you feel? Freedom? Frustration? Exhilaration? Angst?

What did you think? Did you analyze it as you went along? Decide you needed more or less of something? Delete/change/add elements? Or did you allow your flow of creativity to work as a stream of consciousness first and leave the judgment and revisions till later?

Both aspects bring insights into your deepest wants/needs/yearnings and often lead you to a point where that which bothered you somehow seems less threatening. This is the beginning of healing.

All Art forms can provide a source of healing. If you wish to go beyond the personal fulfillment of being an artist, why not combine the pursuit of your artistic dream with an occupation in neuroaesthetics and be a music, art, dance, or writing therapist!

These avenues for creativity are tools the therapist uses to help the client achieve what Stephen K. Levine describes as "The task of therapy:"

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

“The task of therapy is not to eliminate suffering but to give a voice to it, to find a form in which it can be expressed and transformed. Expression is itself transformation; this is the message that art brings.”¹

I was a member of an arts task force where our individual "artistic temperaments" precluded effective consultation. We arrived with our own ideas of what should

be done
and none of us seemed to be ready to seriously consider what the others brought
to the
table. Each had a different focus. To try and become more united, we attended a
weekend
session with a psychotherapist who had us dance to express our feelings and
participate
in other creative and artistic therapies.

During one session we listened to music with the pulsating rhythm of a
heartbeat
which transported each of us into an altered state of consciousness—a realm
beyond this
physical one. We each became aware of and connected to our own inner self. I
recall being
surrounded by loved ones who've preceded me into the next plane of existence.
The
yearning to join them tugged at my soul, but they all kept saying, "No. Not
yet. Go back.
It's okay. Go and do what needs doing." It dawned on me that I had much to
do, partly
with my art, partly with my relationships.

When it was over, I sobbed with both longing to return to that realm and regret
to
be back on this earthly plane. Within half an hour, though, calm enveloped me.
Their
messages became clear. I realized, too, that these fellow task force members
were also
family and we had important work to do together.

They must have come to similar conclusions, because we left there a unified,
committed, compassionate, and loving group. Subsequent meetings proved exciting
and
fruitful.

When I returned home from that weekend, my thoughts zeroed in on the
drumming heartbeat exercise and how it affected me—gave me hope. I sat down
and
wrote:

In Quest of Self
I journey into darkness in search of the Light—
plunge into deep caverns of past hurts, sorrows,
fears, frustrations—long-buried, denied—
primal heartbeat pulsates with each holotropic breath—

CHAPTER SEVEN

infiltrates blood vessels, organs,

reaches into the very marrow of life

propels me—penetrates ever deeper—till I attain mystical plateaus—
reunite past with a present pregnant with promise for the future.

Intrigued by the positive results of the weekend, I began reading more about
the
relationship between The Arts and healing.

The Journal of Aging Studies lists six features of successful aging that came
out of a
study with people between the ages of 60 and 93. As you read these features,
listed below,
consider that they do not appear to be exclusive for seniors but seem pertinent
for all age
groups.

1. a sense of purpose
2. interactions with others
3. personal growth
4. self-acceptance
5. autonomy
6. health

Addressing that study, Catherine DiGiacomo writes:

“As stated in a Holiday Retirement Community blog post, “Creative
activities, such
as writing, painting or knitting, encourage a sense of competence, purpose and
growth—all of which contribute to aging well.” Arts and crafts play a vital
role in
aging healthfully by contributing positively to each of those six features.”²

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Art gives oppressed people a sense of self-empowerment. Author Lisa Janti
notes:

“Whether in the Soviet Union under communism, or in South Africa under
apartheid, it was poetry, dance, and song that gave expression to the innermost
longings of the people and helped propel their struggle against oppression.³

Art can calm even when a biological issue makes it feel impossible to sit
still. A woman
and her children visited Jeanne Sheridan at the art center at the Desert Rose
Bahá’í
Institute in Eloy, Arizona. The woman was concerned about her son, who suffers
with
Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), being in the art center, but
Jeanne sat
the children at a worktable and provided modeling clay to play with while she
spoke
with the woman and gave her a tour of the gallery and studios. The boy with

ADHD was
still sitting quietly three hours later, so immersed was he in the act of
molding different
forms with the clay. The mother marveled, "He hasn't moved."

Whether you experience occasional bouts of loneliness, deep depression, mental,
emotional, or physical challenges, there's a form of art therapy that will be
appropriate
for the condition.

"The aim of art is to represent not the outward appearance of things, but
their
inner significance."4 – Aristotle

"Often it is necessary to clarify a vague content by giving it a visible
form. This can
be done by drawing, painting, or modeling. Often the hands will solve a mystery
that the intellect has struggled with in vain."5 – Carl Jung

Consider this thought from an anonymous writer:

"We do not let our experiences define us. We use them as we would a looking
glass, to view the world anew."

Morph this thought into a creative process. It will both inform your art and
result in the
art informing you—eliciting a new and improved understanding of yourself.

Let's peruse just a few examples of Art genres and learn how they can help you
heal. Note that depending on the severity of your issues, it might be
beneficial to see a
therapist who specializes in one or more of the following forms of art therapy,
If you
don't need it yourself, perhaps you might select art therapy as your
vocation.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Art Heals
Music to Soothe Body and Soul

"Music hath charms to sooth a savage beast." ~ James Bramston

Scientific studies demonstrate the effects of music on animals: dogs in
kennels sleep
better and longer when classical music is played but become agitated by heavy
metal
music. Milk production increases when relaxing music is played for cows.

Pianist Paul Barton plays the piano at a sanctuary for abused elephants in
Thailand. The first time he played, an elephant with a mouthful of food stopped
eating
and stood still, the bana grass sticking out of his mouth, until the music

ended. Another
teared up to the sounds of Clair de Lune.

Music has similar effects on humans.

Use music to ease tensions, anxiety, even pain. Depending on the severity of
your
situation, you may wish to engage a music therapist.

Cellist Gwendolyn Watson frequently traveled to see her mother at Valle Verde,
a
Santa Barbara, California care facility. She stayed with my husband Don and me
during
those sojourns. Her mother's roommate, an inveterate complainer, seemed to
grumble
nonstop. On one visit, Gwendolyn took her cello along. She returned later that
day
radiant with joy. When asked the source of her elation, Gwendolyn related that
as she
played for her mother, the roommate gradually calmed down, closed her eyes, and
listened intently, a smile upon her face. When the music ended, the woman
whispered,
"Thank you. That was so beautiful." The music transformed her from anger into
bliss.

The concept of music therapy has even been the subject of congressional
hearings.

Albeit with assistance, Ida Goldman walked into the U. S. Senate chamber where
she
related that:

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

"Before I had surgery, they told me I could never walk again. But when I sat
and
listened to music, I forgot all about the pain." "Before I had surgery,
they told me I
could never walk again. I had terrible pain in my leg and back. I couldn't
even close
my hand. But when I sat and listened to music, I forgot all about the pain.
When I
listen to the music-any kind of music-I don't think of anything else. My whole
mind
is only on the music I hear. I even dance to the music. My toes just start
tapping
away every time I hear music..." "6

Following the hearings, Senator Harry Reid commented,

“Music therapy is much more complicated than playing records in nursing homes.

Therapists are trained in psychology, group interaction, and the special needs of the elderly.”⁷

Senator Reid also noted that music is a

“...therapeutic tool for those suffering from Alzheimer's disease and related dementias, strokes and depression.”⁸

Shortly after returning from Spain, where he'd spent four years studying classical guitar with the goal of being able to play—and play well—Bach's Chaconne, Joseph Mastroianni was struck down by a vehicle as he crossed a New York City street. Due to a crushed leg and fractures to multiple parts of his body, including his skull and his hand, he underwent numerous surgeries.

Joseph turned to music for his therapy, always dangling the carrot of ability to play the Chaconne again as his inspiration for healing. “During ten years of recovery and rehabilitation,” he told me, “Music was an invaluable tool, both physically and spiritually. I used the guitar as therapy for my hand and music as therapy for my soul.”

Unwilling to become dependent on pain medication, Joseph also used music to control his pain. “It doesn't take away the pain,” he explained, “it takes you away from the pain.”

Reggae musician Bob Marley put it simply:

“One good thing about music, when it hits, you feel no pain.”⁹

Various scientific studies substantiate that premise:

CHAPTER SEVEN

“...research has demonstrated that music can reduce opioid requirements, and that postoperative pain may be lessened...”¹⁰

Music therapy patients not only end up needing less medication, according to therapist

Dennis Thompson, they also:

“...have significant improvements in their respiration, blood pressure, heart

rate,
and muscle relaxation"11

and are found to:

“...enjoy more peace of mind and better quality of life.”12

Neurologist Dr. Oliver Sacks writes:

“The power of music to integrate and cure is quite fundamental. It is the profoundest non-chemical medication.”13

According to oncologist Mitchell L. Gaynor,

“Sound can help people make shifts in perspective that normally take 1–2 years of meditation.”14

Unaware that music therapy existed as an actual professional discipline, Joseph became

his own therapist. He opined that the vibrations of music have positive effects. Experts

agree. Musician and composer Kay Gardner explains:

“...sound’s immediate effect is on the physical body, since sound vibrates mass.”15

Similarly, in Bahá’í Scripture it is written that:

“...although sounds are but vibrations in the air which affect the ear's auditory nerve, and these vibrations are but chance phenomena carried along through the air, even so, see how they move the heart.”16

“Musical melodies are...etheric vibrations, which, reaching the tympanum, affect the nerves of hearing. Musical melodies are, therefore, those peculiar effects produced by, or from, vibration. However, they have the keenest effect upon the spirit. In sooth, although music is a material affair, yet its tremendous effect is spiritual, and its greatest attachment is to the realm of the spirit.”17

Addressing the process of Sound Therapy, retired MA clinical counselor, sound therapist

and world chant master Nancy A. Watters explains:

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

“Sound therapy works because everything in creation is vibrating, including every cell and organ in your body. Your body tunes into every sound around you, whether you are thinking about it or not. Calming sounds, like water and birds, soothe your

nervous system, slow down your heartbeat, lower your blood pressure, slow down your breathing, and shift your brain waves into the alpha state. This process is called entrainment. Within five minutes of listening to calming sounds, your heartbeat, breathing rhythm, and brain waves all relax.”

Joseph Mastroianni recommends music be used to assist in meditation. He posits:

“When your brain is going wild with varying thoughts, you have to quiet the voices.

Music can put you in a place to quiet them so you can sort things and think clearly.

It was invaluable to me.”

Music also is proving to help people some used to think were unreachable. According to the Autism Science Foundation, studies of music therapy with children and adults experiencing autism show that:

“...children with autism showed more emotional expression and social engagement during music therapy sessions than in play sessions without music. These children also responded to the therapist’s requests more frequently during music therapy than in play sessions without music.

“Additionally, a skilled therapist can use music with children to increase their social interaction and improve social skills. Passing and sharing instruments, music and movement games, gathering around a central instrument, learning to listen and singing of greetings are just a few of the ways music therapy sessions can increase interaction.”¹⁸

Because music with a predictable beat and rhythm requires no cognitive reasoning, it proves a very positive therapy with patients who suffer from dementia. Depending on the desired outcome, appropriate types of music can be chosen to calm an agitated patient or to stimulate activity in one who is depressed. Dr. Sacks explains:

“I regard music therapy as a tool of great power in many neurological disorders—Parkinson's and Alzheimer's—because of its unique capacity to organize or reorganize cerebral function when it has been damaged.”¹⁹

This is true not only for those with depression associated with cognitive dysfunction, but also for anyone feeling sad or suffering from clinical depression. Singer/songwriter Willie

Nelson proposes:

CHAPTER SEVEN

“You sing the blues to lose the blues. You lift the burden by transferring it into a song.”²⁰

Then he admits:

“I’ll be damned if I know why or how that miracle takes place, but it always does.”²¹

'Abdu'l-Bahá explains how and why it works:

“...music, sung or played, is spiritual food for soul and heart.”²²

“The musician's art is among those arts worthy of the highest praise, and it moveth the hearts of all who grieve. Wherefore, O thou Shahnaz,¹⁵ play and sing out the holy words of God with wondrous tones in the gatherings of the friends, that the listener may be freed from chains of care and sorrow, and his soul may leap for joy and humble itself in prayer to the realm of Glory. ... music ...is considered to be the cause of the exaltation of sad and desponding hearts.”²²

Music is effective, if chosen appropriately, in effecting emotional well-being. That is why acupuncturists and massage therapists play soothing background music to dissolve any stress you bring with you to your session.

Chanting is a form of vocalized, or intoned, music that simultaneously calms and energizes. Chant Master Nancy Watters related:

“A few months ago, I realized that I consistently need less sleep than before. I used to sleep 9 hours and wake feeling tired. Now I wake up after 5 hours and feel refreshed. What’s up? One morning at 3am, as I eagerly rose to start my day, I remembered a story, from the book *Chant*, by Katherine Le Mée. It explains how chant energizes and heals us.”

The story, about a group of Benedictine monks in France, describes their daily habit of chanting in Latin. It goes on to relate their dismay, when during the 1960s a decision was made to use French exclusively and to eliminate the chanting in order to free

up time for
the monks to increase the output of their earthly tasks. These industrious
monks who up
until then needed but three or four hours of sleep each day yet still
maintained energy
for their daily activities, began to suffer fatigue resulting in an inability
to accomplish
much. They were given an extra hour of sleep time. It didn't help. Dietary
changes were
implemented. Still no improvement. When a doctor prescribed a return to
chanting, along

15 Shahnaz, the name given to the recipient of this Tablet, is also the name of
a musical mode.]

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

with some treatment for a seemingly inexplicable diminishment of their hearing,
they
improved enough to return to their former schedules—with the same level of
ability and
enthusiasm they'd had before the ban on chanting.

Try it yourself. Begin with something as simple as humming, not just for a few
moments, but a prolonged hum. Note how you are affected by vibration, how it
brings a
feeling of being in balance. The longer you hum, the more beneficial the
effect. If you find
it improves your sense of wellbeing. Next learn to chant. You'll find it even
more effective,
and very unifying, when done in a group setting.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

Coax Out and Caper with Your Creative Child

Write a list of your favorite songs? What makes them special to you?

Select one and that makes you feel good. Sing it: a capella, karaoke-style, or
play a
recording and sing along.

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Art Heals

Paint (and Sculpt) Away Your Pain

“The aim of art is to represent not the outward appearance of things, but
their inner
significance.” ~ Aristotle

“Creating artwork allows your mind to be in a safe place while it contemplates the tougher issues you are dealing with. One can use the tools of brush, paint, pastels, crayons etc. to expose and even for a short time color those issues in a different light.” ~ George E. Miller

“Often it is necessary to clarify a vague content by giving it a visible form. This can be done by drawing, painting or modeling. Often the hands will solve a mystery that the intellect has struggled with in vain.” ~ Carl Jung

As with all forms of art therapy, the visual Arts are a form of communication. This form assists those who have difficulty with verbal expression to relate their concerns and fears, whether conscious or subconscious. Drawing and painting are especially conducive for this purpose. In addition to pictorial clues from what is drawn, color choice also tells the therapist a lot about what the client is feeling. It is useful not only for mental and emotional wellbeing, but is helpful to those with physical challenges, assisting with motor skills. (See the story about Joseph Mastroianni’s emotional and physical healing through playing the guitar following an accident that broke most of the bones in his body, including his hands. (See Music to Soothe Body and Soul.)

An article in Psychology Today states:

“Art therapy is founded on the belief that self-expression through artistic creation has therapeutic value for those who are healing or seeking deeper understanding of themselves and their personalities. According to the American Art Therapy Association, Art Therapists are trained to understand the roles that color, texture, and various art media can play in the therapeutic process and how these tools can help reveal one’s thoughts, feelings, and psychological disposition. Art therapy

CHAPTER SEVEN

integrates psychotherapy and some form of visual arts as a specific, stand-alone form of therapy, but it is also used in combination with other types of therapy.”²⁴

According to the American Art Therapy Association's website:

“Art Therapy is used to improve cognitive and sensory-motor functions, foster self-esteem and self-awareness, cultivate emotional resilience, promote insight, enhance social skills, reduce and resolve conflicts and distress, and advance societal and ecological change.”²⁵

The library on this website is replete with works by both therapists and patients on specific therapeutic art efforts and their efficacy.

A survivor of America's WWII internment camps for citizens of Japanese descent found that the act of creating collages helped ease much of her growing anger and resentment.

An art therapist described the transformation of a young boy who had been sent to her because he threatened violence. After he drew a picture of a boy with a gun pointed at a girl, the therapist asked him to brainstorm alternative ways to deal with his issues.

Towards the end of the session, she asked him to take the drawing and revise it based on his new awareness. He transformed the gun into a floral bouquet and spurts of blood turned into hearts. He was then able to verbalize that he has “anger issues.”

An acquaintance of mine found her way back from harsh criticism, but it took many years and a sad circumstance. A talented costume designer and accomplished painter who has merited one-woman shows in various galleries, she had been told by her high school art teacher, “Forget about art; you have no talent for it.” She didn't pick up a paintbrush again until she underwent a severe personal crisis over a decade later. In need of an outlet for her distress, she bought art supplies and attacked the canvases. With brushes as her weapons, she painted away her pain. As her mind cleared, she recognized that the quality of her work went beyond emotional catharsis.

The accumulated angst from a history of abuse led Joanne McClure to enter a residential therapy environment. When she'd completed the program, one of the therapists mused: “It will be interesting to see what you do with your art now.” An accomplished sculptor, Joanne's next project was inspired by the success of the program

and her meditations on this excerpt from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

“When men own the equality of women there will be no need for them to struggle for their rights.”²⁶

On her website Joanne notes:” “This sculpture grew out of a life-saving, life-changing experience in which I took forty days and nights to heal from traumas that had put me into a severe depression. I came out of it understanding the reality that I, a woman, am equal to any man in my rights and opportunities. That understanding set me free at last.”²⁷

The original sculpture held a prominent place in her home gallery. Several visitors expressed affinity

Figure 1 - Free at Last, by Joanne McClure

with this piece due to their own personal experiences.

Many of Joanne's sculptures reflect her struggles and her successes in facing them. One

woman took her time contemplating each piece in turn; her eyes welled with tears. At the

end she remarked, “Every one of these speaks to me.” Joanne came to the realization that

many people have traumatic experiences in their backgrounds and that she wasn't alone.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

Coax Out and Caper with Your Creative Child

Draw yourself engaged in one or more of The Arts?

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THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Art Heals

Drama: The Healthy and Acceptable Way to “Act Out”

“Drama therapy was born out of the realization that some life experiences and wounds

are too painful to address through verbal dialogue alone. Because drama uses metaphor to

express emotion, it was a natural fit for a therapeutic framework.” ~

goodtherapy.org

ctor Alex (Bo) Rocco shared this personal story with me: He'd learned, one year

post

An open-heart surgery, that a repeat operation was needed. For some reason the original procedure had not been successful. Understandably, Alex felt upset, agitated, worried. His son, film director, producer, and screenwriter Marc Rocco experienced similar emotions in his concern for his father, but neither seemed able to share their feelings with each other. To deal with his own anxiety, Marc tuned in to his creative self and wrote *Sinewave*, a short film in which he persuaded an initially reluctant Bo to play the lead role. As the film opens, we see a man in a hospital bed, unable to sleep because he's fretting about the repeat heart surgery scheduled early the next morning. He calls into a late-night radio talk show hosted by a psychologist who tries to help the caller come to terms with his situation. This is how the "conversation" between father and son finally took place—through their Art. Each learned just how the other was feeling, and afterwards some of Bo's concerns seemed not quite as frightening as they'd been before they made the film. Both achieved catharsis through this collaboration.

This was an inadvertent use of drama therapy. Marc didn't consciously think, If I write a script about this problem, both Dad and I will have a better chance of working through it. Alex hadn't wanted to do it because he thought it would be too emotionally fraught. He only agreed for his son's sake. Neither had the conscious intention of using drama as a therapeutic tool. They just felt a need to express their emotions and turned to what they knew best. In most cases, though, drama therapy, which uses the same skills that are utilized in theater, such as creativity, role-playing, puppetry, movement, and story-telling, is best experienced under the guidance of a trained therapist.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Modern day drama therapy follows thousands of years of acting out issues. On creativepsychotherapy.com we read that:

“Dramatherapy is the heir to the ancient shamanic traditions of healing through ritual

drama.”²⁸

According to the North American Drama Therapy Association (NADTA):

“Drama therapy is an embodied practice that is active and experiential. This approach can provide the context for participants to tell their stories, set goals and solve problems, express feelings, or achieve catharsis. Through drama, the depth and breadth of inner experience can be actively explored and interpersonal relationship skills can be enhanced.”²⁹

There are various forms used in drama therapy, According to nadia.org this includes:

“. . . play, embodiment, projection, role, story, metaphor, empathy, distancing, witnessing, performance, and improvisation to help people make meaningful change.”³⁰

An article in Medical News Today explains:

“Participants can develop new ways of coping with difficult situations in a safe and supportive explorative environment. They can process past events and explore painful issues and feelings without feeling threatened.

“Acting out also gives practice in new ways of facing events through alternative choices, choices which may be socially unacceptable in the participant's normal environment, without having to worry about the consequences.”³¹

The article goes on to say why this works so well:

“Role plays and improvisations can encourage participants to understand negative behaviors and to practice new ways of reacting and of being.”³²

Drama therapy is useful in many different situations. It helps people who've been traumatized to face their fears and find ways to overcome them. Seniors in group settings find it valuable in dealing with their losses, whether it be of their physical, emotional, or intellectual capacities. Participants are provided an outlet to express their concerns. When done in a group setting it facilitates the development of interpersonal relationships. Many have felt a diminishing sense of self-worth which can be restored. It similarly empowers

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

children and people of all ages who experience this powerful form of therapy,
be it in
individual or group settings

You may think, But I'm not an actor, I haven't got that kind of talent. Never
fear.

“For many people the word drama is connected with theatre. There is a
difference.

Drama is a personal experience (the word comes from the Greek drao: “I do”
or
“struggle”) and theatre is communicating the experience to others (the word
comes from the Greek theatron: “a place for seeing/showing”). It can be
helpful
to show a therapist how we are struggling, to do so in action, not just in
words...

“Dramatherapy is the use of drama as a therapeutic method. It is not, as in
theatre, a specialised skill which people can or cannot do. We are all acting
and
active every day. In dramatherapy each person can participate at his/her own
level.

There is no standard of performance, no critic (unless you bring your
own).”³³

So go ahead and “act out.” It’s healthy, it’s fun, and it can help
bring your spirit back into
balance.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

Coax Out and Caper with Your Creative Child

Have you ever acted? No? Well, here’s a simple way to ease into it.

If you have, this will be a cinch.

Choose a poem, any poem. You hate poetry? We can change that.

Select a short one that you understand. Perhaps invite others to participate.

I’ve included two of my haikus (they’re short!) and two short poems
in case you’re feeling totally at sea!

Now, act it out. Think about what it says to you.

Put that/those emotion(s) into your voice. Yes, do this aloud.

Next, when you’re getting comfortable with it, include some body movements.

Pickleball players

She’s old and bent now

Under the hot desert sun

Only hint of younger self

Oblivious – Serve!

Her still twinkling eyes

I wrote your name in the sand
but the waves washed it away,
then I wrote it in the sky
tugs.
but the wind blew it away,
on the rug
so I wrote it in my heart
everyone grins,
and that's where it will stay.
wins.

I will not play at tug o' war
I'd rather play a hug o' war
Where everyone hugs instead of
tugs.
Where everyone giggles and rolls
Where everyone kisses and
And everyone cuddles and everyone

~ Author Unknown
Sidewalk Ends

~ Shel Silverstein, Where the

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Art Heals

Dance through the Dark in Order to See the Light

“We dance for laughter, we dance for tears, we dance for madness, we dance
for fears, we
dance for hopes, we dance for screams, we are the dancers, we create the
dreams.” ~ Source
Unknown

Most art genres have a distinctive therapeutic application. Let's
consider
dance/movement therapy:

“Dance/movement therapy (DMT) is defined by the American Dance Therapy
Association (ADTA) as the psychotherapeutic use of movement to promote
emotional, social, cognitive, and physical integration of the individual, for
the
purpose of improving health and well-being.

“According to ADTA's website, dance therapy is ‘a holistic approach to
healing, based on the empirically supported assertion that mind, body, and
spirit
are inseparable and interconnected; changes in the body reflect changes in the
mind and vice versa. DMT as an embodied, movement-based approach is often
difficult to describe, as it is necessary to actively engage in the process to
get a true
sense of what it is.”³⁴

In "Art Heals", the lead section of this chapter, you read about a group
weekend with a
therapist who effectively utilized various artistic exercises to help our arts
task force work

through our issues. In one, she asked us to dance out our feelings and frustrations. We all began hesitantly, but the more we moved the more my inhibitions dissolved along with my doubts and concerns. We danced individually but in near proximity. Though concentrating on ourselves, yet the energy of the others somehow affected us. By the time we ended our movements, I felt at one with my surroundings and with the folks with whom I had previously felt a huge disconnect.

Dancer and author Gabrielle Roth posits that dance works to heal because:

CHAPTER SEVEN

“When you let your body dance you immediately strip away the lies and the dogma until all you’re left with is the spirit of life itself. Movement is medicine, and I trust that if you put the psyche in motion, it will heal itself... You have to dance through the dark in order to see the light. You have to go to the source of all our wounds, the big wound, the divorce of spirit from flesh, and heal this wound if you ever want to fulfill the longing for a real self, a soulful self, a big, huge self that sleeps with the Beloved.”³⁵

Several religious traditions utilize “ecstatic dance” which becomes meditation through movement rather than through stillness. The experience dissolves stress and brings a sense of connection to the Divine, which is pivotal to success in healing. A few of the groups who use dance in this way are the Quakers, Shakers, Sufis, Haitian Vodun, some Orthodox Jewish sects, shamans, and Balinese trance dancers.³⁶

Ms. Roth has a unique way of expressing the link between the physical act of dancing and the spiritual sense of rapture it brings forth:

“Sweat is an ancient and universal form of self-healing, whether done in the gym, the sauna, or the sweat lodge. I do it on the dance floor. The more you dance, the more you sweat. The more you sweat, the more you pray. The more you pray, the closer you come to ecstasy.”³⁷

Have you ever felt the need to dance to express your joy or your praise? A

friend of mine

did. She thought she was alone in the house and was, as she told me, "Dancing for God."

When her husband came home and witnessed it, he became extremely upset. She has a

mild mental condition and he thought it had gotten worse and she'd lost touch with

reality. After that she stopped permitting herself to use this form of expression that her

soul so longed to offer. This is not healthy either. But she feared he might decide to

institutionalize her. It is sad, because, as Allegra Fuller Snyder explains:

"The very tensions that for most of us must be held in check, until for some they

explode and because they have exploded must be hidden off in a mental hospital, in other societies are accepted and are actually in the realm of the commonplace."38

My friend wasn't going insane; she was in a state of ecstatic prayer. Movement as prayer,

with or without words, is a legitimate form of praise. I've been known to use it myself.

The following two poems drew on this understanding:

Dance in the Mystic Fane

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Laughter! Joy! Exaltation!

Beseeching my Lord — in supplication,

Offering thanks. Bestowing praise

In such manner commence my days.

In dance, in song, with music in my heart,

Wafting along—my prayer impart.

Intoning. Chanting. All aglow.

Arms stretched high—now bowing low.

As though in trance on cosmic plane—

My dance is a prayer in the mystic Fane.

Give Freedom to Your Worship

Sing Alláh-u-Abhá.

Dance your prayers.

Clap your praise with laughter and tears.

Let your reverence move you.

Make it come alive.

Allow it room to grow—

to flourish and thrive.

Express your joy.

Experience ecstasy.

Give freedom to your worship.
Permit yourself to BE!

Gabrielle Roth explains:

“When I dance, I feel the presence of a divine force and this is my addiction.

Feeding it is as simple as putting on the right music and letting go...the surest way

to drop whatever you are carrying and to move beyond your baggage to a new you, a new body, one that is funneled by its soul...It awakens intuitive intelligence and artistic sensibilities.”³⁹

CHAPTER SEVEN

Nina Utne writes:

“Marcela Lorca, creator of BreathDance, a body awareness technique, maintains that by using breath, voice, and movement, you can release negative emotional patterns without intellectual processing or even conscious understanding...“Free movement of energy through the body is the definition of health,” Lorca insists:

“So shut the door, pull down the shades, and try a song-and-dance routine to a tune you love. There’s no telling where that freed-up energy might take you.

You might feel foolish, but that’s rarely fatal; chances are that, at the very least, you’ll start having more fun.”⁴⁰

But don't limit dance for healing to just yourself. Beyond the individual, it is suggested that dancing in a group setting can have the power to heal as well. Cosmologist and physicist Brian Swimme suggests:

“That day will come when the political and commercial leaders of all nations sing together. Board members of multi-national corporations will dance before every major decision. Nor will this seem strange, but rather the sanest activity, the most valuable for wisdom. Music will not be understood as entertainment, but as the fullness of life. Dance will not be seen as a side activity, but as the very discipline that leads to truth...to be human is to enter this dance and celebrate this mystery of existence. There is no more political act. To make music is to join with that power that created galaxies. Who can know this and refuse to dance?”⁴¹

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THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Coax Out and Caper with Your Creative Child

Turn on a tune that speaks to your spirit, moves your soul.

It can be a hymn, operatic solo, pop tune, folk song, even an instrumental piece—
anything that elevates your mood.

Now, get up and move to the beat, keeping the words in mind.

Use your legs, your arms, your body.

Turn. Spin. Sway. Bend. Reach. March.

Just move.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Art Heals

Write Your Way to Health

“Writing is famously a cure: By the mystical process of transforming the invisible contents of the mind into black ink on a white page, you get rid of the damn stuff forever.”

~ Charles McCarry

Writing is healing. But why? And how? Psychologist Adrian Furnham, Ph.D. proposes:

“This is much more than simple [sic] trying to write pretty sentences. It is about singling out experiences, events and people that contributed to one’s life. Seeing cause and effect, understanding psychological processes can significantly increase self-understanding. Suddenly things become apparent: patterns observed explanations obvious.”⁴²

Let's consider several approaches to writing for healing.

Freewriting

Is your mind is so filled with busy thoughts, problems, and frustrations that you can’t relax—you can’t slow down enough to create a coherent sentence? Perhaps you just don’t know where to begin, so you sit and stare at the paper or computer screen, your

mind

totally blank. This is commonly referred to as “writer’s block.” What to do?

With no preconceived notions or ideas of what you want or need to say, simply pick up a pen or pencil and paper or sit at the keyboard and just begin to write. Let your

subconscious flow out onto the paper. This form of writing is strictly about your feelings

and associations rather than a specific recall of events. Your thoughts may stick to one

theme, or they might be disjointed and jump from one topic to another. That’s fine. It’s

okay. There is no right or wrong; both are a positive part of the process.

Entertain no

concern for grammar, punctuation, or mixed tenses. The mere act of translating your

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

thoughts and feelings into words may be sufficient to calm you and serve as a stimulus

for you to return to your initial intent. Besides, something you wrote down might spark

the flame of a new idea with which you can now move forward. Dr. Richard Nordquist,

Professor of English and Rhetoric, says:

“...eventually you’ll delete it or toss it away. But first, read it over carefully to see if

you can find a keyword or phrase or maybe even a sentence or two that can be developed into a longer piece of writing. Freewriting may not always give you specific material for a future essay, but it will help you get in the right frame of

mind for writing.”⁴³

Internal Monologue/ Expressive Writing

Here again, let your thoughts flow without concern for rules—rules don’t exist here. You

needn’t check a dictionary for spelling or a thesaurus for a better word choice.

Unlike freewriting, do begin with a definite premise and endeavor to follow through with it. You can have a story line, but rather than dealing with specifics of an

event, relationship, or memory, write about how you felt, how these occurrences affected

your emotions.

Don't inhibit yourself with thoughts of propriety or worry about someone later reading your most personal inner beliefs or concerns. As with freewriting, whether to hold on to it is your choice, but to achieve any significant benefit, allow your subconscious mind to free itself. Read and then consider what you've written in an effort to try and understand the feelings that emerged.

The 2005 article, "Emotional and physical health benefits of expressive writing," warns that:

"The immediate impact of expressive writing is usually a short-term increase in distress, negative mood and physical symptoms, and a decrease in positive mood compared with controls. Expressive writing participants also rate their writing as significantly more "personal, meaningful and emotional." 44

It goes on to explain why this is worthwhile:

CHAPTER SEVEN

"However, at longer-term follow-up, many studies have continued to find evidence of health benefits in terms of objectively assessed outcomes, self-reported physical health outcomes and self-reported emotional health outcomes."45

The premises iterated in James W. Pennebaker and Joshua M. Smyth's *Opening Up by Writing It Down*, first published in 1997, have since been corroborated by other independent scientific studies around the world. The 2016 edition of their book explains that expressive writing offers those who either don't wish to talk about their feelings or have no one to confide in a way to unburden themselves

- Reduces stress, fear and isolation
- Boosts immune systems, optimism and sense of connectedness
- Allows minds to process, organize and understand their experiences and feelings, enhancing learning and memory.46

When expressing themselves in writing, people often report that they feel safe. Studies performed with controls indicate that those adhering to the expressive writing principles reported less illness and fewer hospital visits in the months following their writing routine than those who were not instructed to use them.

Take time to reflect on what you've written and be compassionate with yourself.

If you're worried about someone else seeing what you wrote, store it in a safe place or simply tear it up or shred it. If you choose to save it, you may wish to come back to it for future contemplation.

Journaling

Habitually record your thoughts and feelings in a journal that you can refer to later. It will demonstrate the progress you've made in coping with issues or show that it's time to come up with a plan to help you move forward. It can provide new insights into what is really your basic concern, which may have been disguised by another, less accurate perception.

Expressive or stream-of-consciousness writing can be recorded through journaling. It offers a systematic way to collect these thoughts, especially if you wish to revisit them later. Among its benefits, Kevin Bennett, Ph.D. offers these key points that are discussed in his article, *10 Good Reasons to Keep a Journal*:⁴⁷

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

- Regular writing is known to reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety, and it can be used as a form of stress and emotional regulation.
- Keeping a diary can be beneficial for mental well-being as well as for personal growth and self-awareness.
- Creative insights and novel solutions to problems often result from habitual, uncensored writing.

Memoir

“Memoir isn't the summary of a life; it's a window into a life, very much like a photograph in its selective composition. It may look like a casual and even random calling up of bygone events. It's not; it's a deliberate construction.” ~ William Zinsser

Memoir, unlike a formal family history is not a mere list of dates and events. It's your personal take on a particular time in your life: perhaps a relationship, a memorable trip, an illness, a personal loss, or a special event. It necessarily deals with the feelings and emotions attached to the subject.

Memoir that is just to help you work through difficult memories is for you and you alone. Author Karen Salmonsohn understands this. On quitting a toxic relationship, she fretted that her "Plan A" had bombed. Concerned that a "Plan B" might not prove any better, she decided to do what writers do—she wrote about it. The act of writing, putting your thoughts, feelings, worries into black ink on white paper (or any other colors of your choosing) helps put things into perspective in a way not always possible without writing it all down. It can prove to be the pressure release that allows your stress to flow out—safely—without bursting. Salmonsohn writes:

"I wound up not needing to publish my memoir. It was simply cathartic enough to write. When I was done, I did not feel the need to share my memoir story with the world. The sheer act of writing my memoir was liberating and healing in itself."⁴⁸

As you begin to write, you may find yourself re-experiencing the pain of traumatic events. Take a deep breath and/or a short break, listen to calming music, and then keep going. Soon it will become easier; you'll begin to find more clarity. However, if the pain

CHAPTER SEVEN

is too intense, stop. You may need to use the services of a professional therapist familiar with writing therapy before continuing.

Once you've gotten through your preliminary drafts, and the pain has eased, it's time to decide whether this is enough, as it was for Salmonsohn, or if it should be published so it can help others who may be experiencing a similar situation and who are in a quandary as to where to turn—what to do. That's the time to do some

serious editing
and turn from “first draft mindset to author mindset.”⁴⁹ It’s the time to
stop being self-
indulgent, which was an essential requisite for the draft mode. This will
likely prove to
be another painful process, but each step forward is a step toward healing.

Fiction

When you write a story based on your personal experience, but substitute
fictionalized
people and locations, you won't feel as vulnerable. It eases the trepidation of
facing
your dread. Likewise, when you make up fictitious characters and a very
different set of
circumstances than your own, you can derive therapeutic value from the exercise
of
your imagination.

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Joseph Mastroianni didn't start out to write a novel, but that's how it  
developed.  
Mastroianni titled the book *Chaconne, The Novel*, after a baroque composition by  
Johann  
Sebastian Bach. Bach's *Chaconne* consists of twenty-nine variations on a  
theme, each of  
which can easily be enjoyed on its own yet weave together seamlessly.  
Mastroianni  
challenged himself to write his novel based on the same premise. It contains  
twenty-nine  
chapters that include numerous situations rooted in personal experiences.  
Alternating  
with the semi-autobiographical chapters are ones that fall in the category of  
historical  
fiction: Joseph surmises what inspired Bach to compose *Chaconne*.

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### Poetry

The concise nature of poetry and its use of symbol and metaphor allows you to  
express  
the essence of your suffering without directly accessing the painful memories.  
This can

### THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

eventually lead you to be able to write more specifically so you can come to  
terms with

what truly troubles you.

As Rúhíyyih Rabbani mourned the death of her beloved husband, Shoghi Effendi, she poured her pain into poems. “Say Yes My Love,”<sup>50</sup> opens with this lament:

My breast has become  
The bower of the winds  
If heart there is therein  
Then ‘tis the ghost of a heart

She writes that she is ready to leave this life herself:

So light and airy

Is this cage that now

The bird of my soul

Sees escape come near

As she contemplates the possibility that when she does depart this earthly existence, they will be reunited, she asks:

Will the things of my soul  
Take shape and strength  
And I be with you again?

Hope leads her to realize and declare:

Ah, say yes, my love  
Then perhaps my soul  
Will bide a little longer  
In this earthly cage

Mahvash Sabet languished under brutal conditions in an Iranian prison. Arrested along with the six other members of the Yaran, an informal administrative council of the Persian Bahá’í community formed following the Iranian government’s order to disband it’s

## CHAPTER SEVEN

elected National Spiritual Assembly, she took refuge from her suffering through poetry.

We sense her angst as we read “The Loneliness of the Stranger:”<sup>51</sup>

With our backs to the future, our faces to the past,  
the years go by and we’re all still here  
strangers in our loneliness.

With my back to the future, my face to the past,  
holed up in a corner without access to light

I'm still here, a stranger in my loneliness.

Ploughing the soil of the heart  
watering the seeds of thought  
colouring the tulips of the mind.  
busily watching the feelings shift, the seasons change:  
but always and forever a stranger in my loneliness.

And as she drinks the stagnant water  
of this upside-down life,  
As she chokes on the stagnant water  
Of this inside-out place,  
in this back-to-front world,  
the stranger keeps longing in her loneliness  
longing for her prayers to be answered.

Her pain mingles with hope in this excerpt from her poem "To Fariba Kamalabadi"<sup>52</sup>,  
another prisoner who also served as a member of the Yaran:

In the end we will forget these pangs of separation for they'll be no more.  
The bane of this cup which it's been our lot to drink will be no more.  
A hundred stones have bruised our breasts and lips, but they are sealed;

#### THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

All the false charges which were hurled against us shall melt away.

A helpful way to work through fear is to write about it. Joseph Mastroianni shared a poem he'd written, simply yet profoundly titled Fear. Short though it is, the first time I read it, I underwent a sudden physical reaction to the words: an invisible yet heavy weight compressed my chest, and my body temperature rose as I read:

In fear you seek to hide  
Brick by brick the prison ramparts rise  
Slowly blocking out the light  
Until in cold and dark only breath  
Parts life from death

Joseph says:

"Poetry helps me to focus and pinpoint my emotions, e.g., anger, frustration or pain."

He explains:

"You can't change anything or do anything about it [the negative emotions] unless you are aware of what the issues are; when that is done there is clarity in

determining what must be changed — or accepted.”

The act of transferring your inner thoughts into written words helps in that process.

Joseph considers that:

“Fear is burdensome. The heaviness you felt is reflective of that fact. Fear is also a helpful emotion; it serves to help keep us safe. But fear can also be paralyzing; overcoming fear is what courage is about.”

It takes courage to face your fears. The act of writing it all down takes a certain amount of grit, too, but helps accelerate the process of working through your demons and overcoming them.

Any of these writing methods can help you, too. Are you ready to take pen (or keyboard) in hand? Who knows—you may even want to take your work to the next stage and refine it. The word play is a first step, but there are others to traverse. Using the principles of revision and composition can turn it into a work of Art worth sharing. The

## CHAPTER SEVEN

writing is highly satisfying and therapeutic. Sharing your work can be, also, especially when you see that it has resonated with and helped someone else.

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## THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Coax Out and Caper with Your Creative Child

What do you love to read? Novels? Self-help Books? Biographies? Science Fiction?

Romance. Poetry? Or??? Pick your favorite. Write about why you enjoy the genre.

What do you learn from it? How do you feel while reading—at the end?

Now. Try your hand at writing something—anything—just write.

A few words. A paragraph. A short story. A poem.

Don't compare your writing to anyone else's. Be kind to yourself.

Now, how do you feel?

## CHAPTER EIGHT

## THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

## C H A P T E R E I G H T

### Discover the Artist Within

“Talent is not a gift given only to a few. Talent is like the sun shining outside the window:

it is there for all of us—all you have to do is pull back the curtains and let it in. Talent

comes from openness, integrity, simplicity, and the courage to feel and take risks. It is part

of being human.” ~ Michell Cassou and Stewart Cubley

“When you make art, I hear your soul speaking. And I don’t argue with soul because it

is: pure, honest, beautiful, perfect, worthy, lovable, authentic, true, vulnerable, kind,

hopeful, open and divine, like your art.” ~ Source Unknown ~

A bdu'l-Bahá instructs you not only to gain knowledge of the sciences and arts, but to

do so with gusto:

“Ye must therefore put forth a mighty effort, striving by night and day and resting

not for a moment, to acquire an abundant share of all the sciences and arts, that

the Divine Image, which shineth out from the Sun of Truth, may illumine the mirror

of the hearts of men.”<sup>1</sup>

He further admonishes that this effort is not merely for temporal purposes but more

importantly, more vitally, it serves a spiritual purpose:

“Although to acquire the sciences and arts is the greatest glory of mankind, this is

so only on condition that man's river flow into the mighty sea, and draw from God's

ancient source His inspiration.”<sup>2</sup>

He goes on to explain that:

“When this cometh to pass, then every teacher is as a shoreless ocean, every pupil

a prodigal fountain of knowledge.”<sup>3</sup>

Next, He warns:

“If, then, the pursuit of knowledge lead to the beauty of Him Who is the Object of

all Knowledge, how excellent that goal; but if not, a mere drop will perhaps shut a

## CHAPTER EIGHT

man off from flooding grace, for with learning cometh arrogance and pride, and it bringeth on error and indifference to God.”<sup>4</sup>

Shoghi Effendi encourages you to pursue The Arts with the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh in mind:

“Although now is only the very beginning of Bahá'í art, yet the friends who feel they are gifted in such matters should endeavour to develop and cultivate their gifts and through their works to reflect, however inadequately, the Divine Spirit which Bahá'u'lláh has breathed into the world. 5

“He sincerely hopes that as the Cause grows and talented persons come under its banner, they will begin to produce in art the divine spirit that animates their soul.”<sup>6</sup>

If this sounds easy, think again. Many renowned artists and philosophers not only urge us on and speak of the importance of pursuing the arts, but they also note the challenges, indicating though that the effort is most worthy. Goethe advises:

“Whatever you can do, or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it.”<sup>7</sup>

John Ruskin believes:

“All great art is the work of the whole living creature, body and soul, and chiefly of the soul.”<sup>8</sup>

Pasternak asserts:

“Art is unthinkable without risk and self-sacrifice.”<sup>9</sup>

The following quote by George Leonard encourages you to pursue your art in order to effect spiritual transformation:

“At the heart of each of us, whatever our imperfections, there exists a silent pulse of perfect rhythm, a complex of wave forms and resonances which is absolutely individual and unique, and yet which connects us to everything in the universe. The act of getting in touch with this pulse can transform our personal experience and in some way alter the world around us.”<sup>10</sup>

Are you experiencing mixed emotions regarding your deep desire to pursue your creativity combined with guilt about taking time away from other more mundane activities for which you feel a sense of responsibility? Do you fear that to do so would be just plain selfish on your part? Do you recall in an earlier chapter we saw that to acquire

## THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

an Art is our duty? Similarly, Bahá'u'lláh says that learning an art or a craft is a commandment. He uses the words "it is incumbent" in several places. For the sake of brevity, I will add just one, but you can search the Writings for more.

“O MY SERVANTS! Ye are the trees of My garden; ye must give forth goodly and wondrous fruits, that ye yourselves and others may profit therefrom. Thus it is incumbent on every one to engage in crafts and professions, for therein lies the secret of wealth, O men of understanding! For results depend upon means, and the grace of God shall be all-sufficient unto you. Trees that yield no fruit have been and will ever be for the fire.”<sup>11</sup>

Artists should also use their talents to build up and encourage others. Yes, they will and should address the problems facing society at all levels, and perhaps even create protest art, however, poet Roger White warns:

“Artists should never be the malcontent on the fringes of society. They should move into the heart because they have a great deal to offer to society.”<sup>12</sup>

By the analogy of the Supreme Pen, it seems that as you study the sciences and the arts, and, I posit, with pure motives—wanting this knowledge to better yourself and to be able to better serve others—God inscribes His wisdom upon your soul. When you act on it and put that wisdom to practical use, it manifests itself as a benefit to society.

Do you think you aren't good enough? Don't fret about it, especially not if you're just beginning to explore your artistic talent. Don't compare yourself to the experts; just to yourself. Keep striving to improve and from time to time take note of your improvements. This will both inspire you and spur you on to more projects and successes,

building up your self-confidence along the way.

Are you sufficiently convinced now? Are you ready to take the first step? Still unsure? Consider Jan Phillips' The Artist's Creed:

I believe I am worth the time it takes to create  
whatever I feel called to create.

I believe that my work is worthy of its own space,  
which is worthy of the name Sacred.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

I believe that when I enter this space, I have the right  
to work in silence, uninterrupted, for as long as I chose.

I believe that the moment I open my self to the  
gifts of the Muse,

I open myself to the Source of All Creation  
and become One with the Mother of Life Itself.

I believe that my work is joyful, useful,  
and constantly changing  
flowing through me like a river  
with no beginning and no end.

I believe that what it is I am called to do  
will make itself known when I have made myself ready.

I believe that the time I spend creating my art  
is as precious as the time I spend giving to others.

I believe that what truly matters in the making of art is  
not what the final piece looks like or sounds like,  
not what it is worth or not worth,  
but what newness gets added  
to the universe in the process of the piece itself becoming.

I believe that I am not alone in my attempts to create,  
and that once I begin the work, settle into the strangeness,  
the words will take shape, the form find life,  
and the spirit take flight.

## THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

I believe that as the Muse gives to me,  
so does she deserve from me:  
faith, mindfulness, and enduring commitment.

This should inspire you to heed this advice given by Kurt Vonnegut to high  
school  
students at Xavier High School in New York City:

Practice any art, music, singing, dancing, acting, drawing, painting,  
sculpting,

poetry, fiction, essays, reportage, no matter how well or badly, not to get money but to experience becoming, to find out what's inside you, to make your soul grow.

Seriously! I mean starting right now, do art and do it for the rest of your lives. Draw

a funny or nice picture of Ms. Lockwood [their art instructor], and give it to her.

Dance home after school, and sing in the shower and on and on. Make a face in your mashed potatoes. Pretend you're Count Dracula.

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## CHAPTER EIGHT

Coax Out and Caper with Your Creative Child

Do the assignment Kurt Vonnegut gave the Xavier High School students:

Write a six-line poem, about anything, but rhymed. No fair tennis without a net. Make it as good as you possibly can. But don't tell anybody what you're doing. Don't show it or recite it to anybody, not even your girlfriend or your parents or whatever . . .

Tear it up into teeny-weeny pieces, and discard them into widely separated trash receptacles (sic). You will find that you have already been gloriously rewarded

for your poem. You have experienced becoming, learned a lot more about what's inside you, and have made your soul grow.

## THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Discover the Artist Within

Inhibition is a Four-Letter Word

"...courage to try the untried is an essential element in creative behavior." ~ Genevieve

Coy

Are you ready to take the first step to discover your inner artist?

Remember: it's

essential to face it with courage.

"Inhibition is a four-letter word"—the opening of my spiel for encouraging active participation in my workshops on The Arts and spirituality. No one ever remarks that the word "inhibition" contains ten letters; the word "inhibition." they immediately understand the connotation.

Some of the most common curse words in the English language are composed of

four letters. Folks began referring to them, simply, as “four-letter words.” A loose interpretation insinuates words of any length which are taboo in polite company.

I expand this concept to include the word “can’t.” Unwarranted inhibitions stifle the creative impulse, whether socially determined or self-imposed. This, to me, is not only distasteful but also offensive.

I first made the statement, “Inhibition is a four-letter word,” to a group spontaneously. It wasn’t some clever remark I’d carefully developed for an attention grabber or to make them think, but since it effectively served that purpose, I now intentionally use it, and it works well each time.

First, they laugh. Then they ponder. Inevitably most, sometimes all, feel less intimidated and therefore, less inhibited. The lure works. Rather than merely remaining observers, even the reluctant ones eventually join in movement, poetry, drama, music and drawing activities. What a wonderful stimulus to allow the release of creativity.

Don’t dread making mistakes—you will make them—just don’t let them define you. They’re necessary steps in the progression of your skills and abilities. That’s one of

## CHAPTER EIGHT

the joys of creating. It’s not just okay, but also important. A fourth grade Carpinteria, California student explains:

“Art is a free thing. There are no rules in art. If you ‘mess up’ in art, it’s still a piece of art.”<sup>13</sup>

My husband Don took a pottery class with our neighbors. They brought home all their pieces, but Don returned empty-handed every time. He dropped them all in the trash bin on his way out of the studio. Our friends told me that his work far surpassed theirs in quality and they couldn’t understand why he was embarrassed to show them to anyone else or to keep them. Years later I took up pottery. I only lasted a couple of years. It was

fun, but I just didn't have the knack. My pieces looked like they'd been made by a grade school student. Don doesn't understand why I want not only to keep some but also feel comfortable using them, even when guests are present. He doesn't complain, though. If I like them, he's satisfied. I wish I could convince him to be as supportive of himself as he is with me. Cartoonist Scott Adams proposes:

"Creativity is allowing yourself to make mistakes. Art is knowing which ones to keep."<sup>14</sup>

I wonder which of us has followed that premise faithfully.

I hope you'll be more open to your own creativity because creativity is in fact a spiritual gift, as we saw quoted previously.

"All art is a gift of the Holy Spirit."<sup>15</sup>

Indeed, 'Abdu'l-Bahá asserts,

"This other and inner reality is called the heavenly body, the ethereal form which corresponds to this body. This is the conscious reality which discovers the inner meaning of things, for the outer body of man does not discover anything. The inner ethereal reality grasps the mysteries of existence, discovers scientific truths and indicates their technical application. It discovers electricity, produces the telegraph, the telephone and opens the door to the world of arts."<sup>16</sup>

How then can you permit yourself to stifle your innate creative impulses? Go ahead—

give in to this temptation. Bite into the self-styled forbidden fruit. Let not this ten-letter

"four-letter word" prevent you from developing your God-given talent(s).

The article, "What is Art?" in the initial issue of the Bahá'í resource guide, *Art Matters*, declares:

#### THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

"Artistic expression is not only for the initiated and the well-trained. It is a part of everyone. It is a gift from God in which we all partake. We can all learn to see art as a spiritual path paved with our own individual creativity. Creativity is a part of

our true nature. If we are created in the image of God, reflecting His Names,  
one  
of which is ‘Creator,’ then do we not have within each of us a creative  
potential?

We can transform ourselves and the lives of those around us by delving into  
that  
potential, by discovering, recovering or deepening our creative powers. We can  
use our creativity—of whatever kind and of whatever level of expertise—to  
effect  
massive transformations in our communities to deepening our understanding of  
God, and to dedicate our lives to Bahá’u’lláh’s vision for humanity.

Yes, there are  
obstacles and it will take some effort on our part, but, also, ‘Yes, it can  
be done,’  
and ‘Yes, it must be done.’”

Playwright Ann Boyles’ intention in penning her one-act play, *To Walk in His  
Footsteps*,

was not to address our creativity, but in addressing our need to strive and  
persevere in

our spiritual growth, it fits with this topic, since creativity assists in that  
goal as well. The

play follows Josh, a youth who in a letter to his parents, written while on his  
Bahá’í Youth

Year of Service, expresses his confusion that even though he is learning the  
value of

patience, “I still don’t understand why we have to go through tests and  
difficulties to

grow.” He tells them he’s reading *The Dawn-breakers*, a history of the  
Bábí religion, and is

awed by the courage of the believers who so bravely faced severe persecutions,  
arrests,

as well as horrific tortures and killings. He wonders, I wish I knew how they  
did it.

Later, while reading that same book, he falls asleep and begins to dream. In  
his

dream he meets Anís, one of the Bábí heroes, and then Lua Getsinger and Enoch  
Olinga,

figures from different time periods of the Bahá’í Faith. He watches each of  
them for a

while and then steps into the dream himself and interacts with the characters  
who teach

him important lessons about faith and courage. At the end of the play, he  
explains to

Enoch Olinga his quandary: that Mr. Olinga and the others were tested and  
passed:

“ . . . and you all became great heroes of the Faith. But I’m just a youth,  
and when I  
get tested, I just feel the pain and don’t understand.”

The playwright adapts a musical metaphor that was often employed by Mr. Olinga  
to  
assist Josh. Mr. Olinga has Josh imagine that he is a guitar. Let’s listen in  
on their  
conversation:

“ . . . you hear that a Divine musician has come. What do you do?”

## CHAPTER EIGHT

“I guess I’d hope that He would choose to play me.”

“The Musician takes you close to Himself, tries to play a beautiful melody.  
But soon  
He finds that the guitar is out of tune. He starts to wind the string tighter,  
to tune  
it. But the guitar cries out in pain—it resists—and the string breaks.”

“Oh great, so even as a guitar I fail my test.”

Does this sound like you? As a beginner are you struggling to learn an art, or  
if already  
well-versed in your art, but dabbling with a new technique, are you finding it  
difficult?

Let’s look further into how Mr. Olinga helps Josh understand the process.

“A test is not always something you pass or fail. Sometimes it’s something  
you  
endure—something you learn from.”

“But what if the tests keep coming up and it’s the same ones over  
and over again?”

“Then you keep learning from them. You endure because you wish to give forth  
the divine melody. The Divine musician plays upon the strings that remain. And  
if  
the tune is still wrong . . .”

“I suppose the Musician has to start tuning another string.”

“That’s right! And another, and another if they resist, they will break,  
too, won’t  
they?”

“But, I don’t want them to break!”

“And the guitar won’t be able to play the Divine Melody, will it?”

“But, I want to play!”

“Yes, Josh! And the Divine Musician wants the guitar to play, too! To play

beautiful  
music. But to do that, we must be tuned to God's will. That's when we can  
make  
the beautiful music that we want in our souls to make."

Your talent is God-given. Whether it is the Divine Music, Painting, Sculpture,  
Dance,  
Drama or whatever your artistic choice may be, don't fear mistakes. Don't  
allow them to  
inhibit you and keep you from trying again—and again. Analyze what went awry.  
How  
can you overcome the problem? Meditate on it and seek guidance. Then tackle it  
anew.

Persevere. 'Abdu'l-Bahá wants you to:

"Strive that your actions day by day may be beautiful prayers."17

#### THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Welcome each error as a step in the learning process and know that each of your  
efforts,  
whether successful or just a step towards success, is a beautiful prayer. Just  
stay in tune  
with the Divine Source of your talent.

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#### CHAPTER EIGHT

Coax Out and Caper with Your Creative Child  
Jot down any memories of when your creative child was stifled.

Now, consider the preceding sections of this chapter and write down how you  
will  
overcome any obstacles, past, present, and future, and remove the boulders  
strewn in  
your path.

#### THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

#### CHAPTER EIGHT

Discover the Artist Within  
Are You a Shadow Artist?

". . . God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him;  
male and  
female created He them . . ." ~ Genesis 1:27

The Baha'i teachings affirm this same truth and add its motive:

"O Son of Man! Veiled in My immemorial being and in the ancient eternity of  
My  
essence, I knew My love for thee; therefore I created thee, have engraved on

thee

Mine image and revealed to thee My beauty.”<sup>18</sup>

This explains not only the underlying reason for your creation but also informs you of

your true, inner essence: you are created—spiritually—in the image of God.

What does that mean? The Baha’i writings suggest that you shouldn’t try to understand these verses in anthropomorphic, or physical, terms. Rather, they mean that

every human soul (that includes you) has the innate ability to mirror forth the names and

attributes of God. Those names include “The Fashioner,” and “The Creator.”

If you are made in God’s image and God is the Creator, then you are a creative

being. Theologian Mary Daly also shares this view. She believes:

“It is the creative potential itself in human beings that is the image of God.”<sup>19</sup>

Artist/author Julia Cameron asserts:

“Just as blood is a fact of your physical body and nothing you invented, creativity

is a fact of your spiritual body and nothing that you must invent.”<sup>20</sup>

Many people don’t think of themselves as creative yet surround themselves with Art and

other artists—they are drawn to the creativity in them. Julia Cameron refers to these

people as “shadow artists,” people who for one reason or another fear releasing their own

## CHAPTER NINE

latent creativity, and in their yearning seek to experience it vicariously through the talents

of others. Does this resonate with any part of you? Are you a “shadow artist?” To find

out, answer these questions:

- Do you tell yourself, “I can’t draw a straight line.” Do you believe you have no talent for the visual arts?
  - o But—do you tend to doodle?
- Do you think you cannot or should not sing in public?
  - o Be honest—do you belt out tunes in the shower and when you’re alone?
- What about musical talent? Do you believe you lack musical ability?
  - o Ah—but do you clap, snap fingers, tap your toes or, perhaps,

drum on your thighs or the arms of your chair, when music is played?

- Are you convinced you can't dance? Really?
  - o Yet—Does your body sway when you hear music? Do your feet move or does your body sway with the music even though you remain seated?
- Do you believe you have no acting talent?
  - o Oh—but you like to relate stories and/or tell jokes?

So, you think you lack creative talent. Hmm. Did you respond positively to the second

half of any of those questions? I'll be surprised if you said no to all of them. In fact, I won't

believe you! Therefore, if you acknowledged even one, you do have innate, latent talent,

and it cries out to be nurtured. So, take a moment and say to yourself.

If I am made in God's image and God is the Creator, then,

**I AM A CREATIVE BEING.**

Next, take it one step further:

I am a creative being in the garden of humanity

And the Light shines within me.

You need to let that Light shine forth, but for one reason or another, you, like so many

others, may have become convinced that you have no talent, or if you do, it isn't good

### **THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION**

enough. Or do you recognize that the talent exists and that it is good, yet feel you don't

deserve it? You may have deep-rooted fears.

Often fear of failure derives from sometime in the past when your dreams and/or efforts were thwarted by a relative, teacher, or societal expectations in general. These

individuals, for various well-meaning and unintentional reasons, caused you to check

your creative aspirations. These people who you love and trust, yet who for reasons

which may be well-meaning and unintentional, may have caused you to check your creative aspirations."

During workshops I present related to art and spirituality, invariably, at least one

participant admits to suppression of their artistic urges out of a sense of duty or obligation

to afford more time for the “important things” in life.

Is this you, too? Do you usually feel it necessary to sacrifice your inner artist to the more tangible needs of family, job, and community in the belief that the daily demands of life should take precedence?

Oh, please! Not only is it unnecessary to make such sacrifices, but it’s also in opposition to the will of God. It is worth repeating this admonition from Bahá’u’lláh:

“Arts, crafts and sciences uplift the world of being, and are conducive to its exaltation. Knowledge is as wings to man's life, and a ladder for his ascent. Its acquisition is incumbent upon everyone.”<sup>21</sup>

Two things stand out in that quotation: 1) the fact that arts and crafts are afforded equal status with science and 2) that to acquire them is not an option but is in fact “incumbent” upon all of us. Similarly, this excerpt from a tablet written by Bahá’u’lláh exalts the arts and crafts:

“The one true God, exalted be He, loveth to witness handiworks of high craftsmanship produced by His loved ones. Blessed art thou, for what thy skill hath produced hath reached the presence of thy Lord, the Exiled, the Wronged. Please God every one of His friends may be enabled to acquire one of the crafts, and be confirmed in adhering to what hath been ordained in the Book of God, the All-Glorious, the All-Wise.”<sup>22</sup>

Another boulder blocking your creative path may be embarrassment. Do you fear non-acceptance of your talents. Do you worry about the pronouncements of others on your works? Every time you put your work out in the public eye, whether it is tangible art or

## CHAPTER NINE

performance art, your audience will judge it. They will like it or dislike it, or worse, be indifferent to it, and that will make you think “Why bother?” When you stress over these various possible outcomes, you stifle your creativity and the output will be far from your

best.

The ability to let go of the worry about the opinions of others in order to be your authentic self and let your creativity flourish, can be a slow and gradual trek, always having to go around or over the various boulders and other blocks that will be strewn in your path, some real but most, probably, imagined. It will be easiest to provide examples, so I'll share my road from almost paralyzed to fairly soaring.

During the agonizing high school years, if the teacher called on me to answer a question or offer my take on the subject at hand, the magma rumbling inside the volcano of my inner angst threatened a volcano-tectonic earthquake of epic proportions. Sure that the eyes of each pupil in class saw my body shuddering and knees knocking, and absolutely heard the quivering of my voice, tortured me in class, during the rest of the school day, and long after I'd gone home. Then, in twelfth grade, two epiphanies occurred.

The first took place because, when needing one more elective, the choices were slim and I ended up in a drama class. Each time I had to perform, I was sure I'd lose my lunch before I reached to the front of the class, but the moment I began my monologue or participated in a skit, it felt seamless. Shocked and in awe, it came to me that my brain had compensated as it wasn't Jaine up there, but the character she sought to embody. I was someone else who had no concerns, no need for self-doubt.

The second came when the final exam for our history class came in dual form: a paper coupled with an oral presentation. Normally, the oral portion would have been something I dreaded, but the topic was to report on a major world religion. Having joined the Bahá'í Faith the previous year, it thrilled me to be given the opportunity to share its life-changing teachings. In a clear voice, paired with an enthusiastic delivery, I got through the presentation, reveling in what I considered a gift that could only have come because, as it's been said, "God's works in mysterious ways. So excited about sharing something for which I was truly passionate, I'd forgotten to be nervous. My

normal

trepidation was non-existent. The instructor, Mr. Kazie, remarked, “You get an A+. And the only reason you received that grade is that there is no higher one I could give you.”

## THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Yes, embarrassment still crept stealthily into my psyche, squeezing my heart and paralyzing my vocal chords from time to time, but its strength weakened, gradually but steadily. I’d be lying to say it never returns, but it’s rare these days and short-lived because I know how to erase it.

You can learn to do the same. Take your own discomfiture and think about how you’d counsel someone else with that affliction. Be sure to include the Sacred Words given us by Bahá’u’lláh and offer them as an affirmation:

“Thou art My lamp and My light is in thee. Get thou from it thy radiance and seek none other than Me.”<sup>23</sup>

“I created thee rich, why dost thou bring thyself down to poverty? Noble I made thee, wherewith dost thou abase thyself?”<sup>24</sup>

With these confirmations of your reality, you will easily erase any sense of embarrassment. You are a noble creation of God and His light shines within. Now, take your own advice—allow it to fill and warm your entire being; then let it radiate out to others through your creative self.

Remember, the need for the development of your artistic abilities is “ordained in the Book of God.” If you’re neglecting your inner artist, it’s time to reverse that trend and fulfill the creative destiny the Creator ordained for you—yes, FOR YOU.

Poet Michele Serros refused to be stifled even with her naysayer Tia Annie offering only discouraging thoughts, as she depicts in her poem, “Annie Says.”<sup>24</sup> Here is an excerpt:

My tia, Annie, told me: / "You could never be a writer, / let alone a poet.  
What do you know? / I mean, what can you write about. /  
You got a ‘D’ on your last / book report /  
you gotta be able to write / English good / use big words . . .  
and you've never even been / out of Oxnard.”

The author's toxic playmate, her aunt, continues to taunt her:

“Writers travel all the time / New York, Paris, Rome . . . /

Every place they make Oil of Olay. /

That's where writers go, / that's where they live. /

## CHAPTER NINE

Your family doesn't have/ money to travel. You never will. /

And you don't even type. / Now, how you gonna be a writer?”

The public is enriched by Ms. Serros' decision to free her inner artist and not buy into her

naysayer aunt's toxic pessimism.

You need to inoculate yourself against the infection of these poisonous, art and

soul-killing insinuations. Learn to trust in yourself by trusting in God. To accomplish this,

immerse yourself in the divinely revealed Word and pray for guidance.

“Hold Thou my right arm, O God! and dwell continually with me! Guide me to the

fountain of Thy Knowledge and encircle me with Thy Glory. Let mine ears hearken unto Thy melodious tone and comfort me with Thy Presence. For Thou art the strength of my heart, and the trust of my soul, and I desire no one beside Thee!”<sup>25</sup>

Perhaps you don't just fear failure but actually fear success! Marianne Williamson tackles this head on:

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are

powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us.

We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous?

You

are a child of God. Your playing small doesn't serve the world.

“There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us. It's in everyone. And as we let our light shine,

we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated

from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”<sup>26</sup>

Get past those fears in order to gain access to your artistic gifts: the power of utterance;

the thirst for and quest of knowledge, both material and spiritual; and the recognition

and development of your natural, God-given talents. Those fears are the locks

and bolts  
on the door to your creativity. Unchain yourself.

Shoghi Effendi responded to someone who wrote about some people being nervous about speaking before an audience:

“...you mention the lack of courage and of initiative on the part of the believers,  
and a feeling of inferiority which prevents them from addressing the public. It is  
precisely these weaknesses that he wishes the friends to overcome, for these do not only paralyse their efforts but actually serve to quench the flame of faith in

#### THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

their heart...He has only to use what God has given him and thus prove that he is  
faithful to his trust.”<sup>27</sup>

Be true to yourself and to the gifts God has given you. Tune out the naysayers.  
Trust  
yourself. Trust God. Create.

If your artistic self has been buried for an extended period of time, it will be neither  
easy nor painless to coax it forth again. The ghosts of long suppressed and hidden  
insecurities may haunt you, but without risk and without some pain there can be no  
progress. ... Suppressed hurts and memories of being invalidated in your artistic efforts  
might make you reluctant to try and set your inner artist free.

As I began to explore this theme on a personal level, my thoughts transferred to  
written word and these brief poems flowed forth:

I see, I feel,  
with the child, I behold  
that I was an artist  
though otherwise told.

\*\*\*

Stifled and mocked.  
My artist was blocked.  
Now—to learn its true worth  
like a phoenix: Rebirth

\*\*\*

To dance, to sing,  
to paint, to bring  
release from the well within.

In any effort at growth in any field of endeavor, you must be willing to take baby steps and fall occasionally, possibly do poorly in the beginning, but see the attempt as a success because 1) you tried, and 2) you learned from the effort. Always pull yourself up again and keep on moving forward.

## CHAPTER NINE

Remember: "can't" is a "four-letter word." It's more than negative, it's offensive, it's stifling, it's dangerous. (See Inhibition is a Four-Letter Word).

I tired of saying "I can't draw a straight line," so I attended a drawing class in order to erase that dirty four-letter word from my vocabulary. The results? I still can't draw a straight line! But I can draw, and the work shows some, albeit feeble, recognizable sense of reality. It isn't where my natural, or innate talent lies, so I opt to put my efforts into the stronger talents with which God gifted me, but at least I know that if I wanted to pursue it, if it meant enough to me, I could learn to draw better—I can improve my skills.

It's important to zero in on what to explore. Then, confidently take those initial steps, pick yourself up when you stumble and stay up a bit longer each time, one success—each attempt is a success—following another. When this idea first began to tickle my grey cells, I took up my pen and Emergence emerged.

Lurking —  
in the shadows of my soul—  
tucked in—  
opposite conscious awareness,

The Creative Self  
The Artistic Child  
not dead—frozen against reality  
not frozen—awaiting rebirth.

Who am I?  
Who should I be?  
Who shall I become?

Will waking the sleeping beauty within  
bring chaos

to my snug, safe, systematic, orderly existence—  
open a Pandora's Box

## THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

stuffed with stinging memories—  
inflict an ache  
in the atrophied appendages  
of my True Self  
as I struggle through  
therapeutic exercises—  
learn  
to crawl again  
before I can walk,  
before I can run,  
before I can dance,  
before I can sing  
and Be —  
at last—  
as I was meant to be?—

made in His image:  
The Creator

Well, I did it, am still doing it, and yet, I still sometimes struggle with my own feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt—but I don't give in, I don't quit—I persevere.

Now it's your turn. Try to develop or recover your own inner artist. Give yourself permission to be a beginner. After all, you might find it fun and feel freer. Just think of this observation by Impressionist Edgar Degas:

“Painting is easy when you don't know how, but very difficult when you do.”<sup>28</sup>

It's okay not to be a “good” artist when you first start out; it gives you room to grow and improve. And if you fear the long-buried hurts and insecurities, just think: if you acknowledge the pain and embrace it by dancing it, singing it, writing it, painting it, sculpting it, crafting it, you will overcome any feelings of inadequacy. Imagine that!

## CHAPTER NINE

Remember, in order to start, the door to your creativity needs to be unlocked.  
No

one else holds the key or can unlock it for you. It's all up to you. (See Unlock the Door to Your Creativity.)

Now, get going. No excuses, especially if your attempt at an excuse is merely that

which many have expressed to Julia Cameron:

“But do you know how old I will be by the time I learn to really play the piano/act/paint/write a decent play?”<sup>29</sup>

Heed her reply:

“. . . the same age you will be if you don't. So, let's start.”<sup>30</sup>  
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## THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Coax Out and Caper with Your Creative Child

Write an affirmation to erase any inhibitions which stifle your creativity.

Write a poem about how you feel.

## CHAPTER NINE

### CHAPTER EIGHT

Discover the Artist Within

Why and How to Develop Your Artistic Talent(s)

“Knowledge is one of the greatest benefits of God. To acquire knowledge is incumbent on

all. These visible arts and present implements are from the results of His knowledge and

wisdom, which have been revealed from the Supreme Pen.” ~ Baha'u'llah

You now understand that development of your artistic abilities is deemed

“a duty” that

is “incumbent” for all. Let's now explore the results that ensue when you heed this

admonition.

The very first of the ten basic principles in Julia Cameron's The Artist's Way, asserts

that your reality is spiritual and your reality is creative:

“Creativity is the natural order of life.”<sup>31</sup>

To be in balance with the natural order, all aspects of your life must be developed. These

are:

1. Physical
2. Mental

3. Emotional

4. Spiritual

Developing your innate talent and nurturing your creativity will enhance each of these parts of your being.

1. Physical

a. Performing

i. Dance isn't confined to feet and legs, all parts of the body are involved

#### THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

ii. Theater, even Stand-Up Comedy, requires movement, sometimes use of props. The mere raising of a shoulder or eyebrow can speak volumes without uttering a single word.

iii. Music requires the physical act of playing the instrument, or if composition, writing it down.

b. Visual arts require picking up and working with your medium of choice and the necessary tools.

2. Mental

You have to contemplate the work you wish to accomplish. Much thought, perhaps research, also, must be conducted. You can't help but to learn, to grow.

3. Emotional

Every time, every moment, devoted to developing and portraying your talent, will take you on an emotional journey. The particular emotions will be reflected in the content.

4. Spiritual

See Chapters 2) Art Is an Act of Spirituality and 3) To Create is to Worship

Let's use my experience as an example. For years I strongly felt a deep yearning for a creative outlet. In the quest to discover some talent, I began with the typical "womanly" arts, but sewing, knitting, and crocheting all proved dismal disappointments. My self-esteem plummeted to an all-time low—until I finally found my artistic niche when I joined a community theater group. In addition, I developed a love of poetry and began to integrate poems into all my Baha'i presentations and public speaking engagements.

One day, I engaged in a conversation that went something like this:

"Why don't you write your own poems?"

"Because I'm not creative."

"But you're an actress, and you dramatize the poems so beautifully."

"That's interpretation. The creative part is writing the words for people like me to interpret."

I already wrote prose: as the Public Information Officer for the local Bahá'í community, I'd been writing newspaper articles for years and I wrote a monthly newspaper column.

## CHAPTER NINE

As a public speaker, I'd composed many talks, and I'd already begun to chronicle family stories and my own memoirs. But I hadn't considered my writing as creative because it was all nonfiction. On pondering this conundrum, the answer came in a sudden flash, Uh, oh! This is the complete antithesis to what I've just presented and what I've been telling others for years—An Aha! Moment—I need to take my own advice.

The more I contemplated, the more I realized just how much creativity it takes to properly construct a piece of writing for it to come alive for the reader/listener/audience. It also made sense that for readers to find my articles and stories compelling, I'd used my creativity; they weren't a bland regurgitation of facts. Today courses are taught on Creative Non-Fiction to help keep the writing from becoming humdrum bedside reading that helps put insomniacs to sleep! I resolved not to be a "Do as I say, not as I do" person and challenged myself to compose a poem.

Shortly after I had vowed to do this, the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City occurred. I sat down to pour out my feelings and surprised myself—I had just written my very first poem.

Daily e-mail messages from Cindy Van Kley, a member of the Oklahoma City Bahá'í Community, shared the collaborative efforts of a diverse cross-section of people and groups who might never have come together were it not for this tragedy. Using Cindy's accounts as the basis for presentations on how it is possible to grow stronger and

create beauty after suffering tragedy, I kept holding back the poem because I felt unsure of its worth and dreaded looking foolish.

Then one day I decided to heed my own words. I checked my fear and dared to read the poem aloud at a gathering where I'd been invited to speak. A guest who I'd not met before came up to me afterwards, thanked me, requested a copy of the poem, and even asked me to sign it because, she said, "It moved my heart." That spontaneous act by a stranger gifted me the self-confidence to continue writing—and occasionally sharing—my poems.

The mere act of writing makes you a stronger, more whole being. This has a decidedly beneficial effect on how you perceive yourself, and in turn affects how others perceive and receive you. It creates a climate for healthier interactions with family, friends, and new people you meet.

#### THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Here's how it has benefited the balance in my life (and might work for you, too) of the four aspects of oneness:

##### 1. Physical

I have to stay somewhat in shape, stretching, exercising, in order to have the energy to keep my arthritis in check so I can pick up a pen or peck at the computer's keyboard.

##### 2. Mental

The thought process of deciding on what to write and what should be contained, the research needed to accomplish the choices I make, and the editing done in the effort to make the writing "sing," all contribute to intellectual growth.

##### 3. Emotional

The excitement of pursuing a project that holds deep meaning for me brings joy from the anticipation and then the success in finding the most apt words, the best phrasing, the editing to enhance it, and finally seeing the finished work. The sense of self-worth at a job well done is invaluable after having to fight the plague of doubts that seem determined to diminish it.

##### 4. Spiritual

Now when I pray before and at times while working, whether it be to a dear departed soul in the Concourse on high who was a writer in this life, or to the Master or to Bahá'u'lláh, I beg only for guidance and inspiration, and to be an instrument of service. Never do I ask for success. This, I

believe, brings me a sense of detachment, which to me is indicative of spiritual growth.

The act of writing for me, whether it be poetry, journal, memoir, essay, newspaper article or column, has become a process—at times a meditative process. I express part of its purpose in “Word Pictures”:

The pen—as brush—paints word pictures—  
as eloquent to reader as painting to viewer.

Both rich, lustrous, vibrant—infuse the mind,  
set it to ponder the wonders of life,

## CHAPTER NINE

mine its meanings, strive to fathom its depths.

Search, sift, consider, opine,  
then set those thoughts and opinions  
on page or canvas—again.

Process renewed:

ever-growing, ever-knowing

that we never completely know.

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## THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Coax Out and Caper with Your Creative Child

Set at least one goal for your path towards nurturing your creative self.

Then list steps to achieving the goal(s).

Remember, one step at a time or you'll feel defeated and end up quitting.

## CHAPTER NINE

### CHAPTER EIGHT

Discover the Artist Within

Give Yourself Permission to Create

“It is time to throw off the shackles, to reclaim that which every child knows and is taught

to forget: the essential right to create without interference or shame.” ~

Michell Cassou

and Stewart Cubley

“In creating, the only hard thing's to begin; A grass blade's no easier to make than an

oak.” ~ James Russell Lowell

In any effort at growth in any field of endeavor, you must be willing to take baby steps, stumble, perhaps fall occasionally, possibly do poorly in the beginning, yet see the attempt as a success because 1) you tried, and 2) you learned from the effort.

When I decided to attempt the process of writing poetry, one of my earliest efforts came out, in effect, as a prayer:

throw open the window of my mind

let all thoughts, / ideas, / preconceived notions

flow out into the ether.

experience sensations of lightness—

a feather wafting on cushions of air.

emptiness, readiness / to absorb, spongelike,

and filter / reality, / spirituality,

to gray cells, / heart's wells—

fill all once more / with truth,

bring pure / intentions, / inventions, sciences / arts

**THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION**

thus the new may enter / the old depart

Recreate me, Lord! / Set me toward

the path Divine / that I follow Your design.

Well, it's working—and though I still struggle with feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt,

I persevere. Through study of the Baha'i writings, prayer and meditation, and reading

books and articles on creativity, on writing, on theater, on healing through

The Arts, I

find the strength, spiritual stimulus and inner determination to continue.

You, too, can confidently learn to take those initial steps, pick yourself up when

you stumble, and stay up a bit longer each time, even if a tad wobbly, ensuring one

success follows another. Soon enough the wobbles will wane and you'll stand straight

and move forward with assurance and an eagerness to keep going.

‘Abdu'l-Bahá encourages you to persevere:

“ . . . put forth a mighty effort, striving by day and night and resting not for a moment, to acquire an abundant share of all the sciences and arts, that the Divine Image, which shineth out from the Sun of Truth, may illumine the mirror of the hearts of men.” 32

Not only are you made in the image of God, this passage seems to say, but acquiring “an abundant share” of the sciences and arts will cause “the Divine Image” to enlighten human hearts. Don’t you want to contribute to that enlightenment? Of course you do.

Begin by deciding what area of The Arts interests you the most. Unsure? Try several till you find your natural inclination. It’s possible, perhaps probable, you’ll find more than one. Then, let your deepest thoughts and feelings rise up and flow out, enhancing your creative efforts. Learn from each attempt, whether a setback or a step forward.

Give yourself permission to be a beginner. It’s okay not to start out producing fine work; that’s to be expected; it’s the norm. It’s a rare artist who begins by creating something excellent.

Continue faithfully, with determination and perseverance, with the conviction that this is a spiritual effort, and give yourself room to grow and improve. You will

## CHAPTER NINE

eventually develop into a good artist. It might help to consider these thoughts from Jan Phillips:

“It is blasphemous for any of us to say “I am not creative.” All we do is create. We have desires and we create experiences from our desires. We have experiences and we create stories about those experiences. We hear the stories of others, and we are moved to tell our own, turn them into songs or poems or YouTube movies. We wake up every day to an empty canvas of twenty-four hours and every night we go to bed having created our masterpiece for the day.

“We can do this consciously or unconsciously, but we all do it nevertheless.

And the ones who are conscious of it are the ones most actively engaged in the work of evolution, of unification, of ongoing cosmic revelation.”<sup>33</sup>

Perhaps you already understand all this, but you’ve bought into our society’s tendency

to put artistic endeavors on the back burner. “Oh, but I need to get the laundry done first.

I have errands to run. The kids need help with their homework. Dinner won’t make

itself.” You allow all these things to take precedence and you’ll get to your art when you

finally find a moment to squeeze in a small block of time. Then, when a moment does

pop up, you’re so tired, you just want to put your feet up, read, or perhaps just close your

eyes. Your art never happens. Jan Phillips again comes to your rescue.

“We get so caught up in the flurry of our lives that we forget the essential thing

about art: that the act of creating is a healing gesture, as sacred as prayer, as

essential to our spirit as food to our body.”<sup>34</sup>

Instead of thinking, “I don’t have the time,” make the time. Carve out a space of time.

Make it a priority. It is vital to your spiritual, emotional, and mental health.

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## THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Coax Out and Caper with Your Creative Child

When will you schedule your creative time?

How much time will you allot? Specified. Indefinite?

Where will you create? An outdoor setting? A cozy nook?

What kind of ambience will you require: Absolute silence? Music?

What else do you need? Supplies? Equipment? If you don’t already have them, get

them.

## CHAPTER NINE

### CHAPTER EIGHT

Discover the Artist Within

Meditation: The Key for Opening the Doors of Mysteries

“The spirit of man is itself informed and strengthened during meditation; through its affairs of which man knew nothing are unfolded before his view. Through it he receives Divine inspiration, through it he receives heavenly food.” ~ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

If you don’t already, or haven’t yet attempted to, meditate, you may wonder whether it’s worth a try—and—how it works. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains:

“Meditation is the key for opening the doors of mysteries. In that state man abstracts himself: in that state man withdraws himself from all outside objects; in that subjective mood he is immersed in the ocean of spiritual life and can unfold the secrets of things-in-themselves. To illustrate this, think of man as endowed with two kinds of sight; when the power of insight is being used the outward power of vision does not see.

“This faculty of meditation frees man from the animal nature, discerns the reality of things, puts man in touch with God.

“This faculty brings forth from the invisible plane the sciences and arts. Through the meditative faculty inventions are made possible, colossal undertakings are carried out; through it governments can run smoothly. Through this faculty man enters into the very Kingdom of God.”<sup>34</sup>

The quotes shared by famous artists and musicians in *Whence Art?* illustrate the recognition of many great artists that they are but instruments through whom flows the inspiration from a Heavenly Source. Most of them recognize that Source as the Godhead itself, thus they are the instrument of the Divine Musician, the pen of the Divine Author, the brush of the Divine Painter. This is attested to in the Bahá’í Writings. They also indicate another other worldly source: the “Concourse on high,” those who have passed

#### THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

on to the next level of being that the soul enters once it departs this earthly plane of existence. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’ explains:

“Someone present asked how it was that in prayer and meditation the heart often turns with instinctive appeal to some friend who has passed into the next

life."

“Abdu'l-Bahá answered: ‘It is a law of God's creation that the weak should lean upon the strong. Those to whom you turn may be the mediators of God's power to you, even as when on earth.’<sup>35</sup>

A poignant example is Heather Niderost's story. I had the opportunity to be among a group gathered to hear her talk about her book, *The Light World*. Heather insisted that she didn't write a word of it. She explained that her 10-year-old son Eric died after being hit by a car while riding his bicycle and was laid to rest on what would have been his 11<sup>th</sup> birthday. Heather admitted she had a difficult time accepting the loss. Even though she kept reading all the selections in Bahá'í scripture about the continuance of the life of the soul once it leaves the body, and that death is “a messenger of joy,”<sup>36</sup> she remained inconsolable—until she finished writing *The Light World*, a book to help children understand the cycle of life. It takes the reader through death from the womb world to birth into this physical realm and then to death from the physical body to birth into the spiritual world. Heather insists that she was merely the conduit through which Eric wrote the book.

Heather, along with her husband Adrian and two of their daughters, went on their pilgrimage to the shrines at the Bahá'í World Center in Haifa, Israel in February 1987. She said:

“Ruhyyih Khanum and companion Violette Nakhjavani had just returned from New Delhi, having been present at the dedication of the glorious new lotus temple. She congregated our English language group of pilgrims in the home of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá and spoke to us all. She then held up a new publication, *Unto Him Shall We Return* (a compilation of Writings about life after death) and said ‘This is wonderful BUT—WE MUST REMOVE THE FEAR OF DEATH FROM THE MINDS OF OUR CHILDREN.’ That comment seared into my brain. I went home and realized I MUST write a book for children about life after death, and Eric took over!

“Yes, I felt compelled to write the little book, I felt that Eric had a

message

to deliver, and only he could do it. We went to our summer cottage at Metis-sur-

Mer on the Lower St Lawrence, and it was there that I wrote every morning at

## CHAPTER NINE

dawn, with a prayer, pen and paper, the blind raised to waken me, where Eric took

possession of my thoughts a feeling of ‘Let’s go, Ma!’ The quotes from the Writings

at the head of each chapter were the Source of my healing, the message that Eric

wanted to convey to kids needing answers (and their parents as well).”

Heather’s daily meditations on those passages that head the chapters opened her up to

receiving that guidance from the next world, and their truths finally penetrated. As she

transcribed Eric’s words, she began to feel the solace which till that time had eluded her.

Up until then she’d merely read the words but not taken the time to meditate on them

and pray for them to light her way.

In our recent correspondence as I looked to her to ensure the accuracy of my own

memories of her words, I mentioned my recollection of her telling us that she’d worried

about what she would do if the publisher should ask for anything to be edited.

She said

she couldn’t change a word of the book since she truly believed that Eric wrote it in its

entirety, and she was merely the instrument through which his words flowed from “the

Light World” onto paper to be read by children—and adults—in this physical world. She

wrote back:

“Yes, when I finally put my pen down, the ‘transmission’ was over, literally, not a

word more forthcoming.”

There was no need for her to worry. Not one word needed to be changed.

The experience not only brought Heather an acceptance of his passing and the peace which comes from that acceptance, but it’s been an invaluable tool for children

children

who’ve lost a friend, sibling, or parent, and helps ease the worries of youngsters facing

their own early demise due to some incurable illness. Heather shared these thoughts:

“Inspiration and meditation must be closely intertwined, one giving rise to the other. I feel I need to also share two other experiences stemming from Eric on this pilgrimage. Six years had intervened, and I thought I had healed. Well, the day arrived when Adrian, the girls, and I entered the Shrine of the Báb on stockinged feet and knelt on the carpet to pray. I was suddenly engulfed in inexpressible GRIEF, the tears rolled silently unchecked down my cheeks as wave after wave seemed to empty me out. Kleenexes were hastily passed! I wobbled out and into the shrine of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá only to be enveloped in a cocoon of LOVE such as I have never felt before or since, filling me with new life and healing. Imagine how ‘primed’ I felt

#### THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

when Ruhiiyyih Khanum spoke! I was part of an invisible process completely out of my control.

“Yes, writing the book was an essential part of my healing. It was the culmination of all the foregoing. It gave me the strength, the mission, to share the wonderful Teachings of Bahá’u’lláh on life after death. It gave Eric his voice from the invisible Abhá Kingdom. I have never recovered and never want to!!!”

The wisdoms that come from the type of meditation where you empty your mind of all thought can also bring new spiritual awareness. Here is one example:

Doug Jernberg gifted me a copy of the first couple of years of his journaling compiled from thoughts immediately jotted down following his daily meditation sessions. Replete with inspiring philosophic and poetic gems, the first entry, dated October 22, 1993–Sonoma County [California], is indicative of the spiritual wealth he gains through his meditations:

Life is a  
manifestation of  
His rapture...  
on the verge or edge...  
Man is on the verge of

spirit level of creation...  
just as bird is on the verge of  
the wispering [sic] winds of space...  
just as an amphibian  
is on the verge of breath...

Man is on the verge  
of limitless awareness,  
beyond the limits of

## CHAPTER NINE

ego, intellect, eyes, body  
and its breath...  
the ego tries in vain to secure,  
like the seaweed,  
person and place  
in the ocean of time...

He teaches to

'Let (it) go...  
and to be secure in  
ever changingness'  
thus, i live a life  
of unattaching.

untowards

Highest Being

Aware . . .

Try one, or both, of these methods of meditation, or any other that you decide to practice, like one where you just focus on your breath. No matter what form you use, bear no conscious expectation, and see what pearls of wisdom you glean from your subconscious connection with the world of the spirit.

Consider this guidance from the Universal House of Justice, especially if you decide to limit yourself to but one form of meditation:

“There are, of course, other things that one can do to increase one's

spirituality.

For example, Bahá'u'lláh has specified no procedures to be followed in meditation, and individual believers are free to do as they wish in this area, provided that they remain in harmony with the Teachings, but such activities are purely personal and should under no circumstances be confused with those actions which Bahá'u'lláh

#### THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Himself considered to be of fundamental importance for our spiritual growth. Some believers may find that it is beneficial to them to follow a particular method of meditation, and they may certainly do so, but such methods should not be taught at Bahá'í Summer Schools or be carried out during a session of the School because, while they may appeal to some people, they may repel others. They have nothing to do with the Faith and should be kept quite separate so that inquirers will not be confused.”<sup>37</sup>

In numerous passages Bahá'u'lláh instructs His followers to meditate upon His Writings, a particular situation, or anything from which they seek to further their knowledge and understanding. Let's consider the dictionary definition of the word. It is simply: “to engage in thought or contemplation; reflect.”

There is no magic formula needed. Just focus your attention, push random thoughts out and concentrate on that from which you wish to gain more insight. This is especially important for study of the Creative Word, as indicated by this guidance from 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

“It is incumbent upon you to ponder in your hearts and meditate upon His words, and humbly to call upon Him, and to put away self...”<sup>38</sup>

To tap into and then to stimulate your creative self, do meditate on some of the vast references in the Writings to The Arts. You'll find your sense of joy and wonder and self-esteem begin to and then continue to blossom. Keep at it; they'll soon flourish.

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## CHAPTER NINE

Coax Out and Caper with Your Creative Child

When will you meditate?

What form of meditation will you try? More than one?

How much time will you allot.

Where will you do this?

Choose one type and try it. Then another, and possibly another.

Which one(s) worked best for you?

Make a goal to do this on a regular basis.

## THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

### CHAPTER NINE

Strive for Excellence

“...in every art and skill, God loveth the highest perfection.” ~

Bahá'u'lláh

“...whosoever engageth in a craft, should endeavor to acquire in it utmost proficiency.

Should he do so, that craft becometh a form of worship.” ~ Bahá'u'lláh

The station of worship bestowed on the act of making art is not a given—it's not

automatic—rather it's conditioned upon your attitude toward it and your efforts to

accomplish it to the best of your ability. We've been told:

“... in this religion no other command is as rigorously enjoined as the duty of

refinement, and it is forbidden that one bring any object into being in a state of

imperfection when one hath the power to manifest it in full perfection.”<sup>1</sup>

'Abdu'l-Bahá also exhorts you to persevere in your efforts to perfect your work:

“... one must endeavor to attain the degree of perfection and not be like those

who leave matters unfinished.”<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, the Universal House of Justice pens their hopes for the actions of the believers:

“Rejecting the low sights of mediocrity, let them scale the ascending heights of

excellence in all they aspire to do. May they resolve to elevate the very atmosphere

in which they move, whether it be in the school rooms or halls of higher learning,  
in their work, their recreation, their Bahá'í activity or social service.”<sup>3</sup>

Abdu'l-Bahá wrote to an individual:

“I rejoice to hear that thou takest pains with thine art, for in this wonderful new age, art is worship.”<sup>4</sup>

Further He proclaimed:

## CHAPTER NINE

“What bestowal could be greater than this, that one's art should be even as the act of worshipping the Lord? That is to say, when thy fingers grasp the paintbrush, it is as if thou wert at prayer in the Temple.”<sup>5</sup>

Not only is it like a prayer, but also, He said:

“The more thou strivest to perfect it, the closer wilt thou come to God.”<sup>6</sup>

What happens if you don't strive for improvement—if you don't endeavor to perfect your work? It becomes mundane, merely average, and lessens the possibility that it will draw people and have a positive effect on them. If what you produce is merely meh, you will be unable to soar in the atmosphere of spiritual enlightenment, and lasting joy will elude you.

British novelist George Eliot equates excellence with spirituality:

“Excellence encourages on about life generally; it shows the spiritual wealth of the world.”<sup>7</sup>

In a 1912 presentation to the Bethel Literary Society in Washington, D.C., 'Abdu'l-Bahá exhorted them to:

“...put forward your most earnest efforts toward the acquisition of science and arts.”<sup>8</sup>

because, He explained:

“The greater your attainment, the higher your standard in the divine purpose.”<sup>9</sup>

Part of the divine purpose is for you to strive for spiritual perfection, and

God has gifted  
you with talents and faculties to aid your efforts. Would you want to offer the  
Lord a gift  
that consisted of anything less than your best effort?

It is vital to note the difference between striving for excellence and seeking  
perfection. Only God is perfect. Thus, Salvador Dali declares:

“Have no fear of perfection—you’ll never reach it.”<sup>10</sup>

Aristotle proposes:

“Excellence is an art won by training and habituation. We do not act rightly  
because we have virtue or excellence, but rather we have those because we have

#### THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

acted rightly. We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act  
but a  
habit.”<sup>11</sup>

Simply follow the advice of Robert Browning:

“Aspire, break bounds. Endeavor to be good, and better still, best.”<sup>12</sup>

Pablo Picasso posits:

“There are painters who transform the sun into a yellow spot, but there are  
others  
who, thanks to their art and intelligence, transform a yellow spot into the  
sun.”<sup>13</sup>

Which type of artist do you prefer to be?

To encourage your quest for excellence, think of Art in the terms suggested by  
author George Sand:

“Art for art's sake is an empty phrase. Art for the sake of the true art, for  
the sake  
of the good and beautiful, that is the faith I'm searching for.”<sup>14</sup>

Isn't this what you want for yourself—to perfect your art—to do it for the  
sake of the good  
and beautiful—and to know that in doing so, it will draw you closer to God  
and be the  
best gift—the best token of appreciation—you can offer Him?

??

#### CHAPTER NINE

Coax Out and Caper with Your Creative Child

Ponder these questions and write your thoughts on them:

What is the difference between perfection and excellence?

You can achieve excellence by striving for perfection.

But can you in fact reach perfection?

Or is that the solely in the realm of the Divine Creator?

## THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Strive for Excellence

The Art of an Eloquent Tongue

“Intone, O My servant, the verses of God that have been received by thee, as intoned by them who have drawn nigh unto Him, that the sweetness of thy melody may kindle thine own soul, and attract the hearts of all men.” ~ Bahá’u’lláh

“Talking and eloquence are not the same: to speak, and to speak well, are two things. A fool may talk, but a wise man speaks.” ~ Ben Jonson

Why do you speak?

To communicate.

What do you seek to communicate?

Your needs. Your inmost thoughts. Your opinions.

For your personal needs and in casual conversation, eloquence is an extra, not a necessity.

Plain language might even be preferable: straight and to the point. There are times, though, when if you share your thoughts in simple language, they may be heard but quickly forgotten. When words are strung together like exquisite pearls on fine silver thread, they penetrate, they linger, they remain with the listener. Even if the exact verbiage is lost, the sentiment lingers. The essence of the message remains and keeps reminding, till the listener wishes to return to and consider them again and again.

Some experts in the field separate the concepts of eloquence and rhetoric, yet others describe them as the same.

Eloquence is the art of executing language in the most beautiful manner possible, as music to the ears, as music to the soul.

Rhetoric uses language as a tool to drive home a point, to persuade, to convince.

When one marries the two, eloquent rhetoric will be the most effective

means of accomplishing any goal you set out to achieve.

## CHAPTER NINE

Geoffrey James, contributing editor at inc.com, wrote of “four kinds of speakers in the business world,” but they are accurate for speakers in any endeavor, be it business, religion, politics, personal relations, etc. He describes them as:

1. The incoherent, who meander, use tons of jargon, and talk of things interesting mostly to themselves.
2. The coherent, who can verbally communicate facts and opinions but seldom say anything memorable.
3. The articulate, who speak succinctly and clearly but whose words are seldom persuasive.
4. The eloquent, who use language and body language to win the hearts and minds of their listeners.<sup>15</sup>

He goes on to explain that:

“Eloquent people sound smart, regardless of how intelligent they are. The opposite is true as well. Smart people who are incoherent...often come off as if they're of limited intelligence.”<sup>16</sup>

To develop eloquence is to treat language as you would any Art.

Words can be used for good or for ill. They can be weapons or balms. Once spoken, they cannot be retrieved. They cannot be erased. Even with apology, their harm lingers.

The pain may be eased but is never lost completely. Words can pierce your emotional being like a dagger with which you were stabbed. Wounds can heal, but you might be left with a scar that may fade but will never disappear.

Instead of turning your words into armaments for destruction, do with your speech what the Book of Isaiah, , 2:3-4, says will be done with weapons. Turn your:

“... swords into plowshares and their spears into pruninghooks”

Indeed, Bahá'u'lláh Himself writes, in reference to teaching His religion:

“Know thou that We have annulled the rule of the sword, as an aid to Our Cause, and substituted for it the power born of the utterance of men.”<sup>17</sup>

He then calls upon you to:

“. . . quench, through the power of wisdom and the force of thy utterance,  
the fire of enmity  
and hatred which smouldereth in the hearts of the peoples of the world.”<sup>18</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh even explains how to do this:

#### THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

“It followeth, therefore, that rendering assistance unto God, in this day,  
doth not and shall  
never consist in contending or disputing with any soul; nay rather, what is  
preferable in the  
sight of God is that the cities of men's hearts, which are ruled by the hosts  
of self and  
passion, should be subdued by the sword of utterance, of wisdom and of  
understanding.

Thus, whoso seeketh to assist God must, before all else, conquer, with the  
sword of inner  
meaning and explanation, the city of his own heart and guard it from the  
remembrance of  
all save God, and only then set out to subdue the cities of the hearts of  
others.”<sup>19</sup>

He explained:

“Every word is endowed with a spirit, therefore the speaker or expounder  
should  
carefully deliver his words at the appropriate time and place, for the  
impression  
which each word maketh is clearly evident and perceptible. The Great Being  
saith:

One word may be likened unto fire, another unto light, and the influence which  
both exert is manifest in the world. Therefore an enlightened man of wisdom  
should primarily speak with words as mild as milk, that the children of men may  
be nurtured and edified thereby and may attain the ultimate goal of human  
existence which is the station of true understanding and nobility.”<sup>20</sup>

‘Abdu’l-Bahá similarly wrote:

“Man's speech is the revealer of his heart. In whatever world the heart  
travels,  
man's conversation will revolve around that centre. From his words you can  
understand in what world he is travelling, whether he is looking upward toward  
the realm of light or downward to the nether world, whether he is mindful or  
unaware, whether he is awake or asleep, whether he is alive or dead.

“There are persons with whom you associate and converse whose  
utterances are life-imparting, joy-giving. The withered and faded are  
refreshed, the  
joyless become happy, the extinct become enkindled and the lifeless are  
quickenened

with the breaths of the Holy Spirit. The one drowned in the sea of hesitation and doubt is saved by the life-boat of certainty and assurance; the one attached to this material world becomes severed and the one steeped in blameworthy deeds is adorned with praiseworthy attributes. On the other hand, there are some persons whose very respiration extinguishes the light of faith; whose conversation weakens firmness and steadfastness in the Cause of God; whose company diverts one's attention from the kingdom of Abhá.”<sup>21</sup>

So, whether you will converse one-on-one, within a small group, or address a large gathering, keep in mind the purpose of life—your own and that of the life of your friends, family, acquaintances, and society as a whole. There are many avenues of approach to

## CHAPTER NINE

improving your speech. First and foremost is for all you say to come from pure intentions and with honest, unselfish motives. To this end, heed this admonition of Bahá'u'lláh:

“Strain every nerve to acquire both inner and outer perfections, for the fruit of the human tree hath ever been and will ever be perfections both within and without. It is not desirable that a man be left without knowledge or skills, for he is then but a barren tree. Then, so much as capacity and capability allow, ye needs must deck the tree of being with fruits such as knowledge, wisdom, spiritual perception, and eloquent speech.”<sup>22</sup>

If you are active in your Faith and perhaps read aloud during a Bahá'í devotional gathering, at the altar during services in your synagogue or church or other house of worship, consider that when you are reciting Scripture you are sharing the Word of God.

Does not this, above all else, deserve accurate pronunciation and the most eloquent delivery? Lazy speech can result in a mispronunciation that infers a different meaning to what you've just read. It is not only confusing but can also make you appear ignorant.

Let's repeat here one of the previous quotes:

“Eloquent people sound smart, regardless of how intelligent they are. The opposite is true as well. Smart people who are incoherent...often come off as if they're of limited intelligence.”<sup>23</sup>

Even without any conscious intent, people form an opinion of you by your speech.

Honing your skills in any discipline can raise them to the level of Art. You can develop

the Art of an eloquent tongue.??

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## THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Coax Out and Caper with Your Creative Child

- Select an excerpt from your sacred scriptures, a poem, or any other piece of

writing that holds special meaning to you.

- Read it silently. Then read it aloud.
- Consider each sentence. What do you infer from this piece?
- Are there any words you don't quite understand, or could not define if asked?

Look them up in the dictionary and then the thesaurus so you can better grasp it's meaning.

- Are there any words for which you're unsure of the pronunciation?

Online

dictionaries will pronounce them for you. Listen and repeat several times.

- Read it the selection aloud again, recording it this time.
- Listen to the recording. Are you comfortable with it? Did you stumble over any words? Do you feel you expressed the intent of the piece as you read it?

- Practice it over and over. Read and record again and again, listening until you

are satisfied with the eloquence of the delivery.

You now have a blueprint to follow for any readings you may give in the future.

## CHAPTER TEN

### THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

#### C HAPTER T EN

Reach Out: Connect Minds, Hearts, and Souls

“Art can better awaken such noble sentiments than cold rationalizing especially among the mass of the people.” ~ Shoghi Effendi

The chapter, Art Heals, explains how various arts genres assist in healing physical, emotional, and spiritual wounds. Let's further examine these same genres to understand their role in reaching receptive souls and connecting them to the world-embracing message of Bahá'u'lláh: the oneness of God, the oneness of his Messengers and the oneness of humanity. You'll be encouraged, and it is hoped, inspired by the power of The Arts to bring together those with various cultural worldviews and differing mindsets. So effective is the use of The Arts that the Universal House of Justice suggested:

“All suitable and available creative resources—writers, artists, composers, musicians, poets, public information experts—should be called to the aid of the community, so as to imbue its plans with the most effective and attractive variety of expression...”<sup>1</sup>

In another instance, the Universal House of Justice wrote that to achieve your aims,

“...the friends are also asked to give greater attention to the use of the arts, not only for proclamation, but also for the work in expansion and consolidation. The graphic and performing arts and literature have played, and can play, a major role in extending the influence of the Cause. At the level of folk art, this possibility can be pursued in every part of the world, whether it be in villages, towns or cities. Shoghi Effendi held high hopes for the arts as a means for attracting attention to the Teachings.”<sup>2</sup>

The Universal House of Justice commended the Bahá'ís in Europe for excelling in the use of The Arts in their proclamation, teaching, and consolidation efforts, and assured them:

“...this is a key to opening many doors and should be encouraged and developed.”<sup>3</sup>

CHAPTER TEN

Subsequent subchapters will delve further into a few artistic genres and suggest ways they can be utilized to reach out and connect minds and souls, but first let's look at how those in the wider society with widely divergent beliefs can come together through shared artistic experiences. Artist Olafur Eliasson acknowledges:

“One of the great challenges today is that we often feel untouched by the problems of others and by global issues like climate change, even when we could easily do something to help. We do not feel strongly enough that we are part of a global community, part of a larger we. Giving people access to data most often leaves them feeling overwhelmed and disconnected, not empowered and poised for action. This is where art can make a difference. Art does not show people what to do, yet engaging with a good work of art can connect you to your senses, body, and mind. It can make the world felt. And this felt feeling may spur thinking, engagement, and even action.”<sup>4</sup>

He asserts that the artist has the responsibility to:

“ . . . help people not only get to know and understand something with their minds but also to feel it emotionally and physically.”<sup>5</sup>

This in turn, says Eliasson:

“ . . . can mitigate the numbing effect created by the glut of information we are faced with today, and motivate people to turn thinking into doing.”<sup>6</sup>

He also addresses the unique power of The Arts to connect those with diametrically opposed sets of belief:

“Engaging with art is not simply a solitary event. The arts and culture represent one of the few areas in our society where people can come together to share an experience even if they see the world in radically different ways. The important thing is not that we agree about the experience that we share, but that we consider it worthwhile sharing an experience at all.”<sup>7</sup>

Thus, whether you are an environmentalist, science enthusiast, social activist, or a religious devotee wanting to connect the spirit of your faith with those of

different

religions, or no religion, those with different mindsets and world views, your most effective avenue to reach out and connect minds and souls is through The Arts.

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## THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Coax Out and Caper with Your Creative Child

Whose hearts do I wish to reach?

What means shall I use?

Start small. Make one or two goals.

Once reached, you can add to them.

## CHAPTER TEN

Reach Out: Connect Minds, Hearts, and Souls

Music: Wings for the Spirit

“Music doesn’t get in. Music is already in. Music simply uncovers what is there, makes you feel emotions that you didn’t necessarily know you had inside you, and runs around waking them all up. A rebirth of sorts.” ~ Matt Haig

Why does music wield such powerful effects? Ethnomusicologist and jazz musician

Marvin “Doc” Holladay asserts:

“... music has an instantaneous impact on the listener. Music does not require contemplation and evaluation to elicit a reaction. . . .There is an immediate power of transformation in music . . .”<sup>8</sup>

'Abdu'l-Bahá explains that:

“...sound is but the vibrations of the air which affect the tympanum of the ear, and vibrations of the air are but an accident among the accidents which depend upon the air, consider how much marvelous notes or a charming song influence the spirits! A wonderful song giveth wings to the spirit and filleth the heart with exaltation.”<sup>9</sup>

What is the cause of these vibrations? It is the belief of master composer Ludwig von Beethoven that:

“The vibrations on the air are the breath of God speaking to man’s soul. Music is

the language of God. We musicians are as close to God as man can be. We hear his voice, we read his lips, we give birth to the children of God, who sing his praise.”<sup>10</sup>

The great effect of chanting is in large part due to the vibrations it creates. An excellent mode of prayer, it facilitates the connection of the soul to the Creator. When chants take place in groups, it bonds the souls of the participants. According to Robert Gass:

“In chanting with groups . . . disparate voices begin to touch each other, their multitude of tones searching for a common vibration. We breathe together and the silence in between the musical phrases grows quiet and crystalline. Securely held

#### THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

in the repeating forms of the chant, we become free to let the Spirit of the chant take us where it may.”<sup>11</sup>

Jennifer Warner’s report on website WebMD Health News offers a brief synopsis of research undertaken to find the biological connection to music and mood:

“In a set of experiments, researchers used brain scans to measure the release of dopamine while participants listened to pleasurable and neutral music.

“The results showed that the dopamine release was greater when the participants listened to pleasurable music, such as music that gave them "chills" or prompted a change in heart rate or breathing, compared to when they listened to neutral music.

“In addition, researchers found that even the anticipation of listening to intensely pleasurable music was enough to trigger the release of dopamine.

"These results further speak to why music can be effectively used in rituals, marketing, or film to manipulate hedonic states," write the researchers.”<sup>12</sup>

Beethoven also declares that:

“Music is the mediator between the life of the senses and the life of the spirit.”<sup>13</sup>

Shoghi Effendi also addresses this power of music and encourages its use:

“. . . music . . . assists us to affect the human spirit; it is an important

means which

helps us to communicate with the soul. The Guardian hopes that through this assistance you will give the Message to the people and will attract their hearts.”<sup>14</sup>

Tenth century Jewish musician Sa-adyah Gaon illustrated the manner in which music can be used to psychological effect:

“The musician . . . at gatherings, and banquets, and parties, should begin with the rhythm modes which strengthen the generous, moral qualities and nobleness, and liberality . . . Then he should follow them with agreeable, joyful modes . . . And at gatherings, if he fears disturbance, excitement, and quarreling, he should play the soothing heavy, tranquilizing, and sad modes.”<sup>15</sup>

'Abdu'l-Bahá noted that in ancient Greece and Persia, music preceded any speech or lecture, and the speaker wouldn't begin until the music had succeeded in setting the mood of the occasion. He gave one example:

## CHAPTER TEN

“Among the most renowned musicians of Persia was one named Barbod, who, whenever a great question had been pleaded for at the court of the King, they would at once refer the matter to Barbod, whereupon he would go with his instrument to the court and play the most appropriate and touching music, the end being at once attained, because the King was immediately affected by the touching musical melodies, certain feelings of generosity would swell up in his heart, and he would give way.”<sup>16</sup>

Then He went on to suggest:

“If you have a great desire and wish to attain your end, try to do so on a large audience after a great solo has been rendered.”<sup>17</sup>

As this chapter addresses using The Arts to reach out and connect minds and souls, let's see how that works. Mark Johnson, co-director of the documentary *Playing for Change: Peace through Music* understands that:

“...music . . . opens the door to bringing people to a place where they are all connected. It is easy to connect to the world through music . . .”<sup>18</sup>

Distinguished music professor Chan Ho Yun, in addition to teaching at several

prestigious institutions, also seeks to develop the talents of underprivileged children. He started the Rainbow Music Academy in the Crenshaw district of Los Angeles with a nominal suggested fee of \$10, but if the student's family can't even afford that, they are still welcome. The grandmother of one child says:

"These children have a right to know something else besides police helicopters flying overhead and gunshots and violence, and when you learn music, you have something for life, something no one else can take away."19

Music also breaks down racial barriers. The students at the academy are of many different backgrounds but their shared love of music has brought them together in a way that didn't seem possible outside their musical haven. Chan Ho Yun uses music education to break down racial and cultural barriers so his students can reach out to each other and connect their minds and souls, perhaps with deep and lasting friendships.

In the underground subway, the train station, or just on a street corner when talented musicians begin to play, it is not unusual to see passersby who might not ordinarily make eye contact or nod a hello, suddenly gather around and, as they enjoy the sounds, look at each other to smile in acknowledgement of a shared gift. This

#### THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

phenomenon is amplified and available not only to those present but for people anywhere in the world to experience vicariously when it moves from the individual musician or small group to the members of an orchestra in what is referred to as a Flash Mob and is then caught on video and made available via the Internet. There is double joy for the viewer in not only watching the musicians and hearing the music, but in being able to view the surprise and the growing joy and appreciation on the faces of those caught up in a moment of awe.

The power of music to reach out and connect with military personnel helps to unite and to soothe those who may be living under strained circumstances.

Author Lynn Rosellini, writes of Operation Happy Note, an effort begun by Steve and Barbara Baker of Minnesota who reach out and connect minds and souls by gifting

musical instruments to troops stationed overseas. According to grateful Staff Sgt. Louis

Karsnia who received a shipment in Iraq:

“Before, you'd see guys with their iPods on, listening to music, staying away from

everybody else. “But when the guitars came, people got together. We'd have four

or five guys playing guitar, and 25 or 30 others laughing and singing.’

“In the past three years, Operation Happy Note has sent nearly 630 free instruments to American troops around the world. Scores of e-mailed thank-yous from soldiers make it all worthwhile. This Christmas, the Bakers plan to ship Santa

hats, decorations, holiday CDs and sheet music along with the instruments.”<sup>20</sup>

Sgt. Timothy Hall of the 3rd Infantry Division likely speaks for many troops when he

explains what the gift of the instruments means to him:

“The music takes me away to another world—one that is peaceful and serene, where there is no hate, death or dirt.”<sup>21</sup>

Rosellini adds:

“That sort of military transport is a miracle.”<sup>22</sup>

The best example I can think of for the power of music to reach out and connect disparate

and antagonistic minds and souls of people is the spontaneous truce during World War

I when on Christmas of 1914, German soldiers rose from their trenches, called out Merry

Christmas in French and English, and began to sing Christmas carols. At first the Allied

forces were wary of a trap, but soon they also emerged from their own trenches.

They

shook hands, exchanged cigarettes and snacks, and sang together. That led to a prisoner

## CHAPTER TEN

exchange and the opportunity to gather the dead. I can't imagine any of them being

willing to resume shooting at each other after such a display of human kindness.

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‘Abdu’l-Bahá tells us,

“A wondrous melody is wings for the spirit, and maketh the soul to tremble for joy.”<sup>23</sup>

It makes me smile to recall when the walls of the Desert Rose Bahá’í Institute (DRBI) in Eloy, Arizona trembled while the joy on the faces of the fifteen youth who attended the Summer Music Academy was truly evident.

The 2012 summer session was the second one held at DRBI. The first took place over a weekend the previous March. Due to its success and the earnest eagerness of those who attended, the leaders opted to expand the next one to an entire week, with step dance added to the curriculum. The presenters reached out and made important connections with those young people.

The youth, aged 11–15, participated in a program that included a five-step writing process for composing music, from songwriting through production to publishing. The students enjoyed and appreciated the opportunity to immediately take the knowledge they’d gained and apply it in the studio, with instructors standing ready to assist.

The Baha’i teachings advise that we are to

“...acquire those branches of knowledge that are of use, that both the learned themselves and the generality of mankind may derive benefits therefrom...”<sup>24</sup>

Therefore, according to Sarah Danielle, one of several instructors who came from Tucson, Arizona and Los Angeles, California, the one requirement for the students was to learn to “express themselves powerfully through socially responsible music.”

That they took this lesson to heart is evident in the themes chosen for their songs, e.g., the lyrics to “The Cure” suggest that unity is the cure for the ailments plaguing society, and “Stepping Out” suggests we step out of our comfort zones for the sake of assisting others.

A special workshop, Planet of Percussion by award-winning percussionist Will

Clipman, introduced the participants to various instruments from countries around the

## THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

world. The students were very excited and appreciative to work with him.

Kitchen

Manager, Brenda Hadden, remarked:

“The students were wonderfully behaved and truly excited about what they were doing and the friendships they were creating. Every day through the food lines they

were chatting and singing and dancing while filling their plates. The energy was

phenomenal, and they were learning valuable life lessons.”

She also went to their ending performance and noted,

“The kids did a fantastic job at performing—singing, dancing, speaking in front of

all of us. They sang the songs they wrote and danced in unison. It was very entertaining. They were a great group of youth!”

I enjoyed assisting in the preparation and serving of a few of the meals and was moved

not just by their talent and exuberant enthusiasm, but the spontaneous volunteering by

several student. They broke off from their friends for a few minutes to help with clean-up.

Those who attended the March session received the CD of their five finished pieces. They titled it Y.O.U.T.H. (Young Opportunists United to Touch Hearts).

The eight

track CD for the students in the summer session, is Spiritual S.W.A.G.

(Spiritual Warriors Aiding God).

Emilio Espinoza, 17, of Tucson, Arizona, expressed gratitude for the opportunity

to participate, “My father passed his love for music to us. For me to come here and have

this amazing experience with adults and youth who share this passion was enriching.”

14-year-old Munirih Peace from Pinetop, Arizona said “The most important part of this

week was that I learned where my talents lie.”

It is gratifying to know that the students were being guided to music that will reach out to people and connect their minds and souls, because music’s effect on the spirit

varies with the type of music and the mind-set of the listener. It is vital to be aware that not only does it have the power to link you to your higher nature but can also have the opposite effect depending on the choice of music. Therefore, Bahá'u'lláh counsels:

“We have permitted you to listen to music and singing. Beware lest such listening cause you to transgress the bounds of decency and dignity. Rejoice in the joy of My Most Great Name through which the hearts are enchanted and the minds of the well-favoured are attracted. "We have made music a ladder by which souls may

#### CHAPTER TEN

ascend to the realm on high. Change it not into wings for self and passion. I seek refuge in God that you be not of the ignorant.”<sup>25</sup>

And ‘Abdu’l-Bahá warns:

“...a musical and melodious voice imparteth life to an attracted heart, but lureth toward lust those souls who are engulfed in passion and desire.”<sup>26</sup>

If you’d like to get to know other people on a deeper level—to reach out and connect through mind and spirit—share music together. If you’re a musician, make a date to play together with other music makers. If there’s more than one other person, organize a jam session.

If you don’t play an instrument, invite them to a sing-along, whether it be serious, like a singing devotional or perhaps to form a choral group, or just an informal gathering for the simple yet profound joy of singing. Make music an essential part of your devotionals, study circles, children’s and youth classes and you’ll find everyone’s spirit will be elevated and the hearts of all present feeling more connected to one another. It will help you to create radiant, unified communities.”

Music is a proven method to spread the healing message of the Divine Physician as evidenced in this letter written by Ruhiyyih Khanum after being gifted a tape of music by musician Robert Bassett.

## THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

With all this in mind, it is not surprising, then, that 'Abdu'l-Bahá refers to music as:

“...one of the important arts.”<sup>27</sup>

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### CHAPTER TEN

#### Coax Out and Caper with Your Creative Child

What is your favorite music genre? How can you use it in reaching out and connecting to others?

What music moves the hearts of those with whom you wish to make closer connections? How can you learn to utilize it even if it would not be your choice?

## THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Reach Out: Connect Minds, Hearts, and Souls

Drama: Pulpit of the Future

“It [theater] is an institution of cultural and moral education; besides being entertainment it should develop people’s tastes and raise the level of their culture. [It] must be beautiful entertainment, and it must embody serious ideas.” ~ Stanislavski

Just one film or novel or play or public Art exhibition can affect a person for the rest of their life and, perhaps, set them on a new path they hadn’t previously considered. Art can open the mind and the heart. Poet Roger White explained:

“Art conveys information about ourselves and our universe which can be found nowhere else. Our artists are our benefactors.”<sup>28</sup>

Theater, one of the most influential artistic forms, addresses issues and brings information to us in a non-threatening manner. While watching, we can experience it as if it is, in fact, taking place right in front of our eyes. Done well, it draws us in so we feel we are actually part of it.

Art has the unique and remarkable ability to share its messages without making you feel schooled, taught, or lectured. You learn a tremendous amount from song lyrics, visual art, film and theater. Novelist Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis explains:

“No the theater isn't an industry...let's not reduce ideas to the level of merchandise.

The theater isn't a bazaar . . . Isn't the theater a school for morals? Isn't it a pulpit?

Victor Hugo says in the preface to *Lucrezia Borgia*, 'The theater is a tribune, the theater is a pulpit.'"29

Others agree:

"Theater is a pulpit which is the most powerful means of influence."30 – Stanislavski

"The stage will be the pulpit of the future."31 – 'Abdu'l-Bahá

The great drama teacher Stanislavski recognized and abhorred the negative influences that can infiltrate and corrupt an actor's soul. To prevent that outcome, he developed a

## CHAPTER TEN

training system meant to raise the actor and his Art to the highest, most positive level, because he was well aware that:

"Some actors and actresses love stage and art like fish love water. They revive in the atmosphere of art. Others love not art itself but an actor's career, success; they revive in the backstage atmosphere. The first are beautiful, the others are abominable. ... The habit of always being in public, of exhibiting oneself and showing off, of receiving applause, good reviews, and so on, is a great temptation; it accustoms an actor to being worshiped; it spoils him. His little ambitious person begins to need constant tickling. ... To be content with such interests, one must be mediocre and vulgar. A serious artist cannot be satisfied for long with such existence, but superficial people are enslaved by the temptations of the stage and become corrupted. This is why, in our work, more than in any other, one must constantly keep oneself in hand. An actor needs a soldier's discipline."32

Thus, Stanislavski cautioned:

"With the same power with which theater can ennoble the spectators, it may corrupt them, degrade them, spoil their taste, lower their passions, offend beauty..."33

He asserted:

"My task is to elevate the family of artists from the ignorant, the half-educated, and

the profiteers, and to convey to the younger generation that an actor is the priest of beauty and truth.”<sup>34</sup>

The Baha'i teachings include similar admonitions to artists of all mediums. They are told:

“Of all the arts and sciences, set the children to studying those which will result in advantage to man, will ensure his progress and elevate his rank.”<sup>35</sup>

From a Baha'i perspective, art exists to elevate the human soul.

“Shoghi Effendi was very much interested to learn of the success of the 'Pageant of Nations'....

“It is through such presentations that we can arouse the interest of the greatest number of people in the spirit of the Cause. That day will the Cause spread like wildfire when its spirit and teachings are [will be] presented on the stage or in art and literature as a whole. Art can better awaken such noble sentiments than cold rationalizing especially among the mass of the people.

#### THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

“We have to wait only a few years to see how the spirit breathed by Bahá'u'lláh will find expression in the work of the artists...”<sup>36</sup>

More than a few years have passed, and you can witness a glimmer of that promise coming true.

After an actor commented on the influence theater has on the audience, 'Abdu'l-Bahá agreed:

“The drama is of the utmost importance. It has been a great educational power in the past; it will be so again.” He described how as a young boy he witnessed the Mystery Play of 'Alí's Betrayal and Passion, and how it affected him so deeply that he wept and could not sleep for many nights.”<sup>37</sup>

Following the performance of a monologue on Tahirih at the 1984 Wildfire Conference of the Arts in Greencastle, Indiana, a man approached to thank me. He said something to the effect that “She came to life for me. She was no longer someone on a page in a book.

She was real, and I could care about her.” He added, “We need more works like this. We need to see our history come to life on the stage.”

As years went by and performances on Baha’i increased, people commented that they now had a fuller understanding of, and finally felt a truer connection with, their religious forebears. The dramatization of those historical events made them real, no longer just a story that had little bearing on life today. A personal link was created.

When you watch a play, you step out of the present to fully experience what happens onstage. For some it seems as if they themselves become an integral part of the story. The great poet Coleridge explained this phenomenon as:

“ . . . that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith...”<sup>38</sup>

Were you one of the many people who couldn't bring themselves to step into the shower after seeing the movie Psycho? Did the film Jaws keep you from swimming in the ocean?

You knew these were just stories—yet they penetrated your psyche so deeply you couldn't shake the fact that they weren't real.

The immediacy of theater, along with our willing suspension of disbelief, can inspire us to plumb the recesses of our minds and souls and give due consideration to new ideas and opinions. According to P. S. Baber:

## CHAPTER TEN

“The stage is a magic circle where only the most real things happen, a neutral territory outside the jurisdiction of Fate where stars may be crossed with impunity.

A truer and more real place does not exist in all the universe.”<sup>39</sup>

The moral imperatives in film and theater range from our personal interactions with those closest to us, to situations with world-wide impacts. Drama conveys our deepest emotions, from ecstatic pleasure to terrible pain and, in the process, teach us what it means to be human.

As an actor, I've been blessed to work in several productions that I believe equally

stirred the emotions and uplifted the spirit. I had the privilege of portraying Etta Bunch, a larger-than-life Macy's toy department saleslady with an even bigger heart. Etta plays matchmaker between Doris and Fred, the two leading characters in *Miracle!*, a musical theater adaptation by Frank Maguire of the beloved Valentine Davies' film, *Miracle on 34th Street*.

Director Stacey Seaman believes Etta's advice to Doris, who feels lost and is searching for answers, is one of the most important parts of the story that she wants the audience to take home with them. Etta tells Doris, in her convoluted yet profound way, and thick Yiddish/Brooklynese accent, that:

"...answers aren't nearly as important as questions. Answers can close doors that gotta be left open. But you've gotta ask yourself the right questions. Being afraid is never an answer. Afraid is . . . like a place to hide, and hiding's a waste of time and energy."<sup>40</sup>

Only prayer, I've learned, will keep those spiritual doors open. The actual imprisoned Iranian women portrayed in Ann Boyles one-act play, *When the Moment Comes*, got through their ordeals with prayer, by beseeching Baha'u'llah's aid:

"I don't know how we survived it. Physical strength, endurance—these weren't enough. The pain was too intense. When that is happening to you, you think, 'I can't bear this. This is too much, Baha'u'llah. Why me? I can't stand it anymore!' and you can't bear the pain by yourself. Somewhere in the middle of all of it you realize that. And you know that you have a simple choice to make. The guards, they want you to deny your faith. That is the only reason they are doing this to you. And if you deny your faith, the pain will stop. But then you realize that your faith is your life and you are not going to give it up . . . . So you can't bear the pain anymore, and you're not willing to do the thing that will stop the pain. Really, then, there's only one way you

## THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

can deal with what's happening to you. You begin to pray. You turn your thoughts away from your body, away from the pain, to Baha'u'llah. And, as you pray, something very strange happens. Somehow, you enter a place where there is no pain. Oh, your body is there on the bed, enduring it—but your spirit isn't in that body. It's somewhere else. It's hard to explain. But, back in the cell, we would speak about it, and all of us had that out-of-body experience as we prayed during flogging.”

Those who saw this play, based on true incidents, or any others that depict characters who overcome their earthly tribulations through firm faith and sincere prayer for assistance, can call to mind the action(s) and words from the drama and use the memory as a reminder that everyone is capable of moving through life's challenges when supplicating God's assistance and trusting in His guidance.

Another example is ReGeneration's<sup>1</sup> production *Amazing Grace: Stories of Personal Transformation from Slavery to the Present Day*. Originally compiled and performed by Mary Kay Makoski and Thelma Khelgati, I've changed, with Mary Kay's blessing, a few of the stories, added two more actors, and woven the stories, songs, and poems into a four-voice oral tapestry. To say audience feedback has been positive and encouraging would be an understatement.

One gentleman who saw it performed at the Faulkner Library in Santa Barbara, California on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, with the music performed by Mama's Voices, a small interracial gospel group, tried to convince me to “take the show on the road.” He told me that he was from Washington, D.C. and over many years he's attended numerous programs for the holiday, heard excellent and profound speeches, listened to inspirational music, but none had the deep impact on his soul that this performance engendered.

The Readers Theater script weaves poetry, sacred writings, journal entries, dramatic characterizations, and songs highlighting true life stories, including

that of John  
Newton, sailor turned slaver turned abolitionist turned pastor and lyricist of  
the  
universally beloved hymn Amazing Grace. Our performing group, ReGeneration,  
also  
moved audiences with a similar style script, Now They Are Hanging Women, which  
addresses the plight of Iranian Bahá'ís imprisoned in the years following  
the revolution  
that deposed the Shah and put in place an ultra-conservative religious system  
of  
Reader's Theater troupe based in Eloy, Arizona

## CHAPTER TEN

government. We are currently at work on two scripts, one to address women's  
issues and  
another that highlights the lives of women from different races, cultures and  
countries  
who led extraordinary lives worthy of note, and sure to inspire.

You, too, can write a play, produce it, act in it, do a combination or all  
three, and  
you'll be guaranteed to reach out and connect with the minds and hearts of  
your  
audiences.

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## THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Coax Out and Caper with Your Creative Child  
Now that you've practiced improving your voice,

(The Art of an Eloquent Tongue)

find a skit, a poem to dramatize, (that's something you've already  
practiced!)

or write something yourself.

If you're new to memorization, start out reading it aloud a few times.

You can do this alone or encourage others to participate.

Present it at an upcoming gathering.

## CHAPTER TEN

Reach Out: Connect Minds, Hearts, and Souls  
Dance: The Hidden Language of the Soul

"Dance is the hidden language of the soul." ~ Martha Graham

Dancer/choreographer Bill T. Jones believes:

“Dance comes through the eyes, then the mind and into the heart.”<sup>41</sup>

In the previous section of this chapter, we examined the concept of theater as a

pulpit for ideas. But theater isn't limited to dramatic or comedic presentations by actors.

Dance is another form of theater. It also tells stories, whether in the form of classical ballet, modern dance, hula, folk dance, hip hop, or even belly dancing—which in its truest form also tells a story—and when a story is compelling, and the dancer(s) totally immersed, it speaks to the soul of both dancer and viewer. It becomes an effective medium for reaching out and connecting souls.

The renowned Isadora Duncan, known as the "Mother of Dance" predicts:

“Our theatres will become temples. All drama should have its foundation in religion, for without that it becomes ignoble . . . the dance of the future will have to become again a high religious art as it was with the Greeks. For art which is not religious is not art, is mere merchandise. The dance will return as I have envisioned it. Mankind will not always expect those with vision to put a seed in the ground and bring it to flowering in a single night.”<sup>42</sup>

The effect dance has on the spirit of both dancer and audience likely offers the most profound of the spiritual experiences any art can produce since it combines music, theater and movement. The Hopi say:

“To watch us dance is to hear our hearts speak.”<sup>43</sup>

Dancer/choreographer Doris Humphrey suggests:

“The dancer believes that his art has something to say which cannot be expressed in words or in any other way than by dancing . . . there are times when the simple dignity of movement can fulfill the function of a volume of words.”<sup>44</sup>

## THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

“Speech” from the heart resonates almost instantaneously with the hearts of others.

Thereby creating an intimate connection.

Amanda Corp of Rhode Island USA's Salve Regina University attests to the connection to and influence on the soul experienced through dance in this excerpt of the article, *Dance is the Hidden Language of the Soul*:

To watch a passionate dancer dance,  
is like hearing your heart speak for the very first time.

Dance enables you to find yourself  
and lose yourself at the same time.<sup>45</sup>

The reason dance has such strong power to move us and help open our minds and hearts is explained in part by Lyall Watson:

“Dancing is surely the most basic and relevant of all forms of expression. Nothing else can so effectively give outward form to an inner experience. Poetry and music exist in time. Painting and architecture are a part of space. But only the dance lives at once in both space and time. In it the creator and the thing created, the artist and the expression, are one. Each participates completely in the other. There could be no better metaphor for an understanding of the cosmos.”<sup>46</sup>

For dance to be able to succeed in reaching and moving the audience towards such understanding, choreographer Michael Kidd instructs the dancer:

“Dancing should be completely understandable—every move, every turn should mean something, should be crystal clear to the audience. And if you make them laugh or cry, move them emotionally, make them respond to the dancer as a real person doing something believable within your theatrical framework, well, you’ve done a job.”<sup>47</sup>

An excellent example is found in the "Racism Dance," performed by the Bahá'í youth workshops initiated by Los Angeles, California actor Oscar DeGruy in the 1970s. An article in *One Country* offers this description of the dance and its impact:

“Over time, a number of standard dance numbers have evolved. One of the most powerful is called simply the "Racism Dance." In it, the dancers are divided into two groups, one group wearing all white and the other wearing all black, symbolizing the division between races. Most of the members of both groups are also wearing

## CHAPTER TEN

blindfolds. At the start, two young members from each group, too innocent apparently to be wearing blindfolds, come together in the middle and start to become friendly. They are then harshly dragged back to their own groups by the blindfolded adults, who communicate through gestures their mistrust of and hatred for the other group. And the youngest ones are given their own blindfolds to wear.

“In the dramatic climax, however, the young ones shed their blindfolds, return to center stage, and demonstrate to all that the races can unite. At the end, their example leads everyone to remove their blindfolds—symbolic, obviously, of blind prejudice—and all come together in a final joyous dance sequence.

“While the routine may sound simple—even melodramatic—on paper, when enacted by a group of sincere youth, it can have a powerful impact on an audience, as was clear when a workshop based in Springfield, Massachusetts, USA, performed for a group of public school teachers who were attending a multicultural training session just before the start of school there in September.

"If I had opened my mouth, I would have started crying," said Lola Conley, a second-grade teacher in Springfield, whose comments were echoed by others. "They can teach us so much about where we should be today. It captured reality and gave us hope that this is the way the world could be."<sup>48</sup>

Because of the great power of dance and music to stir the emotions, it is crucial to adhere to the guidelines provided by the Universal House of Justice:

“As for choreographed dances whose purpose is to reinforce and proclaim Bahá’í principles, if they can be performed in a manner which portrays the nobility of such principles and invokes appropriate attitudes of respect or reverence, there is no objection to dances which are meant to interpret passages from the Writings; however, it is preferable that the motions of a dance not be accompanied by the reading of the words.

“The principle which must guide the friends in their consideration of these questions is the observance of "moderation in all that pertains to dress, language, amusements, and all artistic and literary avocations.”<sup>49</sup>

With all this in mind, go dance through life—let your love and sincerity flow out to and

embrace all of God's creation.

?

## THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

### Coax Out and Caper with Your Creative Child

You've experimented with movement to song, but you did this on your own.

Now get others to participate with you.

You can include drumming or other instruments in addition to,  
or in lieu of, recorded music.

This can be included in anything from a social gathering to a worship service.

Now, simply move with the rhythms as your soul guides your body.

Please note that this should not be done if revealed prayers are being sung.

Nothing

should intervene between the Word and the souls of the supplicants.

## CHAPTER TEN

### Reach Out: Connect Minds, Hearts, and Souls

#### To Story—To Poem—To Essay—To Write

“The function of language is to portray the mysteries and secrets of human hearts. The heart is like unto a box, and language is the key. Only by using the key can we open the box and observe the gems it contains.” – ‘Abdu'l-Bahá

Why should you write? Let's hear how a scientist answers this question.

According to

biologist Julian Huxley:

“By speech first, but far more by writing, man has been able to put something of himself beyond death. In tradition and in books an integral part of the individual persists, for it can influence the minds and actions of other people in different places and at different times: a row of black marks on a page can move a man to tears, though the bones of him that wrote it are long ago crumbled to dust.”<sup>50</sup>

American novelist, satirist, and poet Erica Jong offers another reason:

“if you are relentlessly honest about what you feel and fear you can become a mouthpiece for something more than your own feelings. People are remarkably similar at the heart level — where it counts. Writers are born to voice what we all

feel. That is the gift. And we keep it alive by giving it away . . . Generosity is the soul of writing. You write to give something. To yourself. To your reader.”<sup>51</sup>

What should you write? What should be the underlying purpose of your writing? Consider this advice given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to a correspondent from Japan:

“O thou who art seeking the Truth!

“Thy letter has been received. Thou hast taken much pain in inventing the new Japanese writing. Thou hast rendered a service to the world of humanity — May God reward thee.

“Today, however, there exist many kinds of writing. That which is most necessary and is assisted by divine confirmations is the propagation of the heavenly

Call. It is this which energizes the world of existence. It is this which bestoweth life

unto the dead souls, which refresheth the dried tree and ornamenteth it with

#### THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

leaves, blossoms and fruits. Concentrate all thine energy in this that thou mayest

make heavenly progress, that thou mayest attain to the light of the Sun of Reality,

that thou mayest become the cause that the dead body of Japan may attain to heavenly life, may be endowed with solar illumination and like unto the moon and

star it may shine forth.”<sup>52</sup>

Though the highest emphasis is put on writing to share the life-changing teachings of the

Bahá'í Faith, you are free to write in whatever genre interests you:

fiction, memoir,

historical accounts, poetry, etc. It is a given that you write for yourself out of a need for

self-expression, but the end product of most writing is to reach the hearts and minds of

others. This is one avenue to connect with the world around you.

When addressing something you perceive to be wrong—an issue you believe needs to be changed and that compels you to address it—be sure your aim is positive—

even if the initial manner or tone you use might not seem positive, it's okay, even

cathartic, to let your deep inner feelings flow out onto the paper—or

keyboard. (See Ugly

Art Can Have a Beautiful Result. }

Next comes editing. You've mined the words. Now they need to be polished.

This  
is the time to take any negativity that made its way onto the page and find a  
more tactful  
way of phrasing it. Take your time and be meticulous with this task. It may  
need  
numerous revisions before it is ready to present to others.

Writing, though, if done strictly for the monetary reward or in an effort to  
accrue  
accolades, may feed readers' minds but will leave their souls unnourished.  
Neither will  
it foster your own spiritual transformation. Author Brenda Ueland laments:

“It is our nasty twentieth century materialism that makes us feel: what is  
the use of  
writing, painting, etc., unless one has an audience or gets cash for it?  
Socrates and  
the men of the Renaissance did so much because the rewards were intrinsic,  
i.e.,  
the enlargement of the soul.”<sup>53</sup>

When you know you want to write but aren't sure where to begin, what genre to  
use, just  
sit down and let words flow. They'll lead the way. Trust them. Heeding this  
advice, I just  
began to write one day. It could have ended up an essay, but instead a poem  
poured  
forth.

To story—To poem—To essay: To write—  
Something witty—Or wis Intelligent—Or bright—

## CHAPTER TEN

That grabs—Beguiles—Brings tears—Or smiles.

The challenge before me—I quiver and quake.  
Yet it's one that I welcome—Will definitely take.  
I'll look to my muse—And look also within.  
Say a prayer. Sit down. Get ready. Begin.

Let's see where it takes me—Whether now—Or back then—  
Perhaps a peek at the future—At what might happen then!

The only way to know what it may hold  
Is to set pen to paper—Be honest—Be bold.

Each try an adventure. Time very well spent.  
No mush-head from TV—Mind all warped and bent.  
Better to do something in which I delight.  
To story—To essay—To poem—To write.

Everyone has a story. Everyone includes you. Your life experiences, the obstacles you've faced and overcome, can resonate with someone in a similar situation and spur them into rehabilitative action. Your positive relationships, uplifting moments, life-changing adventures, or spiritual epiphanies can bring smiles, laughter, joy or tears of sadness, righteous anger at what you endured, and inspiration and hope to your readers at how you overcame challenges. It might be exactly what someone needs at just the right moment. You can write it as memoir, fiction, essay, or...

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To Story

“Every good story is, of course, both a picture and idea, and the more they are interfused, the better.” ~ Henry James

#### THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Are you reluctant to follow your artistic instincts to write short stories or novels? Does it feel frivolous to indulge your imagination and not seem as important or useful as writing nonfiction? Have you heard people liken fiction to ‘sciences that begin and end in words?’ Addressing this concern, Shoghi Effendi wrote to an individual:

“What Bahá'u'lláh meant primarily with 'sciences that begin and end in words' are those theological treatises and commentaries that encumber the human mind rather than help it attain the truth. The students would devote their life to their study but still attain no where.

“Bahá'u'lláh surely never meant to include story writing under such a category, and shorthand and typewriting are both most useful talents very necessary in our present society and economic life.

“What you could do, and should do, is to use your stories to become a source of inspiration and guidance for those who read them. With such a means at your disposal you can spread the spirit and teachings of the Cause; you can show the evils that exist in society, as well as the way they can be remedied. If

you possess  
a real talent in writing you should consider it as given by God and exert your  
efforts  
to use it for the betterment of society.”<sup>54</sup>

Maya Angelou cautions:

“There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.”<sup>55</sup>

Your stories can be told in a variety of forms: memoir, autobiography,  
biography, and  
fiction and autobiographical fiction. And all forms of storytelling lend  
themselves to  
scriptwriting. Let’s take a brief look at just a few genres.

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Fiction

Fiction can be presented in short stories or novels.

An article on BBC Future looks at the positive personal and social effects that
come
from reading fiction:

“The claims for fiction are great. It’s been credited with everything from
an increase
in volunteering and charitable giving to the tendency to vote—and even with
the
gradual decrease in violence over the centuries.

CHAPTER TEN

“Characters hook us into stories. Aristotle said that when we watch a
tragedy two emotions predominate: pity (for the character) and fear (for
yourself).

“Without necessarily even noticing, we imagine what it’s like to be them
and compare their reactions to situations with how we responded in the past, or
imagine we might in the future....

“At the Princeton Social Neuroscience Lab, psychologist Diana Tamir has
demonstrated that people who often read fiction have better social cognition.

In
other words, they’re more skilled at working out what other people are
thinking
and feeling.”⁵⁶

That last study found that by reading fiction, some people grow more
empathetic.

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## Memoir

This genre serves multiple purposes:

- It preserves family stories for future generations. They won't need to scramble as much as you've had to in order to glean information about their relatives, at least this relative: you.
- It helps you work through personal issues (See Chapter 6b-v, Write Your Way to Health).
- It informs and, if written with a touch of humor, entertains.
- It offers a glimpse of yourself to the reader.

As Nancy Mairs explains:

"Our stories utter one another...If I do my job, the books I write vanish before your eyes. I invite you into the house of my past, and the threshold you cross leads you into your own."<sup>57</sup>

Frederick Buechner expands on this idea in two of his writings:

"My story is important not because it is mine. God knows, but because if I tell it anything like right, the chances are you will recognize that in many ways it is yours. Maybe nothing is more important than that we keep track...of these stories of who we are and where we have come from and the people we have met along the way because it is precisely through these stories in all their particularity...that God makes himself known to each of us most powerfully and personally...to lose track of our stories is to be profoundly impoverished not only humanly but spiritually."<sup>58</sup>

#### THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

"I not only have my secrets, I am my secrets. And you are your secrets. Our secrets are human secrets, and our trusting each other enough to share them with each other has much to do with the secret of what it means to be human."<sup>59</sup>

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History / Biography

Scientists use microscopes, test tubes, and other laboratory paraphernalia to learn from organisms and organic materials how things work in nature and in human biology. Books and articles about historical subjects are their equivalent to understanding

and predicting human behavior. It also provides a link to help you identify with your ancestors and offers information needed to objectively assess from their actions what you would do well to emulate, as well as examples of what should not be repeated.

Biography helps to move an historical figure from the realm of facts and figures.

They are no longer statistics or one-dimensional characters from whom you feel detached. Leadership coach/trainer Kevin Eikenberry proposes that:

“Reading a great biography (or autobiography) can be as exciting as your favorite thriller, provide more valuable and useful lessons than most self-help best sellers, and offer more professional development wisdom than you can likely apply.”⁶⁰

“As exciting as your favorite thriller?” Really? Yes. Neither history nor biography need be a dull, boring read. He lists five reasons to read more biographies:

1. They allow you to stand on the shoulders of giants.
2. They remind you that history repeats itself.
3. They promote self-discovery.
4. They allow you to see the world in new ways.
5. They give you mentors at a distance.⁶¹

These are all excellent reasons not just to read biographies, but to write them for others to read, as well.

Dorothy Freeman Gilstrap opens her preface to the first edition of *From Copper to Gold: The Life of Dorothy Baker*, her biography of her inspirational grandmother, with these encouraging thoughts:

CHAPTER TEN

“Every life is unique in its sensations and intensity, its boredom and its restlessness.

No human effort can hope to faithfully represent the experience of life, even one’s own . . . The reality lives on in memory or heart, but the moment escapes. The Arts live, in part, to reconstruct for our eyes, our ears, our spirits, the essence of experience and perceptions. Biography, if it is to reveal the essence of a

person,
must do the same.”⁶²

Speaking of all The Arts, after advising they are "a gift of the Holy Spirit,
'Abdu'l-Bahá
says:

“These gifts are fulfilling their highest purpose, when showing forth the
praise of
God.”⁶²

You can accomplish this through writing histories and biographies of people
whose
exemplary lives can serve as inspiration to others, or creating characters for
a fictional
story who are interesting enough to hook the reader and develop situations that
reel them
in to keep turning the pages. Effective fiction functions like a good sermon
sans the
preaching.

Write your stories. Delight, entertain, warn, illustrate. Just use Shoghi
Effendi's
advice as your standard.

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To Poem

Why Poetry?

“Treasures lie hidden beneath the throne of God; the key to those treasures  
is the tongue of  
poets.” ~ The Báb

using on "What is poetry?" 'Abdu'l-Bahá poses and then answers the question:

M “What is poetry? It is a symmetrical collection of words. Therefore,  
they are  
pleasing through harmony and rhythm. Poetry is much more effective and complete  
than prose. It stirs more deeply, for it is of a finer composition.”<sup>64</sup>

#### THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

You can reach out and connect with others more effectively and more completely  
using  
this art form. You begin by delving deep within yourself.

“Out of the quarrel with others we make rhetoric; out of the quarrel with  
ourselves  
we make poetry”.<sup>65</sup> ~ W. B. Yeats

To accomplish the goal, others must be willing to read poems. Unfortunately, as  
British

poet John Betjemen laments:

“Too many people in the modern world view poetry as a luxury, not a necessity like petrol. But, “

he adds,

“to me it's the oil of life.”<sup>66</sup> [Ibid.]

Contemporary society, at least in the United States (I won't presume to speak for countries and cultures with which I'm not familiar) lacks an appreciation of poetry. No longer is it a required subject given serious study in our schools. Without being taught the nuances of metaphor and simile, people find poetry impenetrable.

You'll reap great benefits if you being to let poetry play a significant part in your

life. Alas, in today's Western society, poetry is misunderstood, underappreciated, and, to

our own misfortune, dismissed as irrelevant. This sad state led U.S. poet and editor

Harriet Monroe to refer to poetry as "The Cinderella of the Arts."

A reader complained to Arizona Republic columnist E. J. Montini,

“What the hell do we need a poet laureate for?”<sup>67</sup>

and suggested Montini should

“...write a column about how ridiculous it was passing a law like that is when we

have all these other problems.”<sup>68</sup>

Kudos to Mr. Montini for doing exactly the opposite. His reply:

“... we do need a poet laureate... I've spent decades reporting on the least poetic

aspects of our world, and after all that time and all that misery I take for fact a line

from a poem by William Carlos Williams. He wrote: 'It is difficult to get the news

from poems, yet men die miserably every day for lack of what is found there.’”<sup>69</sup>

Don't fret, though, over whether others, once they do read your poems, will "get it." Poet,

musician, critic, educator, anthologist and author Myra Cohn Livingston suggests:

CHAPTER TEN

“Poetry is a place where we are not expected to define or analyze or answer questions. We can simply laugh or cry or wonder or turn the page until we find a poem that sings the tune we wish to hear. It’s as easy as that.”<sup>70</sup>

The same holds true for you if your artistic endeavors are far removed from poetry. Read the poems of others. Don't make it an intellectual exercise and tax your brain trying to peel its layers to reveal its deeper meanings, at least not at the outset. Just take in the rhythms and words like your breath and see how you feel afterwards. Let them percolate a while before trying to parse them; you may not even need or want to. Just allow the emotional and even spiritual component of poetry to stir your soul.

You may wonder, How does a poet find their words? What is their source? Many poets have written poems about how they write poems. One such is Steven A. Jarrell who wrote:

How the Poems Come

The Poems

They do not come like letters to a friend

Or essays of ideas

I feel them deeply stirring first

They are being distilled—

They are essences,

Attars of feelings,

Voices of my soul

And they rise and fall in me like dramatic skies

There are times when they are silent

Endless days and weeks of overcast veils

Then the winds of change stir and the light angles

And a glistening, or a palette of color, or a burst of emotion

Unveils itself and the words come

More often than not—

Miraculously whole, with a scent of heaven

## THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

The revelatory language used by the prophets of God, often profoundly poetic, has enormous impact on millions of people every day.

Let's explore the role of the poet, the purpose of poetry, and its magical ability to affect your wellbeing as well as that of society.

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CHAPTER TEN

Coax Out and Caper with Your Creative Child

Try writing a poem. Begin with a Haiku. That is a poem of only three lines.

The first and third lines contain five syllables each. The middle line requires seven.

Here are two examples. Read them and then write your own.

Reach—beckon—connect	Praying hands upraised
what seems impenetrable	seeming benediction of
can be breached by love	desert saguaro

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

To Poem

The Spiritual Role of the Poet

“It is the immediate influence of the Holy Spirit that causes words such as these (lines from the poet Hafiz) to stream from the tongue of poets, the significance of which they themselves are oftentimes unable to apprehend.’ ~ The Báb

Beware of allowing your successes in The Arts and sciences to become a source of pride or ego-building, because your talents and abilities come from outside yourself. (See Whence Art)

Along with the realization that your talent is a gift from God, it behooves you to honor the Source and use your gift(s) to the best of your ability, ensuring it conduces to your own wellbeing and improvement and to that of society. British author and lecturer Geoffrey Nash suggests:

“The poet is individual and subjective, but he is mankind’s conscience.”⁷¹

Bahiyih Nakhjavani writes,

“His [the poet’s] aim should be to speak with the tongue that whispers in the bones and arteries of his audience, in such a way that the isolated and speechless elements in the community find their voices in his harmony.”⁷²

Dr. Glenn Eyford foretells that,

“The poet will lead mankind into the future by giving expression to hopes and visions that are often poorly articulated and little understood by most men.”⁷³

He based that prophetic statement on his belief that:

“Poets serve as interpreters and prophets by giving definite shape to feeling, to thoughts only dimly perceived by others. They provide the images by which man moves into the future.”⁷⁴

The efforts of the poet not only heal the world—they can also lead to self-healing: John Spencer Hill ponders:

CHAPTER TEN

“What was it that motivated a poet to spend hours on end in his room polishing verses when there was no prospect of financial reward—or even, in most cases, a measure of recognition—for his labours?”⁷⁵

Then he proposes:

“The answer, of course, was a sensuous love of language and an irrepressible drive to discover and express the essence of experience, to capture the evanescent moment and distill its meaning into memorable and evocative images.”⁷⁶

Wallace Stevens addresses the poet's "function:"

“His [the poet's] function is to make his imagination theirs [the people's] and he fulfills himself only as he sees his imagination become the light in the minds of others. His role, in short, is to help people to live their lives.”⁷⁷

But the poet doesn't just write for others. You (if you are the poet) must first write for yourself—to find yourself. It's been suggested that:

“Writing a true poem is a voyage of discovery.”⁷⁸

It's all part of a process, as you can see in this description from a biography of Emily Dickinson:

“She wrote her finest poetry out of scrutinizing her thoughts and sensations until, stared out of countenance, they became malleable material which she could crystallize into meaning for herself and everyone else. That is what poets do. If they

have the practical skill in their craft . . . they rise through introspection to objectivity.

That is, they find what seems to be the truth in their own feelings; then, in memorable form, make it truth that others can share.”⁷⁹

Poetry sweeps away your spiritual cobwebs. It cleanses your soul. It gives voice to your innermost emotions, as explained in "The Place for the Poet:"

“Poetry is especially effective at describing spiritual realities because the poet deals with emotions: the non-physical, spiritual side of life.”⁸⁰

Professor Amin Banani mused:

“What is poetry, after all? It is the language that we turn to when there is no language that can express our thoughts and feelings. Poetry is, in fact, the attempt to move beyond language to communicate states of mind and states of spirit that cannot be communicated in words, but which nonetheless must be expressed.”⁸¹

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Poetry feeds both the poet and the reader, yet, according to Jane Kenyon, should leave them hungry for more:

“The poet’s job is to put into words those feelings we all have that are so deep, so important, and yet so difficult to name, to tell the truth in such a beautiful way that people cannot live without it.”⁸²

It seems to me that honey drips from the sweet tongues of poets. Let's consider now just how the honey of poetry can sweeten your life.

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#### CHAPTER TEN

##### Coax Out and Caper with Your Creative Child

Answer one of these questions:

I’ve never enjoyed poetry because:

I enjoy poetry because...

#### THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

To Poem

What Use Poetry?

“Poetry is an act of peace. Peace goes into the making of a poet as flour goes into the making of bread.” ~ Pablo Neruda

“Poetry is the language in which man explores his own amazement.” ~ Christopher Fry

What is the use of poetry? This question probably has as many answers as there are

W poets, critics and professors of literature combined, yet all seem valid.

Let’s examine

two different viewpoints:

Why read a poem? Because, British poet and critic Dame Edith Sitwell says:

“Poetry ennobles the heart and the eyes and unveils the meaning of things upon which the heart and the eyes dwell.”<sup>83</sup>

She also asserts:

“It is as unseeing to ask what is the use of poetry as it would be to ask, ‘what is the use of religion?’”<sup>84</sup>

Lin Rolens’ review of Paul Portuges’ “The Flower Vendor” states:

”They [the poems] begin ticking—sometimes loudly—in the interior regions of your sensitivities working toward a resonance that will affect you when you least suspect, shaking you by the metaphoric shoulders of your own awareness.”<sup>85</sup>

This can be said of the works of most skilled poets. They are of use to the reader because they awaken them, stir them, and at times motivate them.

It should come as no surprise that American Poet Michael Fitzgerald and Canadian

poet Roger White each answered the question with a poem (Roger answered it with several poems, but for the sake of brevity I’ll only include one.)

First, let’s consider Michael Fitzgerald’s poem The Uses of Art. Granted it is called

The Uses of Art, not The Uses of Poetry, but as poetry is an Art, and all Art basically serves the same purpose, it is surely appropriate to use it in answer to the question.

## CHAPTER TEN

What use art? A stretcher  
to wheel in the wounded—

a monument of blossoms—  
a bit of lattice-work on the temple—  
each painting, a record of a psychic diver—  
each poem, an artifact—  
life to be lived as a symphony, or  
maybe just some chamber music for the few—  
each breath, a brush stroke—  
each day, a dance—85

Roger White's poem, *Print Out*, lists what poems do not do but ends with what they do accomplish, thus explaining why, despite all obstacles real and imagined, poets write, and how their art affects others. He delineates the reciprocity between reader and writer, clearly demonstrating the use of poetry:

Poems do not prevent wars  
or feed the starving poor  
or right injustices. Stocks  
Rise and fall blithely inattentive  
to them. They will not unseat  
the tyrant or defeat disease  
or breathe life into the walking dead.  
They are useless for picking locks  
of prisons. Trains run on time  
without their aid and production  
quotas are set by worthy citizens and bores

#### THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

exquisitely oblivious to their existence.  
It is known that crafty Owen  
brings to his bed  
the giggling, lively maid  
unassisted by their high-flown folderol.  
Of what use are the silly things?  
After all, they are rarely carried by  
commuters on the tram, treaties are not  
forged of them and the statistician  
might despise their logic. Even computers,  
like as not, can be programmed  
to disgorge gaseous tommyrot.  
Who gives a damn?

“Reading your lines, I felt as though  
you had lived my life,”  
an unknown woman writes to me. And a man,

“Your words articulate my dreams.”

Perhaps we will always need the poet's print-out  
that reader find the transcript of his dreams  
and speaker learn from listener what he means.<sup>87</sup>

President John F. Kennedy proposes:

“When power leads men towards arrogance, poetry reminds him of his  
limitations.

When power narrows the area of man’s concern, poetry reminds him of the  
richness and diversity of his existence.”<sup>88</sup>

Professor Herbert Ravetch, in his Santa Barbara City College adult education  
course on

The Meaning of Life through Poetry, suggests:

“Poetry is a sensitive guide that escorts us in a profound consideration and  
penetration of the infinity of life. Poetry is a window on the world, our  
pathway to

## CHAPTER TEN

the color and the sound and the emotion, the sorrow and the joy, the pain and  
the  
exaltation of our existence. Poetry is a unique probe and mirror of humanity—  
encompassing the humorous and the serious, the ideal and the real, the feeling  
and  
the meaning and the understanding of life.”<sup>89</sup>

Ruth Gordon, American film, stage, and television actress, screenwriter and  
playwright.

likens poetry to an onion:

“Peel the onion, layer after layer, until its very heart is reached...it adds  
taste, zest,  
and a sharp but sweet quality that enriches our lives.”<sup>90</sup>

Another very visual comparison has been attributed alternately to French poet,  
essayist,

and philosopher Paul Valéry and to English poet, novelist, and critic John  
Wain. It is

elegantly accurate:

“Poetry is to prose as dancing is to walking.”

Now that we've looked at what poetry is, let's learn what is required for  
poetry to be

effective—to be of use. According to ethicist and author Michael J. Bugeja:

“Poems . . . contain ideas . . . unify our thoughts or feelings. They shape  
how we

perceive the world and excite us with images of beauty, of moments of truth.

Since

ancient times poets have been known more for their ideas than for the words they used to convey them.”<sup>91</sup>

And this insightful statement, attributed to poet Archibald MacLeish, needs no further elucidation:

“A poem should not mean, but be.”

That correlates with the advice given to writers in every genre: “show, don't tell.” John Keats, advises:

“Poetry should be great and unobtrusive, a thing which enters into one's soul, and does not startle or amaze it with itself, but with its subject.”<sup>92</sup>

With all this information you have likely come to understand that poetry is not a luxury but a necessity, as explained in this statement attributed to Chicano-American poet and writer Jimmy Santiago Baca:

“Poetry matters because life, tears, people, birth, human experience matter.”

#### THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

We note in His letter to Louise Waite how 'Abdu'l-Bahá encourages those who understand that the best use of poetry, or any art or endeavor, has a spiritual purpose:

“Verily, I chanted thy poem. Its significance was beautiful, its composition eloquent and its words excellent. It was like the melody of the birds of holiness . . . The breasts of the friends were dilated, and the hearts of the maid-servants of the Merciful were exhilarated by its chanting. Blessed art thou for uttering forth such an excellent poem and brilliant pearl.”<sup>93</sup>

This theme is evident also in his message to Isaac, a nine-year-old boy from Hamadan, Persia:

“O thou who art sweet-tongued! Thy poem is a wonder to the minds and intellects and thy composition an evidence of the gift of the great Lord. Therefore, thy wine is the pure wine, thy heart the recess of light and thy brow radiant with love. If the

people of the world were fair in judgement, the sweetness of thy poem should be a sufficient proof.”<sup>94</sup>

Pick up a volume of poetry to read or pick up a pen and write a poem. Better yet—do both—and let the effort sweeten your life.

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CHAPTER TEN

Coax Out and Caper with Your Creative Child
Contemplate the following poem. Meditate on it.

After the next section, To Essay, you’ll write your thoughts down.

MINOR QUESTION

A song for skipping rope

A flag makes a very poor breakfast, an old woman observed. ~ Sally Belfrage

It was a short-lived minor war

But several Moshes are no more;

Rather neighborly, the fray,

Though many Ahmads bed in clay.

The sun, unblinking, rose and set

On fathers whose grey cheeks were wet;

The moon heard mothers curse the guns—

(They’d dreamt a kinder use for sons).

~ Roger White ~

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

To Essay

“The point of essays is the point of writing anything. It’s not to tell people what they already think or to give them more of what they already believe; it’s to challenge people, and it’s to suggest alternate ways of thinking about things.” ~ Meghan Daum

Merriam-Webster Dictionary describes “essay” as an “analytic or interpretative literary composition usually dealing with its subject from a limited or personal point of view.”

Connection is the goal of essay writing—the connection between the hearts and minds of the writer and the reader.

According to Rochelle Spears Wilson, in *The Purpose of Writing an Essay*, essays fall into four categories: 1) to inform, 2) to persuade, 3) to explain, 4) to entertain. Many essays will combine two or more of these types.

Los Angeles Times columnist Meghan Daum, in an interview with Cressida Leyshon for *The New Yorker* magazine, reveals:

“I never sit down to write anything personal unless I know the subject is going to go beyond my own experience and address something larger and more universal. To me, having “material” for an essay means not only having something to write about but also having something interesting and original to say about whatever that might be.”⁹⁵

To Inform

“Knowledge is as wings to man's life, and a ladder for his ascent.”⁹⁶ ~ Baha'u'llah

An informational essay seeks to enlighten, to provide facts, and only the facts. It does not include personal opinion or any effort to persuade. An excellent site to read informational essays is bahaiteachings.org. Writers from around the world share information on a variety of topics from their personal viewpoint which is formed by their understanding of the Bahá'í teachings. They fit into a number of different categories: history, religion, culture, arts, spirituality, news (current events), science, and more. They are written to

CHAPTER TEN

inform; if they also happen to persuade, that is considered an extra and welcome result, but is not the original intent.

Informational writing can include journalism, articles and essays, letters to the editor, and blogs.

Have you thought “outside the box” in the way you approached a challenging task? Perhaps you’ve figured out a new strategy related to child-rearing, a household chore, or a new gardening hack—something to streamline and make a task easier—a

more efficient procedure?

Writing step-by-step instructions, combined with the reasoning process that led you to your successful new protocol would be an essay to explain or inform.

If you can spike it with a bit of levity, which will enhance the recall by the reader.

You write to express your thoughts, feelings, beliefs, worries, joys. You write to communicate with others. You want to share the facts, and just the facts, if you are a reporter. As a columnist you want to share your knowledge, your understanding of Truth, and hopefully offer a ladder of ascent to those who read your work. Essays and blogs help you mine subconscious emotions and underlying concerns so you can polish and share the gems of your wisdom with others.

Dr. John Persico, Jr. writes the blog, *Aging Capriciously: Divergent Thoughts on Life, Love, and Death*. The intriguing title is an indication of the wit and wisdom he shares, along with his many questions—he'll be the first to tell you the more he learns the more he realizes how much he doesn't know, and sprinkles it all with his own opinions and is open to and welcomes those of his readers. I asked how he'd describe the majority of comments received, and he answered, "Quite a few of the comments received thank me for helping the reader deal with some emotional trauma or pain in their lives. Many say they are relieved to know that others share their pain and or concerns."

This is the point of journalism, whether you're a reporter digging and searching for the true facts of a situation, an investigative journalist burrowing even deeper, a columnist sharing your point of view, or a public information representative for your company, organization, or religious community.

Several references to journalism in of the Writings of the Bahá'í Faith point out the standards writers should strive to achieve: Bahá'u'lláh wrote:

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

"In this Day the secrets of the earth are laid bare before the eyes of men.

The pages
of swiftly-appearing newspapers are indeed the mirror of the world. They
reflect
the deeds and the pursuits of divers peoples and kindreds. They both reflect
them
and make them known. They are a mirror endowed with hearing, sight and speech.
This is an amazing and potent phenomenon. However it behoveth the writers
thereof to be purged from the promptings of evil passions and desires and to be
attired with the raiment of justice and equity. They should enquire into
situations
as much as possible and ascertain the facts, then set them down in
writing.”⁹⁷

'Abdu'l-Bahá added these thoughts:

”We may ascertain the progress or retrogression of a nation by its
journalism. If
journalists should abide by their duties, they would be the promoters of many
virtues, among the community. Truth and the virtues would be fostered. This
would
be so if they carried out the duties incumbent upon them.

“Journalists must serve truth. Newspapers must investigate the means for
the progress of humanity, and publish them. Journalists must write significant
articles, articles that shall foster the public welfare. If they do so they
will be the
first agents for the development of the community.”⁹⁸

Shoghi Effendi counseled individuals who sought his advice:

“Regarding your question about what courses would be most useful for you to
study: He feels that both radio and journalistic work are fields in which the
Bahá'ís
could well learn to express themselves for the sake of helping their teaching
work,
and advises you, if you have the time, to study these subjects. ⁹⁹

“There is no objection to your being a journalist as long as you try to keep
off
political issues; especially the big East-West issues. You have a talent for
writing,
and it might be of help to you financially and in making contacts for the
Faith.”¹⁰⁰

Your writing should address relevant social issues while avoiding anything that
might
devolve into partisan controversy. Avoid being prohibitive rather than
welcoming of
other opinions. Strive to unite rather than separate people on opposite sides
of an issue.

Journalism is a vital career choice that, done well and with the highest of intentions, becomes itself an Art form.

If you only submit occasional articles or essays to newspapers, magazines, newsletters, etc. you may not be a "journalist"(unless you actually work as a free-lance reporter) but you are still practicing a form of journalism. Along with the submission of

CHAPTER TEN

letters to the editor and personal or professional blogs, the same standards and advice apply.

So, what's stopping you? It's time to stop hesitating . Write it!

To Persuade

These essays are written to offer your own point of view in an effort to stimulate others to consider your opinion(s) and ultimately to be stirred into action. Perhaps you want to address poverty, education, immigration, health issues, equality for women you're your organization's agenda in a manner that might sway readers to accept your premises as valid and in need of action. Here you combine the informational with your opinion, making a case for how and why you arrived at your current point-of-view.

Letters to the editor and to government representatives, while usually shorter than an essay, still fall into this category. Opinion essays sent to newspapers occasionally get printed. It helps if you already have some connection with the paper, perhaps as a public information representative for your faith community or a civic organization.

To be effective, endeavor to ensure what you've written is tactful and non-judgmental. A non-accusatory tone is crucial. List issues that need to be addressed and/or changed, offer some positive suggestions and, if possible, provide examples. If you go on the attack, the person(s) you want to persuade will shut down and likely stop reading. Even if they do finish the entire piece, it is doubtful anything will penetrate.

Make your point clearly and dispassionately, your tone neutral, with facts presented in clear, concise, and easily understood language. Be firm and

unequivocal as
you call out what you perceive to be an injustice—the issue that requires
fixing—but don't
resort to an attack on the individual(s) or group(s) whom you want to consider
your
idea(s). They're more likely to pay attention and perhaps come to understand
and respect
your position whether or not they acknowledge its validity. When being
persuasive and
tactful, you open up the possibility that you might just help them to consider
your
premise, perhaps even sway their opinion.

Did you triumph over a painful personal experience? Write about it. Detail how
you overcame it. Perhaps your success will help a reader to recognize warning
signs and
help to head off the problem in the first place or help them mitigate it if
it's already taken

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

hold in their life. This would also be an essay that both informs and
persuades.

Bahá'u'lláh instructed writers:

“Whatever is written should not transgress the bounds of tact and wisdom, and
in
the words used there should lie hid the property of milk, so that the children
of the
world may be nurtured therewith and attain maturity. We have said in the past
that
one word hath the influence of spring and causeth hearts to become fresh and
verdant, while another is like unto blight which causeth the blossoms and
flowers
to wither. God grant that authors among the friends will write in such a way as
would be acceptable to fair-minded souls and not lead to cavilling by the
people.”¹⁰¹

When you write a persuasive essay, you offer your own “two cents.”² You
have opinions,
you see the world from your own individual perspective. Your unique viewpoint
adds to
the mix that serves to help others develop a more accurate and cohesive
consensus and
plan of action. If you remain silent and neglect to offer your personal
perspective, the
points you might have provided will necessarily go unconsidered. This may
preclude the
full amount of information needed for someone or some group seeking to map out

their
own path forward.

Personal Essay/Memoir

You may simply wish to record a factual family history that includes dates, places, and miscellaneous facts. This would be informational non-fiction. Memoir indicates storytelling: tales of people and events related to your relatives, friends and acquaintances.

The writer must be able to delve deep into their psyche and, with skill that comes from study and experience, translate them into words that will resonate with readers.

This may be painful to do effectively. You have to be willing to expose experiences you may have been trying to suppress. It will be cathartic for you and helpful, and if done well, it will assist the reader in their own journey to discovery and healing.

Tony DiMartino, Senior Editor, Mary Engelbreit's Home Companion magazine admits:

2 "My two cents" ("my 2¢") and its longer version "put my two cents in" is an American

idiomatic expression, taken from the original English idiom "to put in my two-penny worth" or "my two cents". It is used to preface a tentative statement of one's opinion.

CHAPTER TEN

"The personal essay is a tough genre to carry off. Many of the pieces fail to pass the test because they're poorly written—not just in terms of grammar, but also because of vague, weak, mushy writing. It isn't enough that a personal experience or memory is deeply felt by the writer."¹⁰²

Author Cynthia G. La Ferle, shares wisdom she's gleaned from experience:

"...in the 12 years I've published essays in national magazines and newspapers, the most important thing I've learned is this: heartfelt writing must also engage the brain. That's not to say your essays shouldn't resonate on a deep emotional level.

In fact, readers tell me over and over that they'll often skip the hard news and flip to the sections where personal columns or essays appear. They're hungry for

writing
they can relate to...the real art of heartfelt writing is in gracefully walking
the
tightrope between schmaltz and over-sophistication...“Heartfelt writing is
honest
writing, and honesty isn't always pretty. You have to tell the bad with the
good...the
essayist fails when she doesn't include the bumps and flaws, the shadow side,
of
the characters in her narrative....Life rarely comes in neatly wrapped, color
coordinated packages. It helps to remember that a lot of us have weird
relatives,
bad habits, career derailments and dishes that don't match. An essay that
acknowledges human imperfections will spring to life on the page, forging a
warm
and real connection between you and your readers.”¹⁰³

Essays to Entertain

I've written a number of family anecdotes that are simply “to entertain.”
A couple of them
are published in an anthology of Santa Barbara, California writers. When We
Were Young.
One is included along with many others in my book *Dizzy Izzy & the Red Witch: Memories
of My Parents*. Some of the stories in the book about my parents will make you
laugh and
others cry. Some combine both elements. They were written not as a genealogical
effort
to detail family history, but rather to share the essence of their
personalities and character.
Readers who never met them have told me they feel like they know them, or at
least wish
they'd known them. Two different men have told me “I'm in love with your
mother,” and
one added, “and I want to grow up to be your father.”

The responses to these tales have been overwhelmingly positive. The book was
written for my family, to preserve the stories and keep my parents' memories
alive for
future generations. That non-family friends and acquaintances who knew my
parents, or
just ones who know me, like the two gentlemen mentioned in the preceding
paragraph,
read them, is understandable. But when I've had friends loan the book to
others who

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

don't know me and they've wanted to meet me (one Face-Timed me and another signed up for a workshop I was giving so she could meet me) because some of these stories resonated so deeply with them, it brought me the realization of the incredible power of memoir. All this because I ensured that even the sad stories are entertaining and when feasible, contain comic relief.

If written creatively, as though you are writing a novel or like you're having a one-on-one conversation with the reader, they will feel like you're actually telling the story aloud, they will connect with you on a deeper level. A good friend remarked, "I could hear your voice, as if you were telling it to me in person."

Don't try too hard or over-think what you want to say beforehand. Tell the story. Write it as you tell it. Perhaps record yourself telling your stories to a real person sitting in front of you. Then transcribe it and polish it up. Everyone who has ever taken a breath has stories to tell. You have stories to tell. Go ahead. Tell them. Share them. Give them freedom and you'll give yourself a sense of freedom as well.

Do you plan to write a cookbook of traditional family recipes? Add stories, anecdotal memories that include who developed it, how and/or why, the time period, how it was used, e.g., every Christmas, weekly family dinners, etc., and then share comments from those who partook of the memorable events and meals. If you then write about the philosophy of how food can create a family tradition, you have an essay that makes the reader want to try the recipe, and when they do, they'll recall the story which will take the enjoyment of the meal to a new level.

If I knew the recipe for Grandma's cinnamon-raisin bread and planned to write it down, I'd also include a description of me sitting cross-legged on the floor beneath the kitchen table, looking up at her flour-covered apron with brown cinnamon-spattered spots that created an abstract design amongst the areas where flour fell onto it. I'd recall

the fresh bakery aroma that permeated the kitchen and caused a sudden rumble of hunger in my tummy. Somehow, as the scent intensified and I knew it was almost done,

I'd climb onto a chair, watch her retrieve it from the oven and place it on an aluminum cooling rack that I'd stare at until she grabbed a pair of potholders and turned it out onto a plate. I'd be jumping up and down inside even if I was merely swaying in my seat while she cut a slice, slathered it with the rich creamy butter she'd kept out to be tastier at room temperature, and then write about how we faced each other, eye-to-eye and smile-to-smile, as she handed me the plate and watched me sink my teeth into the warm, satisfying

CHAPTER TEN

dessert, humming “mmm” as I tried to remember to chew slowly in order to savor it when I really wanted to just swallow it all at once. The story might inspire others to try the recipe, perhaps conjuring up a picture of Grandma and me in her kitchen, or a memory of them with their own grandmother, as they prepare their batter.

The combination of the cited categories turns your recipes into a memoir that both informs and entertains.

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Go ahead now—write on...write your story, write your poem, write your essay—write on!

?

## THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Coax Out and Caper with Your Creative Child  
How did you feel after reading Minor Question?

What can you learn from it?

Write a short essay on the subject.

## CHAPTER TEN

Reach Out: Connect Minds, Hearts, and Souls  
Art: The Common Language of Human Existence

“This is the power of art: The power to transcend our own self-interest, our

solipsistic

zoom-lens on life, and relate to the world and each other with more integrity,  
more  
curiosity, more wholeheartedness.” ~ Maria Popova

“[Art] is a means of union among men, joining them together in the same  
feelings, and  
indispensable for the life and progress toward well-being of individuals and of  
humanity.”  
~ Leo Tolstoy

Art, while in the process of being created, is beneficial to you, the artist, as  
you draw on  
A your inner knowledge and emotions and bring them forth into the material  
world  
manifest for all to see. Now, it is ready to be seen, admired, and contemplated  
by  
others and, perhaps, have an effect on their own thoughts and feelings. Marcel  
Proust  
posits:

“Only through art can we get outside of ourselves and know another's view of  
the  
universe which is not the same as ours and see landscapes which would otherwise  
have remained unknown to us like the landscapes of the moon. Thanks to art,  
instead of seeing a single world, our own, we see it multiply until we have  
before us  
as many worlds as there are original artists . . . And many centuries after  
their core,  
whether we call it Rembrandt or Vermeer, is extinguished, they continue to send  
us  
their special rays.”<sup>104</sup>

Let's delve into the power of a few genres of the visual arts:

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Photography: Capturing Divinity

“Spirituality relates best to patient, slow photography, which takes the time
to stop and
look, to wind down and be truly present, to see with the eye of your heart, to
'receive' or
'make' a picture, rather than 'take' it.” ~ Philip Richter

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Photographer, artist, and educator Donald E. Camp developed a unique process
that
goes beyond the printing of a photograph. He explains:

“I seek to contrast broadly held public views that narrow a face into

stereotype. I attempt as an artist to produce prints that encourage viewers to explore the dignity and nobility that can be found in the human face.”

Camp’s award-winning series of photographs, *Dust-Shaped Hearts*, utilize earth pigments—dust—in the development process, challenging the stereotypes of African American men. This series has had a powerful impact on those who view it, speaking to all but especially to other African American men, helping them see themselves in a new, positive, and radiant light. For example, Mr. Camp relates:

“The foundation of my work begins with a quote from *The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh*³. I chose to work with earth pigment or dust as it’s used throughout the sacred writings of the Baha’i’ Faith: ‘O Children of Men! Know ye not why We created you all from the same dust? That no one should exalt himself over the other. Ponder at all times in your hearts how ye were created. Since We have created you all from one same substance it is incumbent on you to be even as one soul . . . ,

“As an African American man in America, *The Hidden Word: ‘O Son of Spirit! Noble have I created thee, yet thou hast abased thyself. Rise then unto that for which thou wast created.’* also had special meaning to me.

“One day, a few years after I started doing *Dust Shaped Hearts*, I parked my car in a car lot that required that I sign in for the time that I’d be doing business in that office. The guard checked the name and the license plate and then asked me if I was Don Camp, the artist. I was a bit surprised but pleased by the recognition. I responded that I was that artist and we both smiled. He then told me that he loved my work because ‘It makes me feel like someone.’ I was surprised that he knew that I did the work, but I was truly honored that it made him feel like someone. Noble. As Black men we don’t often see representations of ourselves as noble.”

Artists create out of the need to express their innermost feelings and can only hope that their work reaches out and speaks to others. You may not always know whether or not

you've been successful. In that case, just keep going. That knowledge isn't necessary as long as you realize your own soul is being nurtured. But when it does happen, as with

3 A collection of lyrical, gem-like verses of scripture that convey timeless spiritual wisdom

"clothed in the garment of brevity,"

CHAPTER TEN

the individual who Mr. Camp was fortunate enough to encounter (whether that encounter was serendipitous or by Divine design,) it reinforces your confidence because you have the confirmation of knowing that you did indeed reach out and connect with another soul through your Art.

Regarding Mr. Camp's later move toward more universality in his subjects, Edward Sozanski, Contributing Art Critic for the Philadelphia Inquirer, noted in a review of his work that:

“. . . Camp has expanded his subjects to include women and white people. Hung close together in a small room, the...faces create a cohort of imposing and dignified survivors.”¹⁰⁵

The importance of this expansion to other groups, to different races and to the female gender, is also rooted in the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith, as is evident in the following excerpt from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh:

“He looketh on all things with the eye of oneness, and seeth the brilliant rays of the divine sun shining from the dawning-point of Essence alike on all created things, and the lights of singleness reflected over all creation.”¹⁰⁶

Douglas Jernberg finds that photography provides a direct link with the Divine. As he wanders through natural settings, his eye is ever open for “the image which holds charm and insight into divinity.” He explains:

“In the evenings, as oft as I can, I take my little camera . . . with opened eyes, in anticipation for what divinity might be revealed . . . As with many art forms, color, light, shadow, and form, even the space between these composition items, that

is
how things are in relation to each other, all are elements for composition.
When
all are seen as a whole, proportion and scale can become elements used to tell
a
story, reflective of divinity. If I can succeed in positioning the view finder
to get all
the elements in perfect proportion and exposure, the result gives me a feeling
of
heart/mind which I recognize as divine. I then can revel in this nearness.

“Time and time again, sauntering out into the meadows of His nearness,
humbly open to His inspiration, and undoubtedly served by His inspiring angels,
I
look for images in which my love for Him shines.... I find myself spinning
‘round like
a top moved by the angels of inspiration, as they call to me: “Look here!
Look here!”
click, click, click...

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

“My level of joy increases as divine images proceed one after another in a
whirlwind of blissfulness, I feel humbly in awe of His unending beauty. I hear
myself
yielding peals of “Wow !” . . . I can only hope to be open for more . . .
but only if it
pleaseth Him. Omnipotent is His Beauty, unending His Kingdom.

“These days, I like to say with a smile, ‘My eyes are failing me, but my
vision
has never been better.’ I rely on the camera to help me see at a distance and
up
very close. It is a tool to aid in my perception, just as eyes have been. The
meanings
of such perceptions I recognize are often unspeakable, yet remember He says
that
the primary purpose of utterance is to worship God, and is preceded only by His
recognition. I believe we can now say that “art” is a kind of utterance and
a way we
might raise His praise, individually and for others, beginning first with a
recognition
experience. This capacity grows through our endeavors.

“This practice of art I consider to be an element of my spiritual practice.
It
has become the fire and sincerity behind my prayers to the Beloved. When spoken
of, it lends the fire of meaning to whom spoken. When others see our arts done
in

the love of divinity (godliness) their hearts are reached, and then are truly these arts a service to His Kingdom on Earth.

~~~

Sculpture: a Parable in Three Dimensions

“Sculpture is a parable in three dimensions, a symbol of a spiritual experience, and a means of conveying truth by concentrating its essence into visible form. ... It must be the reflection of the artist who creates it and of the era in which he lives, not an echo or a memory of other days and other ways.” ~ Malvina Hoffman

“Sculpture occupies real space like we do ... you walk around it and relate to it almost as another person . . .” ~ Chuck Close

Most of Joanne McClure’s sculptures develop out of a marriage of her own personal history and quotations from the Bahá’í Writings that speak to those experiences.

## CHAPTER TEN

Ms. McClure describes her process as a compulsion from deep within her spirit. While most sculptors take the time to think about what they want to create and build a model, she just gets an inspired picture in her mind and sets to work. She confided, “A medium pours out through my hands—I don’t have control over it.”

On her website, she writes about her piece titled “Enter Therein in the Name of God.”:

“‘ Princes shall come out of Egypt: Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God.’ – Psalms 68:31

“At an outstanding Conference of the Arts at the Los Angeles Bahá’í Center some years ago, I was **Enter Therein in the Name of God**, by Joanne McClure

impressed by the wide variety of high-quality works in a variety of mediums. But my foremost memory was not an art piece but something I came across in the bookstore. On the back cover of an abridged version of *The Dawn-Breakers*, a book documenting the early years of the Bahá’í Faith, was a quote from Shoghi Effendi. He advised

Bahá'í artists to gain inspiration from that tome for their art. I took that to heart and on returning home, began to read it. When I got to the third paragraph on page 68, that moment in history seemed to leap off the page and the vision for this sculpture was born.”

A story is told about a Persian gentleman, Mullá Husayn. A member of the Shaykhí sect of Shí'íh Islam, he believed in the imminent arrival of the Qá'im—the Promised One of Islám (the Mahdi to the Sunnís). His ardent search brought him to the city of Shíráz where his goal was fulfilled. Ms. McClure includes a brief description of that life-changing event on her website followed by an explanation of her sculpture:

“... at break of day, Mullá Husayn, followed by Mullá 'Alí, hastened to the residence of the Báb. At the entrance of His house they met the faithful Ethiopian servant, who immediately recognized them and greeted them in these words: “Ere break of day, I was summoned to the presence of my Master, who instructed me to open the door of the house and to stand expectant at its threshold. ‘Two guests,’ He said, ‘are to arrive early this morning. Extend to them in My name a warm welcome. Say to them from Me: Enter therein in the name of God.’

#### THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

“The sculpture is like a stage set: a street scene depicting that moment when they arrived at the home of the Bab. The gentleman portrayed is Hájí Mubarak, the Ethiopian servant of the Báb, the forerunner to Bahá'u'lláh, Prophet-Founder of the Bahá'í Faith. The servant is welcoming the men who have been traveling in search of the Promised One.”

Ms. McClure wrote to the Universal House of Justice for guidance and for permission to embark on this piece describing the momentous occasion, which they gave with the admonition to make it “as accurate as possible.” Filled with awe, she related, “On completion, it was exactly as I had envisioned it.”

The sculpture, which stands seven feet tall from the bottom of the base to the top

of the doorway, was gifted to the Bahá'ís of Ethiopia by Ms. McClure. It took a year to arrive at its ultimate destination, residing now at their National Bahá'í Center in Addis Ababa. She made two visits to Ethiopia. At one, where she sang with the Voices of Bahá choir for the 75th anniversary of the presence of the Bahá'í Faith in that country. Following the program, a woman sought her out backstage, hugged and thanked her profusely for the gift which is treasured by the Ethiopian Bahá'ís.

This type of appreciation wasn't only received in that country. One year when she attended a session at the Bosch Bahá'í School in Santa Cruz, California, an Ethiopian couple in attendance embraced her and with tears expressed their gratitude for the sculpture which honors their people.

Other works also elicit emotional responses. Used to women being moved on viewing her piece, "A Cause for Peace," she was surprised by a man tearing up as he gazed at the sculpture of a mother and child. She asked, "What draws you? Who are you in this sculpture?" He responded, "I am the child."

A Cause for Peace, by Joanne McClure

A good number of people have reacted emotionally to "Free at Last" (see Art Heals: Paint (and Sculpt) Away Your Pain) and to "Breaking Free." Here's her explanation of the latter piece from her website:

"Free me from the assaults of passion and desire, break off from me the shackles of this nether world . . ." ~ Bahá'u'lláh

## CHAPTER TEN

"Sometimes I don't actually know what impels me to create a particular sculpture. It is often well after its completion that I realize, 'Oh! That's what it's about.' That was the case with this work that was undertaken during a time of great personal struggle, when I was trying to change old patterns of thinking, behaving, doing, I was breaking chains of the past.

"And, of course, life continues to present new chains, or old ones which come to present awareness . . . but that

was a particularly difficult time. I think the man's  
expression and broken chains say it all." Breaking Free, by  
Joanne McClure

Ms. McClure describes the tendency of her sculptures to  
reach out and connect with other souls as a silent inner communication in no  
need of the  
spoken word: "Art communicates on the heart level, bypassing the intellect,  
going  
straight to the soul."

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Architecture: A Social Act and the Material Theater of Human Activity

~ Spiro Kostof

"Humanity leaves immortal echoes through its history using the media of
language, art,
knowledge and architecture." ~ Author Unknown

"The mother art is architecture. Without an architecture of our own we have
no soul of our
own civilization." ~ Frank Lloyd Wright

What comes to mind when you hear the word "architecture?" Are
engineering and
math the first things that pop up? Do you simply consider buildings as being
constructed for utilitarian purposes? Does it all seem—yawn—boring? Or—do
you
think of the "Art" in architecture—the attention to detail to create
something that is not
only useful but draws one to contemplate its lines, colors and features as you
would a
painting or a sculpture?

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Architecture is not merely the blueprint for the structure, the placement of
doors
and windows, room dimensions, etc. It also includes artistic flourishes, on the
inside as
well as out. Arthur Lyon Dahl says:

"Art has long been one of the highest expressions of human culture, and
particularly
of its religious and spiritual dimensions. The cave paintings of early man, the
temples and tombs of the Egyptians, Greeks, Hindus and Buddhists, the churches,
cathedrals and mosques of more modern times, are so often the greatest examples
of a culture's artistic heritage, and still communicate their spirit to us
today."107

A building can be a plain square or rectangle and lack embellishment. It then serves a merely functional purpose. But if it is devoid of interest, what effect might that have on you, if any? Your environment helps set your mood. The modern skyscrapers of a city seem to lend themselves to the frenetic pace of city life. A log cabin set among a small clearing in the forest invites you to relax. The majestic designs of houses of worship are conducive to the creation of a sense of awe and reverence. What is Architecture? expresses this concept:

“And yet a more modest, permeable idea of who we are would accept with good grace that we remain in truth, very vulnerable to the voices of the largest, most public objects in our environment. Our inner states are heavily open to influence and we may be as harmed by architectural ugliness as we are by moral evil. Our spirits can be decisively sunk by a grid of city streets designed without any talent or care.”¹⁰⁸

I can attest to that premise. When traveling through Romania shortly post-revolution, I was dismayed at the unadorned architecture of scores of large apartment complexes with barren exteriors: no lawns, trees, or any semblance of nature. One after the other they stood as sentinels, each indistinguishable from the other. It was the Communist attempt at keeping everything the same, but it created a dull, depressing atmosphere

Thankfully, there is a movement within the field of architecture that directs designers to take into consideration how the different elements of a building affect the way people feel. In his book, *Happy By Design: A Guide to Architecture and Mental Wellbeing*, Ben Channon suggests that whatever the purpose of the building and no matter for whom, or from which culture, Light, Comfort, Control, Nature, Aesthetics, Activity and Psychology must be considered in addition to the three standard ones of Carbon Emission, Safety and Cost Control. The ultimate outcome, he believes, is that the

CHAPTER TEN

finished product be conducive to joy. If these elements are not considered, the result can create a negative mood.

Architect Doug Jernberg seeks inspiration from the divinity which he finds omnipresent throughout the world of being. He meditates on his objective and then endeavors to maintain a heart and mind open to inspiration. Jernberg believes that the inherent divinity sanctifies the project and affects the comfort and wellbeing of those who reside or work in, and even those who visit, the edifices designed by him and, also, by others who utilize this same process.

Similar to the apartments I saw in Romania, here in the U.S., the high-density inner city tenement projects, full of unembellished, plain square or rectangular buildings, all looking much the same, if not identical, only add to the depressed state most of the residents find themselves in due to poverty, high rates of unemployment, and other societal pressures. But forward thinkers are taking action, painting murals are on the sides of buildings in some of these communities. People see things from new perspectives since the artwork often addresses an issue and stimulates thought and meaningful conversations, sometimes between total strangers.

Murals added to the architecture in blighted areas can be the catalyst for transformation. Dan Parolek, in an article about the power of public art, related:

“Murals build a sense of community,” muralist Grace McCammond told St. Louis Public Radio. “They make it welcoming and walkable and they make you want to go there. McCammond’s first mural in the St. Louis, MO, neighborhood known as The Grove was commissioned fifteen years ago by a local property owner. It was so well received that soon other property owners wanted murals too. At the time, The Grove was a place most people avoided, but now it’s known as a local hotspot.”¹⁰⁹

Two similar examples are related in *Wherefore Art?*

William Hickling Prescott perceives architecture to be the “surest test of

the civilization of a people” and speaks of its connection with beauty:

“The surest test of the civilization of a people—at least, as sure as any—afforded by mechanical art is to be found in their architecture, which presents so noble a field for the display of the grand and the beautiful, and which, at the same time, is so intimately connected with the essential comforts of life.”¹¹⁰

Renowned post-modern architect Frank Gehry believes:

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

“Architecture should speak of its time and place, but yearn for timelessness.”¹¹¹

This concept is mentioned in the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh:

“O people of creation!

“It is incumbent upon you to build, in the cities and in the name of the Lord of Revelation, Houses as perfect as can be built on earth, and to adorn them with that which beseemeth them, not with images and statues. Magnify ye then therein the praise of your Merciful Lord in a spirit of joy and radiance. Lo! it is through His mention that hearts are illumined and eyes solaced.”¹¹²

What is the standard for an architect who wishes to design and build edifices that will speak eloquently to future generations of the age in which they were constructed? If you are considering this field, look to the guidance provided in the 1950s by Shoghi Effendi:

“The Guardian [of the Bahá’í Faith] feels very strongly that, regardless of what the opinion of the latest school of architecture may be on the subject, the styles represented at present all over the world in architecture are not only very ugly, but completely lack the dignity and grace which must be at least partially present in a Bahá’í House of Worship. One must always bear in mind that the vast majority of human beings are neither very modern nor very extreme in their tastes, and that what the advanced school may think is marvelous is often very distasteful indeed to just plain, simple people.”¹¹³

“Architecture, like all arts and sciences, is undergoing very rapid

development; one
has only to consider the changes that have taken place in the course of the
last few
decades to have some idea of what is likely to happen during the years
immediately
ahead. Some modern buildings have, no doubt, qualities of greatness and will
endure, but very much of what is being constructed now may be outgrown and may
appear ugly but a few generations hence. Modern architecture, in other words,
may be considered a new development in its primitive stage. Classical Greek
architecture, however, is an example of a mature art style. It is very
beautiful now,
just as it has been beautiful for some two thousand years or more.”¹¹⁴

There are no clear, decisive arguments, though, against innovation or
modernistic styles
other than they be pleasing to the eye and stand the test of time. Some of the
newer
Bahá'í Houses of Worship around the world are testament to this fact,
notably those in
Bahapur, India, known as the “Lotus Temple” and Peñalolén, Santiago,
Chile, as well as
the design for the soon to be constructed shrine for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

CHAPTER TEN

Bahá'í House of Worship, New Delhi, India Baha'i House of
Worship, Santiago, Chile

If architecture is your calling, how nice to know that it offers you the
opportunity to
combine art and science as it has been described as equally a social art and an
artful
science.

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Painting: Silent Poetry

Painting is silent poetry, and poetry is painting that speaks. ~ Plutarch ~

“My only anxiety is what I can do...could I not be of use and good for  
something that would  
console as much as music does.” ~ Attributed to Vincent Van Gogh

“The world only concerns me in so far as I feel a certain debt and duty  
towards it, and out  
of gratitude I want to leave some souvenirs in the shape of drawings or  
pictures—not made  
to please a certain tendency in art, but to express sincere human feeling. “  
~ The Letters of  
Vincent Van Gogh ~

Humans have been painting and drawing from the very beginnings of human existence. The need to express what one sees, feels, and understands, along with both a wish to share that with others and to leave a record for posterity, all contribute to taking whatever medium has been available to create a pictorial record. In the online article, "What is Art? Why is Art Important?" the author posits:

#### THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

"Art has the power to take cultural practices from where they are from and then transport and integrate them into different parts of the world without losing their identity.

"There, these art forms can be used to entertain, create awareness, and even inspire foreigners to accept these cultures, no matter how strange or alien they may seem."<sup>115</sup>

And that's exactly what John Dewey implies:

'Barriers are dissolved; limiting prejudices melt away when we enter into the spirit of Negro or Polynesian Art. This insensible melting is far more efficacious than the change effected by reasoning, because it enters directly into attitude.

"This is especially important in our highly globalized world.

"Art has played an important role in helping fight against intolerance of different cultures, racism, and other forms of unjust societal segregation."<sup>116</sup>

Arts speak the same language to people who speak different languages. Art is the common language of human existence. It facilitates communication and connection with no need for words. This holds true no matter the medium or style of the work, be it representational, non-representational or abstract.

Representational, often called figurative Art, leaves no doubt as to the subject.

Always it is based on something seen and which the artist wishes to depict as they see it.

"Abstract art exists on a continuum, from somewhat realistic representational work, to work that is not based on anything visible from the real world. Even

representational work is abstracted to some degree; entirely realistic art is elusive.”1167

Non-representational Art may consist of just lines, shapes, or squiggles, and color. Even though it doesn't represent anything physical, it often depicts the artist's state-of-mind.

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There are many more examples of visual Arts, such as quilting, needlecraft, pottery, woodworking, stained, blown, and fused glass arts, puppetry, gourd carving and paper crafting to name but a few. Each holds the same values as have been described for the foregoing Art forms.

CHAPTER TEN

Which speaks to you? One? Several? Try them. Enjoy them. Make them. Improve them. Share them.

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THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Coax Out and Caper with Your Creative Child

List all the arts and crafts you enjoy.

What is it about each that brings you pleasure?

Which do you prefer to have others do and just admire?

Which do you like to dabble in yourself?

Which have you wanted to try, but didn't?

Was it because you don't think you have the talent?

Or was it because you felt guilty taking time from your responsibilities?

Write these affirmations. Say them aloud. Determine to follow them.

I am made in God's image. God is the Creator. I am a creative child of God.

God gifted me with creativity. I accept and appreciate this gift, and will use it to the best of my ability.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

C HAPTER E LEVEN

The Standard for Human Action

“Old standards of ethics, moral codes and methods of living in the past will not suffice for

the present age of advancement and progress.” ~ 'Abdu'l-Bahá ~

What standards do you use to judge the worth of your art? Do you have specific criteria? What do you use as your benchmarks for purpose, usefulness, quality, effect? Even if you just begin to create with no end goal in mind, how do you judge your work when it's finished?

“His [Bahá'u'lláh's] teachings are universal and the standard for human action. They are not merely theoretical and intended to remain in books. They are the principles of action. Results follow action.”¹

The Bahá'í Writings are your best source. The Universal House of Justice addressed artists on this subject. Some of it speaks to art that is specific to the Faith, but most of it is pertinent to all your artistic efforts:

“... one of the great challenges facing Bahá'ís everywhere is that of restoring to the city. Our view of the world is markedly different from that of the mass of mankind, in that we perceive creation to encompass spiritual as well as physical entities, and we regard the purpose of the world in which we now find ourselves to be a vehicle for our spiritual progress.

“This view has important implications for the behaviour of Bahá'ís and gives rise to practices which are quite contrary to prevailing conduct of the wider society. One of the distinctive virtues given emphasis in the Bahá'í Writings is respect for that which is sacred. Such behaviour has no meaning for those whose perspective on the world is entirely materialistic, while many followers of the established religions have debased it into a set of rituals devoid of true spiritual feeling.

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

“In some instances, the Bahá'í Writings contain precise guidance on how the reverence for sacred objects or places should be expressed, e.g., restrictions on the use of the Greatest Name on objects or on indiscriminate use of the recording of the voice of the Master. In other instances, the believers are called upon to strive to obtain a deeper understanding of the concept of sacredness in the Bahá'í teachings, from which they can determine their own forms of

conduct

by which reverence and respect are to be expressed.

“The importance of such behaviour derives from the principle expressed in the Bahá’í Writings, that the outward has an influence on the inward.

Referring to

"the people of God" Bahá'u'lláh states:

‘Their outward conduct is but a reflection of their inward life, and their inward life a mirror of their outward conduct.’

“It is within this framework that the Universal House of Justice wishes you to view

the concerns which have been expressed over the past several years. Bahá’ís endowed with artistic talent are in a unique position to use their abilities,

when

treating Bahá’í themes, in such a way as to disclose to mankind evidence of the

spiritual renewal the Bahá’í Faith has brought to humanity through its revitalization

of the concept of reverence.

“Questions of artistic freedom are not germane to the issues raised here.

Bahá’í artists are free to apply their talents to whatever subject is of interest to

them. However, it is hoped that they will exercise a leadership role in restoring to

a materialistic society an appreciation of reverence as a vital element in the achievement of true liberty and abiding happiness.”²

According to Shoghi Effendi,

“The believers are free to paint, write, and compose as their talents guide them.”³

But he cautions moderation:

“...a chaste and holy life...involves no less than the exercise of moderation in...all

artistic and literary avocations....It condemns the prostitution of art and of literature...It can tolerate no compromise with the theories, the standards,

the

habits, and the excesses of a decadent age.”⁴

He also wrote about the need to distinguish between the art itself and the milieu in which

it takes place:

CHAPTER ELEVEN

“As regards the matters you raised in your letter: In the teachings there is nothing

against dancing, but the friends should remember that the standard of

Bahá'u'lláh

is modesty and chastity. The atmosphere of modern dance halls, where so much smoking and drinking and promiscuity goes on, is very bad, but decent dances are

not harmful in themselves. There is certainly no harm in classical dancing or learning dancing in school. There is also no harm in taking part in dramas.

Likewise

in cinema acting. The harmful thing, nowadays, is not the art itself but the unfortunate corruption which often surrounds these arts. As Bahá'ís we need avoid

none of the arts, but acts and the atmosphere that sometimes go with these professions we should avoid.”⁵

Bahá'u'lláh Himself wrote about the need to beware of being swept into the dross of the

immoderate and demeaning trends that have no spiritual basis. Regarding music, He

admonished:

“We have permitted you to listen to music and singing. Beware lest such listening

cause you to transgress the bounds of decency and dignity....We have made music a ladder by which souls may ascend to the realm on high. Change it not into wings

for self and passion.”⁶

When you listen to music, especially in the company of others, examine your response.

Does it cause you to act in a way contrary to this advice? Or does it lift your spirit to

heavenly realms? Bahá'u'lláh also warned writers:

“Great care should be exercised that whatever is written in these days doth not

cause dissension and invite the objection of the people. Whatever the friends of

the one true God say in these days is listened to by the people of the world.”⁷

In dramatic or dance programs, If the plan is to depict a story based on historical events

in Bahá'í history, the Guardian offers specific guidance as regards the Central Figure of

the Faith:

“With reference to your question whether the figures of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh

should be made to appear as characters in dramatic works written by the believers,

Shoghi Effendi's opinion is that such an attempt to dramatize the

Manifestations

would be highly disrespectful, and hence should be avoided by the friends, even in the case of the Master. Besides, it would be practically impossible to carry out such a plan faithfully, and in a dignified and befitting manner.”⁸

If you live in a democratic society where individual rights and privacy are guaranteed, you likely treasure that freedom. It is important, though, to know that spiritually and

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

morally, liberty is not an excuse for license. Beware this pitfall into which it is easy to get trapped. People who congratulate themselves for having committed positive moral acts often then find themselves justifying a temporary aberration to satisfy their perception of deserving to stray now and then. If you find yourself tempted to indulge yourself in any pursuit that might be contrary to the good pleasure of the benevolent God, turn to the sagacity of the Universal House of Justice:

“You, who live in a land where freedom is so highly prized, have not, then, to dispense with its fruits, but you are challenged and do have the obligation to uphold and vindicate the distinction between the license that limits your possibilities for genuine progress and the moderation that ensures the enjoyment of true liberty.”⁹
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CHAPTER TWELVE

C H A P T E R T W E L V E

The Wisdom of the Review Process

“Bahá’í authors should welcome review of their works.” ~ The Universal House of Justice

elcome it, we’re told. Not put up with it even though you don’t like it. Not endure it,

W since you have no choice. Meditate on that concept: “welcome review.” Eunice

Braun, in *A Reader’s Guide*, explains the purpose of the review process:

“The purpose of review is to protect the Faith from misrepresentation and to ensure dignity and accuracy in its presentation. In general the function of a

reviewing committee is to say whether the work submitted gives an acceptable presentation of the Cause or not. Reviewers may win the gratitude and good will of authors by calling attention to such things as occasional grammatical or spelling errors, but approval should not be refused on such grounds; all such details are editorial matters for agreement between author and publisher.”¹

It's not uncommon for authors to groan and grumble about the review process. You, too, may think it takes too long, or feel that some of the decisions are unfair and/or unwise; I've heard authors vent their frustration, and at times sensed their deeply hurt feelings.

For artists, authors included, your creations are like your children—they were often birthed on following a combination of love and pain and long hours of hard work—and to think what they have brought into existence through that difficult process is not acceptable or is deemed unworthy and dismissed can cause you to feel resentful and protective, just as a parent would if someone disparaged their child. I would guess that some of this occurs more from the publishing arm than the review board and artists may not differentiate the two.

Your goal then is to listen subjectively and rather than perceive the critique as a personal attack, dispassionately consider the offered suggestions and ponder their merits.

Then if you still feel strongly that the review board has made an error, you can appeal to them to reconsider, presenting rational arguments for your opinion. If afterward you

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

remain dissatisfied and unconvinced, you can further appeal your case to the National Spiritual Assembly, and in the most extreme circumstances, to the Universal House of Justice. But it is important to understand that the review board is arbitrary, its function is solely to protect the reputation of our blessed Faith and ensure that inaccurate or misleading information is not disseminated.

The review process for writing that discusses the teaching and history of the Bahá'í Faith dates back at least to the time of the ministry of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. He wrote:

“But, whatever writings and articles which the believers may write for the spread of the Cause of God, these they must necessarily send to the Holy Land, in order to be corrected and rectified (or approved of) and then to be returned to them and then published. Before their being corrected here and before securing permission from here, their publication is by no means allowable.”²

The review board is neither tasked with making judgments on your writing style nor the quality of your work. Their instruction is strictly to ascertain that your facts are accurate and that the content maintains the dignity of the Faith. It is the publisher and your editor who will discuss grammar and style with you and possibly suggest additional material be added or some removed. Again, it is reiterated that:

“... In general the function of a reviewing committee is to say whether the work submitted gives an acceptable presentation of the Cause or not. Reviewers may win the gratitude and good will of authors by calling attention to such things as occasional grammatical or spelling errors, but approval should not be refused on such grounds; all such details are editorial matters for agreement between author and publisher.”³

Similarly, the Universal House of Justice explains:

“The function of reviewing is, essentially, to check the Author's exposition of the Bahá'í Faith and its teachings, which may include verification of any quotations from Bahá'í writings. This function should not be confused with evaluation of the literary merit of a work or of its value as a publication, which are normally the prerogative of the publisher...”⁴

Review is not limited to books; it is for anything that will be read or seen by the general public. If it is something that will be read widely, it is essential that it be approved by the

National Review Board.

CHAPTER TWELVE

“It is an obligation of all Bahá’ís to present the Faith in a dignified manner, and therefore, when writing articles about the Faith, they should take into consideration the type of magazine or other publication in which the article is to appear. Should there be any question about its character, they should consult with the National Spiritual Assembly. In addition, all authors should bear in mind that anything written about the Faith for publication is subject to review before submission to the publishers.”⁵

Even dramatic presentations should be approved if they directly address the Faith, its Central Figures or history.

“Literary work, whether a play or otherwise, has to be reviewed by the National Spiritual Assembly of the country in which it is published. As to the performance of a play in any country, this is a matter for decision by the National Assembly who may rule that, for safety's sake, a certain drama (Bahá’í or non-Bahá’í) should not be performed by Bahá’ís within its jurisdiction. That, however, is a different question, and has nothing to do with review.”⁶

If your work is turned down by one national review board, you can send it to one in another country, but if you choose that route, the work must be published in the country from which you received approval. For instance, you can't have it approved in Canada or India and then have it published in the United States.

“As to your request for guidance from the House of Justice regarding the play you are writing, we are asked to say that the friends are free to write whatever they are moved to create. If, however, such works are about the Faith and are for publication, they must be reviewed and approved by the National Spiritual Assembly of the country in which they are first published.”⁷

“Bahá’í authors may submit their work for review to any National Spiritual Assembly and may send their works, once approved, to any publisher they like,

Bahá'í or non-Bahá'í, at home or abroad. It should be remembered, however, that the approval should be given by the National Spiritual Assembly of the country where the work is to be first published. And in the case of a non-Bahá'í publisher, the author should insist on use of the system of transliteration at present used by the Faith for languages employing the Roman alphabet.”⁸

The Universal House of Justice exhorts you to consider the appropriateness of a particular magazine, website, or some other widely read publication before submitting your work to them.

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

“It is an obligation of all Bahá'ís to present the Faith in a dignified manner, and therefore, when writing articles about the Faith, they should take into consideration the type of magazine or other publication in which the article is to appear. Should there be any question about its character, they should consult with the National Spiritual Assembly. In addition, all authors should bear in mind that anything written about the Faith for publication is subject to review before submission to the publishers.”⁹

If the material is for a local publication, then the Local Spiritual Assembly can review it.

As listed in Lights of Guidance:

“In the Feb. 'Bahá'í News', page 3, it mentions that magazine articles about the Cause...written by individual believers as their personal understanding of the teachings'...need not be reviewed officially. He feels this is unwise, in view of the Master's own instructions that articles about the Cause should not be published by individuals without proper approval of some responsible body.

“The Guardian says the Local Assemblies can pass upon such articles; it is not necessary to refer them to a National Committee.”¹⁰

My weekly column, “Faith and Action,” ran for six years in the Eloy Enterprise, the local weekly newspaper in the small city where I live. Addressing issues of the day, moral and civic, or highlighting historical events, each one included at least one quotation from the

Bahá'í Writings. The column ran for several years before my community had enough members to elect its own Local Spiritual Assembly (LSA), so I requested review by the Local Spiritual Assembly (LSA) in a neighboring jurisdiction. They appointed two trusted, knowledgeable individual(s), Kitty Lutness and Joyce Kleikamp, both of whom are also writers, to serve as reviewers. I felt both relieved and grateful when they caught anything problematic that could possibly be misconstrued. Even after Eloy formed its first LSA, I asked, and they agreed, to continue as my reviewers.

It is vital to understand and fully accept that the purpose of review is to protect the Faith. It is not at all meant to place obstacles in your way or be a source of discouragement. Rather you are encouraged and urged to help the Faith and its principles through your literary talents. The Universal House of Justice urges you on:

“It is hoped that Bahá'í authors will provide a constant stream of new works.

Introductory books, commentaries, dissertations on various aspects of the Revelation, text books, histories, reviews, audio-visual material are all needed to stimulate study of the Faith and to promote the vital teaching work.”¹¹

C H A P T E R T H I R T E E N

Promote Spiritual Transformation
at the Community Level
Development of The Arts

“Artistic expression, such as music and drama, in reflection meetings, cultural events, and other gatherings will quicken the hearts, enabling them, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote, to “become inflamed with the fire of the love of God.” ~ International Teaching Centre

Overall, this book addresses the reader personally, on a one-to-one basis. But there is wisdom here for local communities as well. This "General" section on the "Development of the Arts" is addressed to each Bahá'í individual who serves, or may serve in the future, on a Local Spiritual Assembly, a Feast and/or Holy Day committee, or who plans any event or program, be it a study circle, cluster reflection meeting, deepening

session, children's class, proclamation event, or fireside. For the reader of another faith, or no faith, it can be for Bible Study, social gatherings, marriage enrichment sessions, or any other activity you plan. It even pertains to weddings and funerals.

- Don't ignore The Arts and omit them entirely from your programs and gatherings.
- Don't merely schedule "entertainment."
- DO weave the arts into everything you do.

o Please note that I'm not denigrating entertainment for entertainment's sake. That in itself will enhance any event. But when The Arts become woven into the presentations and the music, poetry, drama, or visual art is specific to the topic, it reaches the mind and, beyond, that, penetrates the heart and soul. (See Art's Underlying Purpose.)

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

For decades I've endeavored to educate about and encourage implementation of this concept, but although most listened politely, not much weight was given to acting on the idea of weaving the arts vs. using them as incidental entertainment, primarily as people are arriving and to end the program. But perhaps now that the same thought has been put forth by the Bahá'í International Teaching Centre, the friends will begin to take these ideas to heart. In 2001, they stated:

“As with all other aspects of the expansion and consolidation work, the requirements of the time call on us to be more systematic in the use of the arts.

They should not be considered simply an embellishment to our programs or an afterthought in our planning. Rather they must become an integral part of our teaching plans and community life.”¹

Their rationale:

“The arts have a vital role to play in the process of entry by troops.”²

We all want to share our faith with others and offer them the greatest gift of all: the Divine Elixir that can heal all the ills facing us on individual, community, national and world levels. One of the most efficient ways of reaching hearts and moving souls is through artistic mediums.

Poet Roger White gave some sage advice to a group of young people gathered at the Bahá'í World Centre, Haifa, Israel. It is advice that should reach everyone, not just the youth.

“Poetry, like all art, has a message for us. It says: care, grow, develop, adapt, overcome, nurture, protect, foster, cherish. It says: your reality is spiritual. It says: achieve your full humanness. It invites us to laugh, reflect, cry, strive, persevere. It says: rejoice! Above all, it says to us: be! We cannot turn our backs on art. Art heals.

“I am of the conviction that in the future, increasingly, one important measure of the spiritual maturity and health of the Bahá'í world community will be its capacity to attract and win the allegiance of artists of all kinds, and its sensitivity and imaginativeness in making creative use of them.

“Artists—not tricksters and conjurers, but committed artists—will be a vital force in preventing inflexibility in our community. They will be a source of rejuvenation. They will serve as a bulwark against fundamentalism, stagnation, and administrative sterility. Artists call us away from formulas, caution us against the fake, and accustom us to unpredictability—that trait which so characterizes life.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

They validate our senses. They link us to our own history. They clothe and give expression to our dreams and aspirations. They teach us impatience with stasis. They aid us to befriend our private experiences and heed our inner voices. They reveal how we may subvert our unexamined mechanistic responses to the world. They sabotage our smugness. They alert us to divine intimations. Art conveys information about ourselves and our universe which can be found nowhere else. Our artists are our benefactors.

“To the degree the Bahá'í community views its artists as a gift rather than a problem will it witness the spread of the Faith "like wildfire" as promised by Shoghi Effendi, through their talents being harnessed to the dissemination of the spirit of the Cause.

“In general society, artists are often at war with their world and live on

its fringes. Their lack of discretion in expressing their criticism—which may be hostile, vituperative, negative, and offer no solutions—may lead to their rejection and dismissal by the very society they long to influence. Artists are frequently seen as trouble-makers, menaces, destroyers of order, or as frivolous clowns. Sometimes the kindest thing said of them is that they are neurotic or mad. In the Bahá'í community it must be different. Bahá'u'lláh said so. Consider that the Bahá'í Writings state that All art is a gift of the Holy Spirit and exhort us to respect those engaged in science, art and crafts.

“The artist has among other responsibilities those of questioning our values, of leading us to new insights that release our potential for growth, of illuminating our humanity, of renewing our authenticity by putting us in touch with our inner selves—as Rilke says—to change our lives. The artist aids in our transformation.

“In the Bahá'í Order the artists will find their home at the centre of their community, free to interact constructively with the people who are served by their art; free to give and to receive strength and inspiration. It is my hope that all of us who are gathered here will be in the vanguard of this reconciliation between artists and their world. As Bahá'u'lláh foretells, the artists are coming home to claim their place. I urge you: Be there! Welcome them!

“Bring chocolate!”³

The most utilized art form that communities include is music. Shoghi Effendi recommended including music at Feasts.:

“With regard to your question concerning the use of music in the Nineteen Day Feasts, he wishes you to assure all the friends that not only he approves of such a

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

practice, but thinks it even advisable that the believers should make use, in their meetings, of hymns composed by Bahá'ís themselves, and also of such hymns,

poems and chants as are based on the Holy Words.”⁴

Writing about what an ideal Feast² would look like, 'Abdu'l-Bahá indicated:

“The believers of God must assemble and associate with each other in the utmost love, joy and fragrance. They must conduct themselves (in these Feasts) with the greatest dignity and consideration, chant divine verses, peruse instructive articles, read the Tablets of ‘Abdul-Bahá, encourage and inspire each other with love for the whole human race, invoke God with perfect joy and fragrance, sing the verses, glorifications and praises of the Self-subsistent Lord and deliver eloquent speeches.”⁵

In one sentence He advocates chanting, singing, and eloquent speeches among the elements of a successful Nineteen-Day Feast. Each of these is an artistic endeavor.

Increase your creative efforts. Add more than one art genre. This can't help but enhance all undertakings.

Short monologues and skits are very effective uses of artistic mediums which can be added to programs to enhance the message, rather than just "entertain." They still entertain, but they have a lasting and profound effect, as shown in this excerpt from a report by the National Spiritual Assembly of Brazil on their fifth Bahá'í National Unity Conference:

“The arts were one of the key features of the Conference . . . The youth presented humorous theatrical plays on the development of virtues and the construction of soundly established communities.

“Dramatic presentations raised the enthusiasm of the participants. For example, all were thrilled to watch the story of Anis brought to life on Soltanieh's stage. The children also gave a special touch to the event. A large tent was pitched where they had their activities.

“As a result of the Conference, 12 new believers were enrolled. In addition, four offers of pioneers were received, 17 friends volunteered as travelling teachers, and 48 youth expressed willingness to serve in teaching projects in schools and

universities.”

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Acclaimed artist Mark Tobey provides a wise explanation of why we need to return to making art and artists central in the community:

“All human beings are responsible to each other, and the lack of this consciousness creates within communities restrictions and differences, for which the community as a whole pays the price of less expansion. Society as a whole has shut the door to the artist and creative person because they have individually and collectively shut the door to their own creative sides. Feeling people are too difficult and demand too much individual thought and time for the routine of their factual existence. When people of any community learn that art may become a functional part of their life they will find more life and not only that but a new eye and a new ear—and the artist will step down from his ivory tower only too glad to become a part of the whole again and both will come to see these and similar activities as the manifestations of a higher state of human consciousness—the vision of the whole.”⁶

Do you wish more life for yourself and your community? If so, be sure to tap into your own creativity, recommit to your artistic self, or if you haven't yet done it, begin the journey to discover your artist hidden deep inside your soul. (See Discover the Artist Within). Encourage others in the community to do so, also. And offer your service to the community in helping plan and execute the use of artistic elements in your community life.

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THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Promote Spiritual Transformation
at the Community Level

The Arts: Indispensable in School Curriculum

“In this new and wondrous Age, the unshakeable foundation is the teaching of sciences and

arts. According to explicit Holy Texts, every child must be taught crafts and arts.” ~

'Abdu'l-Bahá

e're warned by 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

W “. . . In this new cycle, education and training are recorded in the Book of God as

obligatory and not voluntary. That is, it is enjoined upon the father and mother, as

a duty, to strive with all effort to train the daughter and the son, to nurse them from

the breast of knowledge and to rear them in the bosom of sciences and arts.

Should

they neglect this matter, they shall be held responsible and worthy of reproach in

the presence of the stern Lord.”⁷

Wow! As a parent, if you don't ensure that your children are educated in the arts as well

as the sciences, you "shall be held responsible and worthy of reproach in the presence of the stern

Lord." That should make you stop and think. Two points stand out:

First: The Lord is called "stern." This is rare in the scriptures of the Bahá'í Faith.

Bahá'ís are accustomed to God being referred to in terms like the Most Merciful, the Ever-

Forgiving, the Clement, the Gracious, etc. To use the term "stern" signifies great import

for the subject. It must be invaluable and affect both the individual and society

Second: The vast majority of schools, at least in the United States, have eliminated

The Arts from their curriculum. A few have included it an elective or an after-school

activity which is often fee-based.

So important is the question of Art that it is even specified in Bahá'í teachings to

be part of students' curriculum. This is in stark contrast to the fact that when budget cuts

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

are needed in public schools, at least in the United States, Arts are usually the first classes

to be cancelled. 'Abdu'l-Bahá gave a new and unique view on how to structure the school

day:

“He must study every day from morning till noon, so that he may learn how to read and write. From noon till about sunset he should acquire a craft. The children must both learn to read and acquire an art or skill.”⁸

'Abdu'l-Bahá also addresses the purpose of the arts and why children must be encouraged and nurtured in their artistic endeavors:

“Encourage the children from their earliest years to master every kind of learning, and make them eager to become skilled in every art—the aim being that through the favouring grace of God, the heart of each one may become even as a mirror disclosing the secrets of the universe, penetrating the innermost reality of all things; and that each may earn world-wide fame in all branches of knowledge, science and the arts.”⁹

And He indicates that:

“Among the greatest of all great services is the education of children and promotion of the various sciences, crafts and arts. Praised be God, ye are now exerting strenuous efforts toward this end. The more ye persevere in this most important task, the more will ye witness the confirmations of God, to such a degree that ye yourselves will be astonished.”¹⁰

He then assures:

“This verily is a matter beyond all doubt, a pledge that shall certainly be redeemed.”¹¹

These statements are borne witness to by many who probably never read the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. or perhaps even heard of him, or who lived long before Him.

The ancient philosopher Plato called for inclusion of music education:

“I would teach children music, physics and philosophy; but most importantly music, for the patterns in music and all the arts are the keys to learning.”¹²

Eloquent Evidence: Arts at the Core of Learning, a 1995 publication of the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities, states:

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

“Schools that incorporate music, art, drama, dance, and creative writing into the basic curriculum have found that teaching the arts has a significant effect on

overall

success in school. Because the arts are closely associated with important ideas and events in history, students who have a good background in the arts are likely to have a richer source of information and insight to draw upon, compared to those who do not study the arts.

“For example, students of the arts continue to outperform their non-arts peers on the Scholastic Assessment Test, according to The College Entrance Examination Board. In 1995, SAT scores for students who studied the arts more than four years were 59 points higher on the verbal and 44 points higher on the math portion than students with no coursework or experience in the arts.”¹³

How good and how accurate is your own recall after you’ve heard a great lecture? No matter how profound the message, how eloquent the speaker, you retain but a fraction of what they said. You can take notes, which can help, but at the risk of missing something valuable that is being said while you’re busily jotting away.

When something is presented visually, musically, or dramatically, your retention increases, especially if it is easily memorized in the form of a song or poem.

You probably learned the alphabet by singing your ABCs.

The number of days in any given calendar month can be recalled easily by reciting the poem *Thirty days hath September . . .* surely you remember that one from your school days. I still recite it occasionally if I’m unsure of how many days are in a particular month.

Changing Education Through the Arts (CETA), a program of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, has as one of its main goals, to:

“Help students learn more fluently and with greater motivation by providing professional development that builds teachers’ knowledge and skills in integrating the arts across the curriculum...”¹⁴

One CETA Teacher explains:

“Through the CETA program, teachers come to understand that the arts really turn on lights in children’s minds—their learning is more meaningful and deeper.”¹⁵

And a third-grade student in the CETA program suggests:

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

“Just reading a book doesn’t make things stick in your head, but when you do a tableau, what you read really sticks in your head.”¹⁶

Beyond just an art class or art instruction, CETA calls on schools to fully integrate the arts:

“Arts Integration is an APPROACH to TEACHING in which students construct and demonstrate UNDERSTANDING through an ART FORM. Students engage in a CREATIVE PROCESS which CONNECTS an art form and another subject area and meets EVOLVING OBJECTIVES in both.”¹⁷

Sometimes adults are so intent on making their own pronouncements that they forget to ask the students themselves for their input. Yet, The Arts can have a deep impact on them.

Let’s see what one young woman says about how she is impacted by The Arts . A high school student at Vista Grande High School in Casa Grande, Arizona says:

“So many kids don’t know how to express themselves, but then they take an art class and they learn the techniques they need to express themselves through art.

For me, art not only allows me to express myself, but it also has a calming effect on me. Teens need that.”¹⁸

Whether or not you are a parent, you can advocate for change in our public schools. You can make friends and family aware of the importance, nay the necessity, to bring back and/or enhance the type and amount of arts education offered in our schools. In the interim, find independent art classes or tutors for your children so they can reap the benefits which will enhance their futures. And take to heart for yourself the value of art in your own life, whatever your age. Art matters. You can (and probably should) immerse yourself in it, too.

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THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Promote Spiritual Transformation
at the Community Level

The True Worth of Artists and Craftsmen Should Be Appreciated

“It hath been revealed and is now repeated that the true worth of artists and craftsmen should be appreciated, for they advance the affairs of mankind.” ~ Bahá’u’lláh

“Artisans, craftsman, agriculturalists and tradesmen are seen in the Bahá’í perspective as enjoying an intrinsic station of worth and value.” ~ Bahá’í International Community

We’ve examined why art and artists are essential to the growth of a well-rounded, healthy community life, and therefore, why it’s essential to incorporate The Arts into your own life.

After reading and considering this information, you’ve gained knowledge, but knowledge alone is insufficient. It doesn’t change anything. However, if this knowledge has brought you an understanding of, agreement with, and acceptance of the premises presented, you now realize its vital importance.

Now let’s transfer this knowledge to the community. As a community member or leader, it’s vital to first have a firm understanding, a belief, of the positive results that will take place when The Arts are woven into your community life, or to realize that what already exists should be expanded to strengthen and enhance what is already taking place. Volition is when desire turns to will and determination. Knowledge and volition are the prerequisites, but even together they matter not unless they lead you to action.

What will push you to ensure these vital changes take place? That comes when you internally, not just rationally, come to respect and appreciate the artists in your community and their work, then encourage them—nurture them—include them—consult openly and honestly with them—become comfortable with them—welcome them. You don’t have to “Bring chocolate,” (see previous section: Development of The Arts) but that would be a delightful touch! The result? They will inspire the community to explore and test out artistic inclusions in all facets of community life.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

A perusal of the sacred scriptures of the Bahá’í Faith, shows the importance of,

respect for, and appreciation of artists and craftsmen elevated to a level never before seen in religious texts. Bahá'u'lláh states:

“Great indeed is the claim of scientists and craftsmen on the peoples of the world.”¹⁸

He admonishes:

“The people of Bahá should not deny any soul the reward due to him, should treat craftsmen with deference, and unlike the people aforesaid, should not defile their tongues with abuse.”¹⁹

Further, He declares:

“In this Day the sun of craftsmanship shineth above the horizon of the occident and the river of arts is flowing out of the sea of that region. One must speak with fairness and appreciate such bounty. . .”²⁰

What exactly is meant by deference? The Merriam Webster Dictionary describes it as

"respect and esteem" and dictionary.com says it is "respectful or courteous regard."

Unfortunately, in current society, aside from some famous celebrities, artists are frequently treated with disdain rather than respect, esteem, and courteous regard.

Bahá'u'lláh warns,

“Beware, O My loved ones, lest ye despise the merits of My learned servants whom God hath graciously chosen to be the exponents of His Name `the Fashioner' amidst mankind. Exert your utmost endeavor that ye may develop such crafts and undertakings that everyone, whether young or old, may benefit therefrom.”²¹

The Bahá'í International Teaching Centre tells us:

“...we must be sensitive to the fact that Bahá'í artists may sometimes feel outside the mainstream of community life because they are unsure as to what form their service might take. They may feel their contributions are not valued if service to the Faith tends to be equated only with serving on committees or Assemblies. These feelings may be especially apparent in indigenous cultures where the traditional arts have sometimes been denigrated by society at large.”²²

Once this respect becomes genuine—something given automatically—without need for thought—action will follow naturally. You won't have to struggle with the question,

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

"Should we include Sam the singer?"—or "Polly the poet?"—or "Should we incorporate some artistic element?" You'll just do it. You won't consciously do so because you know it should be done, but rather because you couldn't imagine anything worthwhile being accomplished without it.

Some adults are wont to give scant credence and little respect to youth—to their ideas, their expressions, their art. It would be well to stop, listen, and learn from young artists—to encourage them and invite their collaboration and participation. Shoghi Effendi attested to this:

"Some of the poems are written by very youthful persons, yet they ring so true and give expression to such thoughts that one should halt and admire."²³

Julio Alcala, a high school student who worked as a part-time clerk in my office, hailed from the barrio in Oxnard, California. Julio received poor grades in English due to difficulties with spelling and grammar. But the emotions evoked by his poetry were palpable. This sample is called Running to Hide:

Where will I stand
When god stops the hands
And all of this is over
Will my picture frame
Show the shame of me
Running to hide
Where they can't hurt me
As today As yesterday
I've hidden my treasures
My hopes and dreams
What can not be seen
Can not be broken
What would they say
Once they saw my
Treasures

Would they judge me

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

for a fool
I can not take a risk
I'll go on
Running to hide
Where they can't hurt me
There will come a time
When the world isn't so big
And I'm not so small
Then I'll open my
Treasures
But until then
I'll hide my friend
And I'll just go on
Hurting

When Julio brought me samples of his poetry, I could have pointed out grammar and punctuation that needed correcting, but he wasn't seeking a critique—just a chance to share his work with someone who loved poetry. I spoke only of what I liked about it— which truly was almost. I complimented word choices and phrases that I felt especially moving or compelling. Julio, as is made obvious in the poem, needed someone to trust— someone whose appreciation of his talent was sincere—support he felt lacking both at home and at school. He needed encouragement and an outlet to present his efforts. Each poem spoke to me on a deep soul level. I can only hope that it helped him, somehow, later in his life and that he's stopped “running to hide” and now feels safe and welcome to “open [his] treasures.”

May you be both the giver and receiver of similar encouragement.

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THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Promote Spiritual Transformation
at the Community Level
Encouragement: Essential to Success

“Encouragement is...given to commerce, the arts, science, agriculture and scientific

discovery. The people are commanded to bring forth fruit upon the earth. "The principle of faith is to lessen words and increase deeds." ~ 'Abdu'l-Bahá ~

he fruit brought forth by the deeds of ethical and honest businessmen is trust.

In science

It is knowledge and in agriculture the benefits of more abundant and healthier food

choices. The deeds of an artist are their efforts to improve and bring forth works of Art

that will bear fruit in the inspiration and awareness they provide the

viewer/reader/audience. These benefactors of society will flourish if given sincere

encouragement. If not, their spirit may wither, and with it their artistic output.

Bahá'í Counselor Stephen Birkland, noting the power of nonverbal communication, encourages you to encourage others:

"In teaching and training, encouragement is essential to success. ... We must encourage through empathetic listening and smiles in addition to verbal praise.

Set up possibilities."²⁴

He goes further and suggests:

"We should encourage poets, playwrights and musicians to write artistic pieces regarding encouragement."²⁵

Many artists feel misunderstood, unappreciated, devalued, and ignored. This often keeps

them apart from participation within the community, and some move to different groups

they find welcoming. Others succumb to the pressure and set aside their creative

aspirations. A few are strong enough in their faith in themselves and in their understanding of the Bahá'í teachings not to feel intimidated or guilty, they refuse to be

deterred. There are many, too many, who feel alienated from their Bahá'í family. The

National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United Kingdom advised:

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

"If the friends can encourage each other to express themselves through their arts,

from the heart, it will undoubtedly prove a source of greater understanding between them, a means of breaking down barriers of coldness and conventionality

and getting to know each other on the spiritual level. Try to consult with each one, draw out the shy ones. It is surprising, when the friends are asked directly regarding their skills and hobbies, to find out just what a talented group of people we are.

Sometimes artists, even professional ones, can be very reserved and need to be coaxed into coming forward.”²⁶

Following are a few examples of true incidents based on interactions between artists and their fellow Bahá'ís:

Canadian author, Marlene Macke shared this story at the first annual (2018) writer's retreat, The Write Life, held at the Desert Rose Bahá'í School in Eloy, Arizona

“My first book took nearly a decade to write. The delay in getting it finished lay in my paid employment and my service in the Bahá'í community. When you live in a tiny Bahá'í community, one feels compelled to be at every meeting, study group, devotional, Holy Day, fireside, Feast and Assembly meeting, and when push comes to shove, I felt guilty about wanting to stay home and write.

“Then I went to a writer's workshop at the Louhelen Bahá'í School in Michigan and had an epiphany! The facilitator of the workshop addressed this very issue of writers being torn between life's commitments, Bahá'í service and writing. She told us that our writing was service, that no one had our “voice” and if we did not write, then that voice was lost forever. She said that others can chair meetings, take minutes, organize Ruhi classes and so on, that our gift of service was a particular one that no one else could offer, that we ought to recognize our gift of service, honour it, and just do it.

“This freed me from my former guilt (and, yes, some resentment) and I became purposeful in getting my book written. I let my fellow Bahá'í community members know of my epiphany, although I recall being met with a wall of silence at the time. Now, a decade later, these same community members seem proud that one of theirs has published a book about a beloved fellow Canadian believer, they tell others how excited they are that I have another book ready for print, and

they introduce me as an author.

“The community has even asked me to continue with a series of dramatic readings that I started writing a couple of years ago. Together we have walked a

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

path of transformation: me in feeling free to pursue my service and they in coming to honour the place of the arts in the Bahá'í community."

My own story comes in two parts.

First: At 34 years of age, I had been a homemaker and stay-at-home Mom for 16 years. Even though I dearly loved my husband, my two children, and the many and diverse Bahá'í activities in which I was involved, I felt unfulfilled. My yearning for a creative outlet led me to try all the stereotypical female crafts that could be done at home: sewing, knitting, crocheting, needlepoint, etc. Unfortunately, it became all too apparent that I was inept at each of them. Secretly, I yearned for an outlet outside of home and hearth.

In November 1979 I attended the first play presented by the newly formed Carpinteria Community Theater group (Carpinteria, California then our hometown). I found myself delighted and inspired. I knew, or knew of, almost everyone in the cast. Their joy in their craft was obvious. I could tell they loved what they were doing. It recalled to me that same sense of joy and fulfillment I'd experienced in my high school drama class, and I realized this was where I belonged. They offered a ten-week acting course which I took along with both of my children, and I was hooked!

The negative side, or so some thought, was that rehearsal and performance schedules often conflicted with Feasts, Holy Days, and committee meetings. Several of the friends resented my putting the theater before the needs of the community. One went so far as to say, after I'd told her I was unavailable for something she considered vital, "Damn that theater." Sounds similar to what Marlene Macke experienced, doesn't it? How many other artists have been treated, or perhaps it's more apt to say mistreated

thusly?

What my friend didn't understand is that because I worked full-time in a small office, I was with the same few people day in and day out. I then came home to a husband and two children and in my spare time worked almost full-time again with various Bahá'í activities and commitments, interacting mainly with the same set of people, all of whom were Bahá'ís. When I spoke at a Fireside of public meeting, it wasn't me who was inviting guests to attend. I had no one to invite. Then I entered the world of theater. Each play brought me in contact with new people and inevitably I had at least one person in the cast or crew curious about the Faith and its teachings, some of whom had never before

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

heard of the Faith. What a joy to be able to share the divine message of Bahá'u'lláh with people who expressed interest and had questions they wanted answered. These were opportunities had been rare before theater became my avocation.

My friend's vehement resentment about my intensive foray into this pursuit dissipated in 1991. On being cast in each of the two one-act plays on Bahá'í history, written by Canadian playwright Ann Boyles scheduled for presentation to approximately 6,000 youth from around the world during the 1992 Bahá'í World Congress in New York City, she looked me in the eyes, and with contrition in her voice, declared, "Now I understand why it was so important for you to be in the theater. Without all that experience you might not have been good enough to do this." It took 12 years for her to come to that realization—12 years during which she was known to frequently grumble—but she never grumbled again.

Second: An enlightened Bahá'í friend gave me some wise words of encouragement when I needed them the most. In the early years of our marriage, I'd often expressed to my husband my wish to move abroad as Bahá'í pioneers. My husband was adamant that we should wait until after our children were grown and finished with their

schooling.

When that time arrived, he was ready to pack up and go. I wasn't. The thought of not

being involved in theater tore at me. I not only did community theater but also performed

pieces related to Bahá'í history and others that reinforced Bahá'í principles like race unity

and the equality of women and men. I developed feelings of guilt for putting the theater

before service to the Cause, yet an insistent inner voice told me to stay. I no longer felt

any desire to pioneer. If anything, I dreaded the thought of leaving. In discussing this

with an understanding friend, she said, "Jaine, you are pioneering. You are a homefront

pioneer in the field of theater for teaching the principles and the history of our Faith.

There are so few people doing what you do. You're needed here." Her kindness, her

words of advice, freely and honestly given, absolved me of all guilt and I continue to use

my acting talent in service to the Faith all these years later, even now as a senior citizen.

It wasn't a mere platitude or simple rhetoric. Perhaps she was just wise, or she may have

been familiar with the statement of Shoghi Effendi noted earlier (See Drama: Pulpit of the

Future), in which he foresees the ultimate purpose of these efforts:

"That day will the Cause spread like wildfire when its spirit and teachings are

presented on the stage or in art and literature as a whole."²⁷

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Then why not, I ask—I plead— include the creative accomplishments of your members

in your activities. Many artists feel alienated within their own communities.

Heed the call

of the Universal House of Justice to encourage:

"... Bahá'í artists and musicians to contribute, and consider inviting their non-Bahá'í

colleagues to contribute, to the effectiveness of...activities by giving expression

through the various arts to important themes relating to world peace.²⁸

I'll share one success story on this point:

Musician/singer/songwriter Chris Ruhe relocated to Eloy, Arizona to become the

Station Manager of radio station KURE, located on the grounds of the Desert Rose Bahá'í Institute (DRBI in Eloy), AZ. Demanding and time-consuming as that position is, Chris was not about to give up playing music. He couldn't survive without it. He searched out and made connections with Arizona musicians with whom he now collaborates. Several of them have played for various Bahá'í functions. One of these friends came to the realization that his happiest, most fulfilling and soul-satisfying moments are when he's playing for and mingling with people at Bahá'í events. The venues included DRBI, the Scottsdale, AZ Bahá'í Center, Macy's European Coffee House and Bakery in Flagstaff, AZ where the owner hosts a monthly Bahá'í fireside. He decided, following one of DRBI's annual Artist & Scholars Symposiums, to embrace Bahá'í Faith and enrolled as a member.

Let us continue to encourage artists.

Societal and personal problems will begin to resolve themselves once the Bahá'ís, both individually and collectively, develop a true respect and acceptance for the artists in their midst, encourage them, and then tap their talents for the betterment and welfare of the community within and to assist with outreach to the community at large.

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Promote Spiritual Transformation
at the Community Level
Criticism is Easy; Art is Difficult

“Criticism is easy; art is difficult. ~ Philippe Destouches

“When a work lifts your spirits and inspires bold and noble thoughts in you, do not look

for any other standard to judge by: the work is good, the product of a master craftsman.”

~ La Bruyère

The art of critique, also known as "constructive criticism," is a vital aspect of artistic appreciation. Done right, it is an art. Done wrong, it is poison.

Sometimes, though, those dearest to you, and whose opinion means most—your own “Tía Annie” (See *The True Worth of Artists Should Be Appreciated*)—may cause unintentional damage to your artistic sensibilities. Perhaps they thought they had your best interests at heart. Who's to say that one's opinion is correct for the person to whom it is proffered? Henry James wrote,

“We must grant the artist his [and her (author's addition!)] subject, his idea, his donnée: our criticism is applied only to what he makes of it. If we pretend to respect the artist at all, we must allow him his freedom of choice, in the face, in particular cases, of innumerable presumptions that the choice will not fructify. Art derives a considerable part of its beneficial exercise from flying in the face of presumptions.”²⁹

Varied levels of proficiency exist among artists and their output—all need to be encouraged—but each has their appropriate place. Some can be incorporated into Feasts, firesides, study circles, children's classes, Holy Days, and small community gatherings, but are not appropriate for a large event to which the public is invited. It takes tact and

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

wisdom to help the budding artist understand and not feel that they are being weeded out of the creative garden. Tread with care. You don't want to crush anyone's spirit or artistic soul but rather encourage continued study, practice, and perseverance which will lead to improvement—a striving toward excellence. (See *Strive for Excellence*)

Beware when and how you offer an opinion. Judgment by an artist on the quality of another's art is fraught with danger. More perilous to an artist than the criticisms of the general public or even family and friends, is that of other artists. Theirs can be especially poisonous.

“That isn't real music!” exclaimed my musician/singer/songwriter friend when I put needle to platter to listen to a favorite vinyl record. The artists weren't present, so

they didn't hear his hurtful words, but what did that say about me, who truly liked every song and every singer on that album? He didn't realize what an insult that could be to me.

"That's bad poetry," complained a literature professor and popular author during an artists' retreat after we'd viewed excerpts from PBS' The United States of Poetry, a program that highlights poets of varied races and ethnicities from all around the country reading aloud their poems. Those of us who had planned the retreat had chosen this because we believed in the value of the work.

An acquaintance of mine confided that his peers had pronounced that his work didn't qualify as "fine art."

"Sculptor Seward Johnson Celebrates American Life¹," Lisa Fields' March 28, 2014 article on the website, American Profile, demonstrates that even renowned artists suffer demeaning criticism. Art critics denigrated his popular series, Celebrating the Familiar, as "kitschy and unoriginal." Fields lauds the fact that when inducted into the New Jersey Hall of Fame, "Johnson was hailed for staying true to his artistic calling and diverse audience instead of pandering to critics." Remember this if you find yourself similarly the subject of criticism because your art doesn't fit a critic's personal viewpoint.

I once had a colleague exclaim "I hate your poetry!" She believed my efforts unworthy of being considered poetry. Soon after her pronouncement, I received a message from a woman on the poetry e-mail list to which I belonged (this was in the years prior to the emergence of Internet-based social media sites) in which she added to her praise of my recent submission, "You are my favorite poet."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Similarly, after opening night of the second play I'd ever been in, and in which I held a major role, the drama critic was not merely unkind, his comments were snide and hurtful. But that same night, I was sought out after the show by a well-known and highly

regarded local actor, who also happened to be an English instructor by day. He wanted to meet me and tell me much he enjoyed my performance.

These examples should help you, as an artist, not to take to heart any negative comments. Instead ponder what people do or don't like, however difficult it may be with the latter. Consider their comments; if there is value in what they say and you come to agree that something should be changed, go ahead and work to improve it. If in the end you disagree, then just keep on. You will never please everyone. Also, strive to maintain or even surpass what is already being done well—there is always room for improvement.

Why do people judge art so harshly? They might consider what Baha'u'llah says:

“Arts, crafts and sciences uplift the world of being, and are conducive to its exaltation.” 30

Let's not forget that He also advises that craftsmen should be treated "with deference."

What a contrast to the biting and denigrating tone many professional critics use. Even worse is when they are dismissive. James Boswell declared:

“A man who tells me my play is very bad is less my enemy than he who lets it die in silence.”³¹

In discussing what I believe to be the injustice and cruelty of dismissive pronouncements with the aforementioned professor of literature who declaimed about “bad poetry,” he insisted, "After all my years of education, training—and degrees—I've earned the right to make these judgments."

But has he? Well, yes and no. From a technical point of view, a critic might note weaknesses and strengths and offer—tactfully—constructive criticism. But to dismiss something, to declare it “bad art”—or "not art," diminishes the very essence of the effort and the individual who created it. British author Samuel Butler said, “Every man's work, whether it be literature or music or pictures or architecture or anything else, is always a portrait of himself.” 32

If you're told your work is unworthy, you may assume the comment is an indication that you are unworthy. Regardless of the level of competence, whether novice, amateur,

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

highly accomplished, or master level, each artistic creation has value; each artistic offering is drawn from the well of the spirit of its maker. To trample that spirit might sever the line holding the bucket that dips into the well. If you quit, you deprive yourself of the opportunity for improvement; future possibilities will vanish. Develop creative resilience and find your way back. A New Yorker article on criticism cautions:

"...it's naïve to think that negative reviews have no effect on artists' psyches or careers, and critics should consider what it takes to recover from wounds before inflicting them."³³

Experts have a right to, and should, recognize when something is poorly executed, but that comes with the obligation to word their critiques tactfully. They, more than the average person without an artistic education, should understand the dangers of harsh criticism. James Playstead Wood, biographer of Emily Dickinson, asserted, "Critics may set up standards for the forms of poetry, decide what subjects are and are not suitable for poetic treatment, and lay down laws about language and style—they have done it since Aristotle, but they seldom satisfy anyone but themselves and other critics."³⁴

Shakespeare referred, in his Sonnet 66, to the effects of criticism as

"Art made tongue-tied by authority."

Rudyard Kipling cleverly points this out in *The Conundrum of the Workshops*:

"And the first rude sketch that the world had seen was joy to his mighty heart—Till the Devil whispered behind the leaves, 'It's pretty, but is it art?'"

What makes some critics offer such scathing diatribes? Self-aggrandization, perhaps, due to feelings of inferiority and/or envy? Possibly they once aspired to greatness

in the field

of their passion only to realize their own talent lacked the ability to achieve their goal.

The power they hold can be their way to strike back at what they perceive as slights or injustices they suffered and a way to act on resentment and jealousy towards others who did succeed.

If you wish to pursue your innate artistic creativity in a spirit of service—and to serve others is to serve God and ties in to all the teaching plans being developed in our communities, clusters, regions, and on an international scale—then heed this advice from Shoghi Effendi:

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

“Let him not wait for any directions, or expect any special encouragement, from the elected representatives of his community, nor be deterred by any obstacles which his relatives, or fellow citizens may be inclined to place in his path, nor mind the censure of his critics or enemies.”³⁵

'Abdu'l-Bahá emphasizes a culture of encouragement. If every critic followed His advice, we might have more artists endeavoring to make art. For instance, he says:

“If a pupil is told that his intelligence is less than his fellow pupils, it is a very great drawback and handicap to his progress. He must be encouraged to advance by the statement, "You are most capable, and if you endeavor, you will attain the highest degree.”³⁶

My son Corey’s experience is an apt example. Seemingly unable to sit still for any length of time in his kindergarten and first grade, he never appeared to be paying attention. Yet when questions were asked, he had more correct answers than fellow students who sat in one place and kept their eyes on the teacher. One told me, “Corey learns by osmosis. When he transferred schools mid-year during first-grade, the school counselor looked over his records and asked Corey’s new teacher, “Do you think I need to work with Corey

on a regular basis.” She replied, “You don’t need to work with him on any basis. She let Corey know she believed in him and in his abilities and not only gave him encouragement, but positive feedback every time he sat longer, finished an assignment in time, etc. He lived up to all her expectations and was thriving. The teacher in second-grade was not as hands on, but he performed well. The third-grade teacher didn’t know how to handle him. She felt he was too out of control and rather than helping, working with him, her frustration and disappointment were evident. She criticized but didn’t encourage. His grades plummeted. The rest of his grade school years, fourth, fifth, and sixth, the teachers again were positive, and he flourished. The old adage, “It’s not what you say, it’s how you say it,” seems fitting here.

Conversely, a different danger lurks: over-praising, especially when it borders on adulation. Do you tend to exclaim, "You're wonderful!" "I love your work." "You're such a great/talented musician / actor / painter." Of course, it is important to give credit where it’s due, but you do no favor by speaking in a manner that might inflate someone's ego. Neither diminish anyone's self-worth nor give them reason to think themselves better or more privileged than their peers. To give underserved praise because you don’t want to seem rude and don’t know what else to say is also problematic.

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Samuel Johnson, described by the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography as "arguably the most distinguished man of letters in English history" understood this. He observed:

“He that applauds him who does not deserve praise, is endeavouring to deceive the publick; he that hisses in malice or sport, is an oppressor and a robber.”³⁷

How do you find the balance? Direct your comments and accolades to a description of what effect the performance had on you. How did you feel? What new thoughts or considerations did it raise for you? For example, during a high school drama class we

invited another class in to watch us perform an intense scene from *The Miracle Worker*. I portrayed Helen Keller as a young deaf and blind child being taught to eat with a spoon. One of the students in the audience approached me afterwards and said, "My knuckles turned white," while demonstrating with her hands how hard she'd held on to the arms of her chair. So intense were her feelings that she entered what in theater is called "suspension of disbelief," the ability to become so immersed in the realities of the play that you are able to believe what you see and hear on stage. She didn't have to say, "You gave such a tremendous performance." Her knuckles said it for her.

If given a direct personal accolade, the actress, musician, or other artist might think, Hey, I am terrific, I am really something special, an ego boost that then acquires a need for more adulation and often a sense of entitlement. Lee, Chief of Product Management at Lifehack.org explains:

"Excessive compliments take us away from our original motivation of simply enjoying an activity. We start doing the activity purely for the sake of receiving ego-satisfying praise."³⁸

Depending on the character of the artist, a generalized personal compliment rather than one with a specific example, might be imagined as empty words, What else are they going to say? They're just being polite. This does nothing to help build self-esteem, which is different from becoming egotistical.

Susanne Perry says, "In education we call this 'praise vs. encouragement.'" When sincere encouragement is given, it indicates belief in the individual which is equal to praise but not ego-inducing.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

If you note some specifics, they'll know they did well; they accomplished what they set out to do. That encourages without being ego-inflating. Here are examples of how to praise the action, not the individual

- I felt so energized/uplifted by the music.
- Listening to the high notes brought tears of joy to my eyes. My entire being vibrated.
- I've always loved reading about those times/that person, but your performance actually transported me there; I felt I was a part of it/witnessing it in real time.
- [The character] came to life — became real for me.
- I never realized just how bad things must be for those people.
- I didn't want to take my eyes off that painting. It was so compelling; it just drew me in.
- After experiencing that talk/performance I'm now questioning some of my previous assumptions.

As to undeserved praise for a lackluster performance, if you're writing a review, be honest but tactful. Don't cut people down in order to demonstrate your own clever wit.

If you are a spectator, speaking with a performer following a show, avoid addressing the performance itself and say something like, "You looked like you were truly enjoying yourself," "How nice that you get to do what you love," or that script has a great message." You're saying something positive without speaking to the performance itself.

You're being kind without compromising your ethics. Only address a person's performance, with gentle honesty, if asked directly for your opinion.

All this being said, don't eschew "constructive criticism"—welcome it.

In fact, you might wish to seek it. Don't fear it being harsh as long as it's sincere and not demeaning.

Brian Lee explains:

"Without receiving negative feedback and criticisms from others, our growth and

opportunities become stunted. And in the long term, we're not only liable to fail—

but to fail badly . . . If you always think you're right but don't get feedback from

anyone else, how do you know for sure that what you're doing is any good?

Listening and acting on honest views will tell you precisely what you're doing well—

and what you can do better.

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

“This type of feedback forces you to evaluate your actions and the way you work. If you use constructive criticism wisely, it can guide you away from bad practices and move you towards good ones.

“The right kind of criticism is honest feedback that will benefit you.”³⁹

This can come from experts, yes even professional critics, who truly care about the art and aren't using it for a perverse sense of power to earn themselves a bit of cachet. It can even come from a most unexpected and seemingly unqualified individual. Both of these sources are addressed by Bruce Grierson in his Psychology Today article, “Why It's So Hard to Take Advice.”

Grierson wrote about filmmaker and actor M. Night Shyamalan being panned by the critics and deciding to give serious consideration to what they said didn't work.

Shyamalan kept it in mind on his next project which turned out to be a huge success.

Grierson also related an incident where professional baseball pitcher Wade LeBlanc, feeling down about his performance on the field, had a cab driver suggest he try

“going over your head in your windup.” LeBlanc could have brushed it off, even been

annoyed by the cabbie's audacity to offer him advice on how to improve his game,

instead. Instead, he tried it the cabbie's way the next day and, according to

Grierson, “He

was brilliant, allowing only one hit over seven innings.”

You may wonder, Why did she include an example from baseball in a book on The Arts?

There must be other anecdotes from the Art world. Anything done well, with study and

practice and improvement, becomes a skill, and skill developed to its highest degrees

becomes Art, thus the expression “the Art of cooking” is heard when that skill is brought

to the level of excellence. It follows that there is “the Art of baseball.”

And all these “Arts”

are subject to critique.

A venue for constructive criticism for authors is a writers' group where people

gather to share their works-in-progress and have the others indicate what does or doesn't

work for them—and why. The presenter is free to heed or reject the advice as

they deem
appropriate. Often the suggestions taken benefit the work.

The word “criticism,” it seems, has multiple layers of meaning and intent.

Artist Mark Tobey anticipated a less critical future:

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

“If I do anything important in painting, some age will bring it forth and understand.

One naturally looks forward to the time when absolutes will reign no more and all art will be seen as valid.”⁴⁰

Are you sufficiently convinced now as to how you can offer honest, thoughtful critique without stifling another’s spirit? Are you ready to become a source of encouragement?

Remember not to internalize criticism of your own art as a personal insult.

Listen

with an attitude of learning. Feel free to accept or reject suggestions, but first give them due consideration. Your artistic sensibilities and skills will flourish, you’ll feel freer rather than stifled, and you’ll fortify your fortitude.

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THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Promote Spiritual Transformation

at the Community Level

Why to Utilize The Arts

“Art has the power to transform the living. It helps transcend the obstacles and barriers in

our life that hide God from us. Artists are the midwives in the passage to a new World.” ~

Aaron Gallegos ~

“If we, citizens, do not support our artists, then we sacrifice our imagination on the altar

of crude reality and we end up believing in nothing . . .” ~Yann Martel, *The Life of Pi*

One of the most important reasons to utilize The Arts in your community endeavors

is because every effort will be more successful. Isn’t that your goal?

The Arts, especially music, enhance memory retention. (See *Art Indispensable in Education*)

This relates to the use of The Arts in Feasts and Holy Day observances, firesides, study circles, junior youth sessions, children's classes, cluster reflection meetings, and public presentations.

Bahá'í Counsellor Steven Birkland writes about the effectiveness of incorporating
The Arts:

“Arts are emerging organically. In Cartagena, Colombia youth and junior youth in study circles are writing their own songs/poems/anthems (for their particular study circle).

“It is important to make plans based on current capacity (strength-based planning). If we try to do more than we are capable of accomplishing, we set ourselves up for failure and disappointment. We should do accurate—brutally accurate—assessment of our cluster (but do factor in divine assistance!). Don't make plans based merely on a wish list.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

“The most important things to start with are study circles, children's classes, and devotional gatherings.”⁴³

My hope is that institutions and planning committees will commit to utilizing the arts in all meetings, programs, and events, whether just for the Bahá'ís or ones that include the public. If there are no professional or proficient artists or performers in the community or nearby, there's a wealth of recorded material from which to choose. Also consider calling on the talents within the greater community. Locally we've invited locally based singers, dancers, and musicians to perform, and sometimes to help plan, an activity.

Let's next explore how to utilize art and the talents of artists for mutual benefit.

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THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Promote Spiritual Transformation
at the Community Level

How to Utilize and Support The Arts and Artists

“Cognizant of the power of the arts to enhance the vitality of our community life and to extend the influence of the Cause, we cannot delay in our wholehearted commitment to their diffusion.” ~ International Teaching Centre ~

When presenting the workshop *The Arts: A Key to Spiritual Transformation*, from which this book developed, it was always gratifying when participants later informed me with a sense of joy and enthusiasm that they'd returned to practicing their Art after a long period of avoiding it due to their sense of guilt at taking time away from more "practical" ways of serving their faith and their communities. But one time, I felt blessed to be told something about resolve to assist an artist. One participant happened to be a member of a Local Spiritual Assembly that had turned down a request for support from an artist in their community. After several Assembly members took the workshop, they revisited the topic at their next Assembly meeting and decided to approve the artist's request. I'm unsure of the nature of that support, whether it was monetary, material but not with funding, or perhaps logistical, but there are a couple of things to consider about finances and artists. Before we address that topic, let's first look at what the International Teaching Centre says on how their inclusion benefits the community:

“Artistic expression, such as music and drama, in reflection meetings, cultural events, and other gatherings, will quicken the hearts, enabling them, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote, to ‘become inflamed with the love of God.’ When non-Bahá’í artists are invited to share their talents at such events, they too come into contact with the compelling spirit of the Faith.”⁴⁴

Whether you are an individual planning an event or program or you serve on a committee or administrative body, there are various ways to support the artists in your community.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

- First and foremost is encouragement, which is addressed in more detail in Encouragement: Essential to Success.
- Artists can be invited to plan and implement a program.
- Singers and musicians can be asked to include selections pertinent to the topic or Holy Day. Pertinent is underlined to indicate how vital it is that The Arts be used to exemplify and amplify the theme of the presentation.

Considering the last point, to open a presentation, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá recommends a musical introduction, because:

“It has a great effect upon the human spirit....If a person desires to deliver a discourse, it will prove more effectual after musical melodies...”⁴¹

This requires thought into the appropriate music, the psychology of your intent and your goals. (See Music: Wings for the Spirit.)

I recall being at a Holy Day program when, following the readings from the Bahá’í Writings, someone "entertained" with Irish ditties. For me, even though I liked the music, it felt out of context and diminished the solemnity of the occasion. I felt as though I’d been rising on a heavenly cloud only to be abruptly dropped back down into a secular environment before I was ready.

Ample are the songs written for specific Holy Day observances, and many others, though not specific, are fitting. These would have enhanced rather than dissolved the reverent atmosphere.

Invited to select and read poetry as part of a Race Unity Day program, I asked for the specific topic. The individual with whom I spoke seemed baffled. I explained that if the speaker was zeroing in on oneness and unity, I wouldn't choose a poem about the pain and suffering caused by prejudice, and vice versa. The goal was to choose a poem to strengthen and solidify the information being imparted.

For a Naw-Rúz program hosted by Lou and Eva Tuman, artists from among the wider community in addition to some Bahá’ís, including poets, musicians, vocalists, and a puppeteer, offered performances on the topic of spring. By the end, people were so uplifted they had a "spring" in their step!

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

The times and places for light and entertaining tunes would be, for instance, at a strictly social gathering, a concert planned for that purpose, or perhaps an Ayyám-i-Há celebration.

Another consideration in your planning is integrating the arts—weaving them throughout your presentations, creating if you will a tapestry of the various elements.

This conduces to the understanding that participants take away will be more “meaningful and deeper.” To maximize the level of potential recall, Luna Mohanty suggests:

“Use more than one sense. The more of your five senses you pay attention to when trying to create a memory, the more connections you will make in your brain, which leads to a stronger, longer-lasting memory.”⁴²

It’s also possible, and often successful, to have an entire program be Arts-Centered.

Storytelling rather than cold reading from books, songs, poems, dance, or any combination of these and other art forms, used to convey the facts and/or spirit of a Holy

Day can be extremely effective. When presenting such a program for a Ridvan

celebration, which also including a dramatic reading, I was approached afterwards by

several people who wished to express their appreciation and how moved they were. All

but one were guests of the Bahá’ís.

From 1997 to 2020, Anne & Tim Perry put together Ridvan pageants in the Dallas area. The programs included costumes, set, staging, music, dramatized stories, dance,

and acting. Elements included red roses, fez representing Baha'u'llah, a boat, water, a red

roan stallion (occasionally a live one), and the spirit that characterized Ridvan--joy at the

Revelation and sorrow about the exile of Baha'u'llah. Numerous people were involved,

making it a more immersive program, and participants spanned from young children to

seniors. This created a culture of cooperation which fostered friendship and

understanding between age groups. When outdoors, a tent was erected. Indoors a

background gave the feel of a tent, as would be done on a stage set. The

costumes were

colorful and authentic. Indoors a cutout or other prop simulated a red roan

stallion. There
is no end to the creativity one can use to enhance a celebration.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Another issue that I've witnessed again and again in my more than six decades
as
a Bahá'í is the unfair and unjust expectation that everyone who is invited to
serve a
community, at a fireside or public meeting, whether as a speaker a singer,
musician, or
dancer invited to perform, someone who will offer a dramatic presentation or
dance
program, a teacher who travels to assist with children's classes, junior youth
groups,
study circles, teaching efforts or anything else, should donate their time and
efforts, to
include paying their own travel expenses. There are some people who both wish
to do so
and have the financial resources to do so, but there are likely many more for
whom this
is a financial burden.

Years ago, when Bill George took his unique and mesmerizing stage production,
The Kingfisher's Wing, to communities throughout the country, he often met with
astonishment and resentment from people when he mentioned remuneration. Once he
was told, "Well Dizzy Gillespie came and he performed for free." It didn't
occur to that
individual that Dizzy Gillespie was a headliner, a highly-paid major celebrity
and could
afford to work for free on occasion for his beloved Faith. But Bill and so many
more
people like him earn their living—which doesn't bring a celebrity's
salary—doing their
art fulltime. Just like someone who works in an office, in a trade, or anywhere
else, they
have to earn money for housing, food, insurance, etc. If this is their job they
must be paid.
The costs of Bill's equipment, his puppets, his travel expenses including
gasoline, wear
and tear on his vehicle, housing and meals on the road, of which much was
doubled
because musician Styve Homnick traveled and performed with him, would have run
out

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

fast and he'd have been unable to keep traveling and sharing the play on
Bahá'í history

which had so deeply touched audiences, many of whom were not members of the Bahá'í Faith. I've recently learned that renowned Lakota flutist, storyteller, and hoop dancer, Kevin Locke, faced this same issue.

At a minimum, gas money, if people are driving, and hospitality can be offered to these people who so graciously give of their time and talent. This is different than the caution given by the Universal House of Justice:

“A word of caution accompanies this call to promote the arts more vigorously. The emphasis on the arts and on utilizing the services of Bahá'í artists is not intended to result in financing performances or publicizing the talents of a handful of individuals. Rather it is intended to facilitate the efforts of artists to use their abilities to serve the Faith. The House of Justice explains this principle in a recent letter to an individual believer: ‘...the patronage of artists and their life in art, while important in itself, is not a stated goal of the Cause in its current unfoldment, any more than the support for believers practicing medicine or working in agriculture, worthy as these fields are in themselves.’”⁴⁵

Patronage is not the same, nor should it be conflated with, payment for services rendered or for reimbursement of travel costs. Financing performances, on the other hand, indicates in their entirety, from start to finish, paying to develop it and produce it.

You wouldn't expect a plumber or electrician to come work for free, so if you invite an artist of whatever genre, they too deserve payment for their services.

At the Desert Rose Bahá'í Institute (DRBI), friends who are already there participating in a weekend or weeklong seminar and wish to share their talent for the evening programs, offer this service without charge. One year, however, during the Thanksgiving weekend school, Ginny Healy, then DRBI General Manager, decided it would be good to bring some local talent in—good for the friends to experience something fresh and good for the locals to know their talent is appreciated and

welcome—good also for them to become familiar with DRBI. I put Ginny in touch with Rule of 3, a trio of women who not only blend incredible harmonies, but who each have great stage presence and a terrific sense of humor. Their established fee exceeded DRBI's budget. They all consulted together, and the musicians took into account that DRBI is a non-profit entity and they finally agreed on an amount acceptable for both. The show was a huge success. The audience didn't want to let them stop and the women were thrilled;

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

they said this was by far their best and most enthusiastic audience. One of the singers remained in touch with DRBI about future artistic possibilities. Some of the friends worked with her first through her position at Central Arizona College's (CAC) music department, and later as the Director of the Pence Theater, CAC's performing arts venue. She's become a good friend of the Bahá'ís.

The Arts, and the opportunities to include them, are vital to us as individuals, artists, and art appreciators, they are imperative to creating stronger, more cohesive, and unified communities. The Arts energize our minds, bodies, and souls. Let's support them.

If you're unsure how to include The Arts effectively at the community level, here are a few suggestions:

- Devotionals (including the devotional portion of the 19-Day Feast) benefit from The Arts, especially music. At the monthly interfaith devotions my husband Don and I host, artistic elements are always included, occasionally live music by an attendee, often music videos, and usually poetry, each selection pertinent to that month's theme. Participants sometimes share personal stories afterwards and occasionally visual art, paintings, sculpture, even dolls, have been brought, as everyone is invited to bring something to share, related to the theme, that has moved their spirit.
- You can provide music to listen to or encourage people to sing along. Musical instruments, such as drums, maracas, tambourines and triangles can be made available to those who prefer to play along rather than singing themselves.

- Dance and movement can be woven in, as well.
- If you want to set a more meditative, reverent tone, soft music and candles in a softly lit room can help set the tone. Or instead of recorded music, perhaps someone could be drumming or playing a flute softly in the background.
- For children's classes and junior youth gatherings, and yes, even for adult study circles, The Arts enhance any learning experience and help participants retain the lesson, but again they should be relevant to the lesson's theme.

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

- Participants can be asked to break a poem up into two or more voices and even to act them out. They can portray a story through movement and dance.
- For public presentations, 'Abdu'l-Bahá advises to set the tone by beginning with music that will put the audience in a receptive mood. Strategically woven into the presentation, visuals, poetry, and dramatic readings, as well as songs that emphasize points, enhance the experience and assist with recall. You might wish to invite expressive readers and talented singers to present these segments. A variety of voices helps a program move along and helps maintain interest.

A tip to help you and your community going forward would be to survey the friends in your own and in surrounding communities as a start, then keep moving further afield, to find out what talents and skills people have and what they are willing to offer and what requirements they'd need, for example, microphones, AV equipment, hospitality, and travel expenses.

If you're hesitant to try any of the foregoing possibilities yourself, I suggest just "Try it; you'll like it!" Unlike the fellow in the Alka-Seltzer commercial which originated that saying, who kept being told "Try it; you'll like it," over and over again, and finally tried it and groaned, "Thought I was gonna die," I feel pretty confident you will find success and you'll like it just fine.

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Beauty Enhances and Enriches the Spirit

"It is natural for the heart and spirit to take pleasure and enjoyment in all things that show forth symmetry, harmony, and perfection. For instance, a beautiful house, a well-designed garden, a symmetrical line, a graceful motion, a well-written book, pleasing garments—in fact, all things that have in themselves grace and beauty are pleasing to the heart and spirit..." ~ 'Abdu'l-Bahá ~

Art emanates from and promotes the intrinsic beauty in both our material and our spiritual natures. Musician and composer Ludwig Tuman explains:

"Beauty may be regarded as an attracting quality that radiates from the Manifestations of God, is reflected in all God's handiwork, and felt in the human heart as a stirring and awakening of love. Beauty then, plays an essential role in aiding man to fulfill the very purpose of his existence: to know and to love God."¹

Keith Ransom-Kehler asserts:

"In the aesthetic experience there is a lavish out-rushing of the soul's fine gift of response to and recognition of something from which it cannot derive any possible personal benefit ...

"The very nature of the recognition of beauty requires a complete withdrawal from self, for the first definition of anything beautiful is its freedom from the utilitarian. We can imagine something of the bewildering tempestuous ecstasy that swept through the first soul who discovered that though putting on some ornamentation on his crude earthen vessel did not in any sense increase its usefulness, or enlarge its content, it did release in him new levels of response, new powers of expression, a new hope, a new sensibility, a new vision. The addition of this element or decoration to his utensil could not feed his body, but it performed the more eternal task of nourishing his soul.

"It is beauty upon which the spirit feeds, for spirit is limitless and its nutrient

can never come from those sordid restrictions that please the impertinent.”²

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

A deep sense of pleasure arises from the beauty inherent in much art.

Tuman explains that beauty not only emanates from God's chosen messengers, but it in turn becomes an "attracting quality" that brings us closer to God. He calls it a

"... spiral of spiritual growth, carried upward on the wings of love toward the Kingdom of the Most Great Beauty."³

When asked by Professor Chris Kavelin for advice in developing a college course on

Spirituality and Social Transformation, Aunty Mary Anne Coconut, an Aboriginal elder

from Weipa, a remote community in the far north of Australia, shared her wisdom with

him:

“Well, the first thing is to let the students know that if they have any challenge that’s

facing them, anything that they need done in their lives that they don’t feel they

can do, that they should go out into nature and find some place that’s beautiful.

Find someplace like a beautiful tree and go sit next to that tree. Then say a prayer

to God or to their soul, or to whatever their understanding of the ‘Other’ or

‘Spiritual Reality’ is and to ask for help and say, 'This is beyond me. I need

assistance.' Then they should trust that there will be an answer of some kind and

that when they feel that answer has arrived they should act on that answer.”⁴

Professor Kavelin zeroed in on the prayer aspect, which of course is the crux of Aunty’s

advice. I, however, am struck by the point that the supplicant should find a “beautiful”

spot in nature in which to offer their prayer and commune with their Maker. She doesn't

elaborate on this point, but it makes perfect sense.

We should endeavor to surround ourselves with beauty. So important is beauty to our spiritual growth that the Bahá’í International Teaching Centre wrote:

“... an appreciation of beauty is one of the spiritual forces that lifts us to higher

realms of existence. To strengthen this power of attraction it is beneficial

for the
friends to be exposed to various forms of art.”⁵

Beauty enhances and enriches the spirit. Have you ever had an artistic
experience that
moved you to shed tears of utter joy? That's happened to me at times while
listening to
Sarah Brightman sing, especially songs of the spirit. An ethereal quality in
her voice
transports my soul to another realm: it seems to transcend my body and I feel a
closeness
to God that no other voice has ever created for me.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

When standing among the towering redwoods in California, or gazing at God's
incredible palette of colors and the unique natural sculptures at Canyon de
Chelly and
the Grand Canyon in Arizona, watching and listening to the waves crash along
the shores
of the Pacific Ocean, the rest of the world, all its crises and its busyness,
just disappear.
The natural beauty immerses me in a sense of well-being; I feel enveloped in
the arms of
the Creator. In my home, on a smaller yet satisfying scale, I've placed
beautiful pieces of
art. If stresses or worries arise, I focus on one of them and agitation eases.
I then feel calm
enough to commune with God in prayer or meditation.

These sentiments are more profoundly explained in poetic form, as in *Touched by
Beauty*, whose author remains unknown:

We all want to be touched
by wonderful music, beautiful art,
love of our fellow man.
To be moved, drawn,
taken to places unknown.
To feel an overwhelming chill
from a beautiful orchestral phrase,
to be filled with warmth and joy
from the color of a canvas,
to feel the wonder from
touching the creativity of mankind.
How music, art and poetry
cause such emotion is unknown.
but we all know when we are there —

what a cold world it would be without
the beauty of music, art, poetry and love.

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THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Beauty Enhances and Enriches the Spirit

Ugly Art Can Be Beautiful: The Beauty in Protest Art:

Art and Justice: Twin Triggers of Human Transformation

“The beautiful, which is perhaps inseparable from art, is not after all tied to the subject, but to the pictorial representation. In this way and in no other does art overcome the ugly without avoiding it.” ~ Paul Klee ~

If Art is meant to be beautiful, why does some art seem to prize ugliness that seems to scream at the viewer? Could it be, perhaps, that beauty and ugliness can be equally valid and important? Might there be beauty in the ugliness?

We’ve already considered beauty and its spiritual effect. Now let’s examine how the ugly can instigate change. The beauty is in the result—the transformation.

“Beauty and Ugliness” on encyclopedia.com, points out that:

“Kant [philosopher Immanuel Kant] holds that good art is beautiful, although it differs significantly from natural beauty: a good work of art is a beautiful representation. A representation can be beautiful even if its subject matter is not beautiful.”⁶

Though this is valid, it is equally important to note author/ cartoonist Ashleigh Brilliant’s understanding that:

“Beauty can come out of pain—but that doesn't make pain beautiful.”⁶

Sometimes you need to be (metaphorically) slapped in the face—or be the “slapper”—to stimulate the movement from knowledge, to volition, to action. You may require a bracing wake-up call before you come to care enough and, also, to wish to help others also realize change is needed, urgently needed. This awakening may not only bring you to want to see the change happen, but cause you, to finally determine to work towards accomplishing that change. Otherwise, It’s easy to remain complacent in the face of

injustice when you are protected by your own personal cocoon of safety, be it family, job, privilege, or material security.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

That's one of the reasons I think Baha'u'llah so strongly emphasized justice. He wrote:

“Justice is a powerful force. It is, above all else, the conqueror of the citadels of the hearts and souls of men, and the revealer of the secrets of the world of being, and the standard-bearer of love and bounty.”⁷

Thus, the need for the artist to move the world toward justice, one artwork to one soul at a time.

I don't think there's ever been a time when some Art didn't express dissatisfaction with injustice or challenge the status quo. Whether it be poetry, literature, drama, comedy, paintings, murals, cartoons, dance, songs, storytelling, performance art, street art, or any other form of artistic expression, people will use their Art to protest—to try to shake up society, from the grass roots to the ruling class.

War, prejudices, human rights, hypocrisy, and economic inequality are common targets of protest artists who are, indeed, agents of change.

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THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Beauty Enhances and Enriches the Spirit

Ugly Art Can Be Beautiful: The Beauty in Protest Art:

The Arts: the Non-Lethal Weapon to End War

Art significantly influences public perception of war by shaping narratives and evoking emotional responses. – Clara H. Whitman

Anti-war songs and poetry, with their long history as artistic vehicles and cries for justice, remain in both the conscious and subconscious mind. They trigger an urge to ponder and consider their messages.

Anti-War Songs Abound

Folk singer Pete Seeger's hit, *Where Have All the Flowers Gone?* asks,

Where have all the young girls gone?

Taken husbands every one

They find their loves, it blossoms, then suffer when the new husbands become soldiers

who leave them behind when they're sent off to war.

Where have all the young men gone?

Gone for soldiers every one

They return — not to their wives — but to the graveyard.

Where have all the soldiers gone?

Gone to graveyards every one

War withered and destroyed the flower of their youth and of their love.

Where have all the graveyards gone?

Covered with flowers every one

Each verse ends with the question:

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

When will they ever learn?

Perhaps that last line should read:

When will we ever learn?

In the 1987 song, *I Don't Want to Be a Hero* by Johnny Hates Jazz, the reluctant recruit

offers this heartbreaking lament:

Oh send me off to war

In a far away land

I never knew existed

Subject me to the truth

To the horror and pain

Until my mind is twisted

The young man in the song doesn't want to go off to kill someone he doesn't even know

just to satisfy the anger of the rulers who can't get along. He fears returning home

wounded, not just physically but mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.

The use of The Arts to protest against war relates to this opinion by Howie Lasserter:

“History proves that war is better at abolishing nations than nations are at abolishing war.”⁸

The Power of Anti-War Poetry

Poets attack the very concept of war. During World War I, the famed British poet and soldier Wilfred Owen wrote in graphic ugliness of the carnage and the suffering that soldiers endure. He ends this poem by imploring the reader:

My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est
Pro patria mori.

That final line, taken from the Latin odes of the Roman poet Horace, means "It is sweet and proper to die for one's country." The poem, published posthumously in a 1920 book

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

simply titled *Poems*, includes this preface by Owens himself. He writes: "This book is not about heroes...My subject is War, and the pity of War. The Poetry is in the pity."

That pity can't help but well up in the reader of poet Roger White's, January 1991:

Israel.⁹ The poem opens with this memory:

Other-worldly in our goggled headgear,
mock monsters in a monstrous time,
we huddle in sealed rooms and wonder
whether this is the promised Armageddon,
shivering to think what reign it ushers in.

Further on, White stuns us with the fact that the "goggled headgear" of the gas masks

meant to protect, sometimes had the opposite effect:

not too soon to mourn the innocent,
the few elderly women and the child,
smothered in their masks, through ignorance
of the mechanics of protection.

The shock value he employs in *Nursery Rhyme*¹⁰ is especially effective to shake up our sensibilities, rouse them from their apathetic slumber as he illustrates what happens when war turns normal people into unthinking, unfeeling killing machines as seen in

these two stanzas:

Georgie-Porgie Pudding-and-Pie,
Assisted by some others,
Strafed the children, made them die,
and broke the hearts of mothers.
Margery Daw, King Cole and Mary,
Well see your garden grow,
With mushroom cloud, quite contrary,
And corpses, row by row.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Ed McCurdy's Last Night I Had the Strangest Dream is one of several songs that used the opposite tack. Instead of showing us the negative via the ugliness of war, he dangled the carrot of the positive, and the beauty of the possible, as the dream sees that “the world had all agreed to put an end to war:”

I dreamed I saw a mighty room
The room was filled with men
And the paper they were signing said
They'd never fight again

And when the papers all were signed
And a million copies made
They all joined hands and bowed their heads
And grateful prayers were prayed
And the people in the streets below
Were dancing round and round
And guns and swords and uniforms
Were scattered on the ground

This song became so popular it was recorded by numerous artists, including Simon & Garfunkel, John Denver, Pete Seeger, Bob Dylan, and Johnny Cash. Adopted as the official song of the Peace Corps, it was sung by a choir of children as the Berlin Wall crumbled.

Poet W. B. Yeats insisted:

“Man shouldn't make war; it opposes the natural spirit, and don't let anyone tell you otherwise.”¹¹

‘Abdu’l-Bahá addressed this subject several times using similar messages. I especially like His suggestion:

“For 6,000 years man has been at war. It is time to try peace a little while.
If it fails,
we can always go back to war.”¹²

The following is an excerpt from an interview He did with W. H. Short, Sec.
N.Y. Peace
Society, and Hudson Maxim at the Hotel Ansonia, New York City, 15 April 1912:

Hudson Maxim: "Do you consider the next great national war necessary?"

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

'Abdu'l-Bahá: "I hope your efforts may be able to prevent it. Why not try
peace for
awhile? If we find war is better, it will not be difficult to fight again; but
if we find
that peace is the glorification of humanity, the impulse of true civilization,
the
stimulus to inventive genius and the means of attainment to the good-pleasure
of
God, we must agree to adhere to it and establish it permanently." ¹³

Rev. Albea Godbold paints a word picture of the result of war which compels
contemplation:

“If full scale war comes, all men may be cremated equal.”¹⁴

War is not the only ugliness attacked through art. Let's examine some of
Art's other
targets.

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Beauty Enhances and Enriches the Spirit
Ugly Art Can Be Beautiful: The Beauty in Protest Art:

The Wall and the Call: Public Art and Social Change

"There is much that is needed to be said, to make people stop, look and listen,
to confront
social injustice issues. Art can often say what words cannot.“ ~ Karen
Gutfreund ~

Visual art, especially public art, should provoke an emotional response,
which explains
why the Education is Not a Crime mural campaign has touched so many hearts
around the world.

That global public mural campaign, which began to protest the prohibition of
higher education for members of the Bahá'í Faith in Iran, also addresses the
lack of
education for girls in many other countries, and as well as the persecution of

journalists.

As people pass by, many stop to study the murals and contemplate the symbolism chosen by the artist. Some find themselves caring about the plight of the subjects, coming to a new awareness of the value of education and the conviction that it is a universal

human right.

Mural by Camo, Sydney, Australia street artist

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Creative artists use what's available, whether it's a wall or a collection of toys, to get their message across. The renowned Chinese artist Ai Weiwei, described as "one of China's most prolific and provocative contemporary artists," uses diverse genres in his quest to promote change. He speaks through his Art to promote themes related to human rights.

Trace, one of his most famous visual works, uses Legos to create the faces of detainees and exiles from over thirty mostly Asian countries. On the Smithsonian Institution's Hirschhorn website, we learn the artist's philosophy behind the use of a children's building toy for such an important work of art:

"Inspired by his five-year-old son, Ai chose LEGOs as a disarmingly playful and ubiquitous material that can easily be constructed, or deconstructed, on a massive scale—in some ways acting as a metaphor for freedom."

It further explains why he opts to use a wide variety of ordinary object in his works:

"Ai is known for appropriating materials such as pearls, porcelain, and salvaged wood in his works, and the artist has a tendency to use mass quantities of objects—and large numbers of volunteers—to help create his work, playing with the dichotomies of individual and collective effort, unity and fragmentation."

Even though his artistic activism led to his being jailed for 81 days in 2011, the website indicates:

". . . the artist has continued to create art that transcends dualities between East and West, focusing on fundamental questions about the interrelations between

art,
culture, society, and individual experience.”

A good source to learn more about some of the most impactful protest artists is
A Brief
History of Protest Art on format.com.

When you ponder the profound work of protest artists in their quest for
justice,
consider these words of Bahá'u'lláh:

“Justice is, in this day, bewailing its plight, and Equity groaneth beneath
the yoke of
oppression. The thick clouds of tyranny have darkened the face of the earth and
enveloped its peoples. Through the movement of Our Pen of glory We have, at the
bidding of the omnipotent Ordainer, breathed a new life into every human frame,
and instilled into every word a fresh potency. All created things proclaim the
evidences of this world-wide regeneration. This is the most great, the most
joyful
tidings imparted by the Pen of this wronged One to mankind. Wherefore fear ye,
O

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

My well-beloved ones? Who is it that can dismay you? A touch of moisture
sufficeth
to dissolve the hardened clay out of which this perverse generation is
molded.”¹⁵

Let’s pray that the power generated through the deep sense of justice
underpinning these
artworks will indeed be the moisture that makes pliable the hardened clay of
the hearts
which perpetrate the injustices plaguing our world. May that hard clay soften
and
convert into a rich soil from which positive change will grow and flourish.
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THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Beauty Enhances and Enriches the Spirit
The Beauty in Protest Art:

Dramaturgy for Social Justice

“All drama is about the choices that we make to other people and to
ourselves.” ~ Edward

Albee

O ne film or play can affect you for the rest of your life, and perhaps set
you on a new

path not previously considered. Art works to open your mind and your heart.

As poet Roger White explained in *Bring Chocolate* (see *Development of The Arts*):

“Art conveys information about ourselves and our universe which can be found nowhere else. Our artists are our benefactors.”

Theater at its best addresses issues and disseminates information in a manner that is

much more effective than sitting and listening to an excellent lecturer. While watching,

you can experience it as if it is happening in real life right in front of your eyes and you’re

a part of it—a first-hand witness. I think of it as a sermon minus the preaching. It can

replace the pulpit. (See *The Spiritual Influence of the Drama*). Playwright Edward Albee

wrote:

“I like the fact that the theater always exists in the present tense, and that at its best

it is an argument against the status quo. A serious play always holds a mirror up to

people and says, ‘Look, this is who you are. This is how you behave. If you don’t like

it, why don’t you change?’”¹⁶

Two examples are the musicals, *West Side Story* and *Zoot Suit*.

West Side Story, a modern day take on *Romeo and Juliet*, depicts the anguish of two

young people whose love is thwarted by their peers—members of rival gangs from

different cultures. The audience witnesses the sacrifices they make to honor their love for

each other. Whether watching the modern musical or the Shakespearean drama, the

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

viewer takes away a realization of how ludicrous, how irrational, is tribalism, and how

dangerous is prejudice against and distrust of “the other.”

There is no legitimate basis for dividing ourselves—there are no “others.” ‘Abdu’l-

Baha posited:

“White doves and gray doves associate with each other in perfect friendship.

Man

draws imaginary lines on the planet and says, "This is a Frenchman, a Musselman,

an Italian!" Upon these differences wars are waged. Men are fighting for the

possession of the earth. They fight for that which becomes their graves, their cemeteries, their tombs.

“In reality all are members of one human family – children of one Heavenly Father. Humanity may be likened unto the vari-colored flowers of one garden. There is unity in diversity. Each sets off and enhances the other's beauty.”¹⁷

My Chicano History class from Santa Barbara City College took a field trip to Los Angeles in 1978 to attend a live performance of *Zoot Suit*. The summary of this play on enotes.com explains:

“The first Chicano play on Broadway, *Zoot Suit* incorporates bilingual dialogue and alienated Mexican Americans. The play grew out of California Chicano guerrilla theater. Luis Miguel Valdez questions newspaper accounts of the Los Angeles zoot-suit-Columbus Day riots and the related Sleepy Lagoon Murder Trial (1942). The drama uses song, dance, and a unifying narrative based on the traditions of the Mexican corrido (a ballad form that often reflects on social issues). Newspapers described zoot-suiters knifing and killing until stopped by the U.S. Navy and Marines and deservingly imprisoned (‘Police Nab 300 in Roundup’); Valdez contrasts this yellow journalism with a very different reality: lively, harmless singing and dancing interrupted by police violence (‘Marines and Sailors ... stomping like Nazis on East L.A.’), mass arrests, and brutal police interrogations.”

The stage décor was equally as effective as the spoken words. Stacks of newspapers created the illusion of desks, chairs, etc. For the audience, they served as a silent, visual recognition of the power of the press, which can be used for good or ill at the whim of writers and editors.

Historical dramas also wield great power. Two one-act plays by Anne Boyles: *To Walk in His Footsteps* and *When the Moment Comes* were presented to youth in attendance

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

at the 1992 Bahá'í World Congress in New York City. Both fleshed out stories and statistics and transported the audience back in time—with a visceral impact.

To Walk in His Footsteps introduced us to three characters with typical human flaws whose lives were transformed through, respectively, learning of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings and acceptance of His Station, meeting 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and correspondence with Shoghi Effendi.

When the Moment Comes took the young audience inside the prison where a group of Bahá'ís, some very young like themselves, were incarcerated following the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran—their only crime being a believer in the persecuted Bahá'í Faith. The youthful prisoners, most of whom (like many of their elders) had previously taken their freedoms for granted, gained a new appreciation for them and developed a deeper, more meaningful sense of connection with their fellow Bahá'ís who continue, to the present day, to suffer persecution in the cradle of their Faith.

When we reprised these plays on the West coast, a journalist from Voice of America covered a production of When the Moment Comes at the Los Angeles Bahá'í Center. As the cast gathered onstage following the performance for an interview, he kept stumbling on his words, unable to begin to ask his questions. Noticeably uncomfortable, he finally requested I cover my feet, which were made up to look like the wounds following a beating with the bastinado—a wire whip smacked over and over against the soles of the feet. His mind knew what he saw wasn't real, but his heart experienced it as if it were. His soul had been transported right into the prison, he entered the “suspension of disbelief,” and he felt like a first-hand witness to what they endured.

You can be moved, perhaps even changed, after being immersed in the drama of an alternate reality, whether it is quite different from that which you experience on a daily basis, or similar to the environment in which you live. That's what a good play does. It uses the Art of the playwright, the vision of director, and the ability of the actors to embody all of it, to serve as a mirror. As you view it, read it, listen to it, contemplate it, may you recognize something of yourself in the antagonist and wonder, "Is this

who I
really am? Do I want to go on like this? Should I change?"

You may be inspired by the reactions of the persecuted. Depending on the
strength
of your feelings, you may determine to emulate them when facing vicissitudes in
your
own life, or recognize that the effect on you is weak and determine to work
toward

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

developing a higher sense of empathy. You may also find you wish to find a way
to work
to end the injustices as they exist offstage in actual society.

You, with your innate human creativity, can become an agent of change by
morphing the ugly into the beautiful through your own Art.

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THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Beauty Enhances and Enriches the Spirit

Ugly Art Can Be Beautiful: The Beauty in Protest Art:

Writing to Right Wrongs

“Words are a form of action, capable of influencing change.” ~ Ingrid
Bengis

In writing, humanity is our canvas, humility our medium, enlightenment our
purpose. ~

Source Unknown

One of the functions of Art involves awakening in you a determination to
protest and
fight injustices everywhere.

Artists address all social problems, such as hunger, poverty, various forms of
violence: child abuse, sexual assault, and domestic abuse, as well as the many
forms of
prejudice and racism.

These social ills may impel you to shriek your outrage. Consider doing so
through
your own Art. Discover alternative outlooks and challenge yourself to take
creative action
towards resolution of a problem you choose to address. Art that attacks these
issues
engenders hope and empowers you to propel your community toward its needed
change.

Here are a few literary examples of using Art to address injustice:

Fiction

The Land, Mildred Taylor's prequel to her Logan family series of novels, introduces the reader to Paul Edward Logan, born to a Black slave and a White plantation owner.

Accepted by his father, but not in a manner equal to his White half-siblings, Paul finds, as described on the website Goodreads: "Black people distrust him because he looks white. White people discriminate against him when they learn of his black heritage. Even within his own family he faces betrayal and degradation." In the novel, Paul sets off to find and settle land of his own, land every bit as good as that of his father. The impact of this story is evident in the reviews of its readers: A teacher relates:

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

"I almost thought I had made an error in judgement in choosing it for my 7th graders. How could Taylor possibly cover this controversial part of our history in terms that they could understand? She did. At some points I gasped out loud at the harshness of the reality of this world I couldn't imagine. And yet it was so different than other books written about this time. It focused on hard work, and it didn't have any easy answers. It made me so angry for Paul at times."

One reader shares these thoughts:

"This story isn't simply about life after the Civil War and the racial conflicts that arose. This is Paul Logan's story and the many challenges he faced in order to gain personal achievement."

Another reader describes the protagonist as

"... a man of quiet strength, resolute morals, and audible ambition." She finds the novel: "a masterfully-paced story that reminds you of the deep pleasure found in hard work aimed towards an honest end ..."

The lessons of courage and perseverance in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles, and the fact that these attributes of Paul's character led to his eventual victory in achieving the end for which he'd striven while up against the odds, will

affect you on
a level no amount of lecturing or mere list of facts and statistics could
manage. Your mind
understands the numbers, but your soul is affected by the stories of people and
their
struggles. You relate to them on a personal level. This holds true with
non-fiction stories
as well.

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### Nonfiction

Wangari Maathai's *Unbowed: A Memoir* relates her growing awareness that the loss  
of  
forests in her country, Kenya, a result of the greed of the business world  
married to  
government corruption, turned a once fertile nation into an arid wasteland.  
Though  
physically beaten, jailed, and publicly shamed, Wangari Maathai never lost her  
determination and drive to strive for change. She founded the Green Belt  
Movement  
which encouraged and assisted poverty-stricken women to grow seedlings and then  
plant them in an effort towards reforestation.

Vilified by her own government, which even refused her permission to travel to  
accept the Nobel Peace Prize for her efforts, Maathai remained undaunted. With

### THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

unwavering courage and determination, she worked towards her goals right up  
until her  
passing in 2011. You can't help but be inspired by such a life and realize  
that you, too,  
could be an agent for change.

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Poetry

What is poetry? The suggestion, by the imagination, of noble grounds for the
noble
emotions. ~ John Ruskin

Poetry doesn't belong to those who write it but to those who need it. - Mario
Ruoppola

The following poems provide examples of poetry which will reach deep into your
soul
and stir up sadness, and outrage.

Addressing miscegenation and depicting the pain it engenders, Roger White wrote
Whom Love Blinds, dedicated to Catherine M'boya:18

Black was she,
And white was he,
Love bathed their hours with colour.

Fate's bleaching whim
Wrenched her from him
And oh! their lives were duller.

Grief's swart dye
Stained his mind's eye,
His pitch world lacked all lightness.

Tear-blinded, she
Could only see
His absence as a whiteness.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Perusing these words, you can't help but feel the pain their separation caused. The reality of their situation might erupt in an excruciating sense of righteous indignation as your empathy is stirred in just these few lines. You ache at the depth of the injustice in forcing people apart people who are meant to be together, simply due to their skin color.

Sometimes one Art project stimulates another. After walking along the green in Washington D.C., Rhea Harmsen came across The Clothesline Project, a public Art installation which provides women who've suffered various forms of violence and abuse the opportunity to paint their pain into art on t-shirts which are then hung on a clothesline and displayed in public spaces.

The exhibit haunted Ms. Harmsen, and she was moved to write about its effect on her psyche. She aptly titled the poem after the name of the exhibit, The Clothesline Project:19

On that green were these rows of T-shirts
hanging on a clothesline.
And on each shirt a story,
pictures, a poem, an expletive . . .
Haunting by virtue of its ugliness,
its truth, and its violence.
Each was the story of a woman abused,
a child violated,
a human temple desecrated . . .
She described what she'd seen:
T-shirts now branded in my memory.
Color-coded for each crime,

pink, red, orange for rape victims,
green-blue for the battered and abused,
yellow and brown for sexually molested children,
and white "in memoriam" of the silent women
dead by the violent hand
of their husband or lover.

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Ms. Harmsen lamented the fact that on returning home with an urgent need to share with others that powerful experience, she found no listening ear, not one person willing to help her process the disturbing thoughts that swirled relentlessly through her mind.

Not the subject of polite conversation, I thought ...
But because I wandered through
those T-shirt corridors of struggle and survival
I still hear them.
Their strangled cries echoing into eternity.

She described some of the designs and the words written upon them in graphic detail, such that on reading them, I choked up, and do so each time I reread them. How much more intense it must have been to be there in person, to have seen the art as well as the words, the t-shirts, one after the other—so many mind-boggling and tragic stories. Ms.

Harmsen described them as:

Now a link in a chain,
pulling the weight of the ages
off the backs of the downtrodden.
Each a tiny hailstone that will beat
upon the windowpane of our consciousness,
intrude in the paths of our notice,
tug like a child on our sleeve
till we look at them and see them plain.

Art transports you vicariously experience someone else's life and facilitates an empathetic reaction. Artists deserve enormous gratitude for guiding you to remove your blinders and truly see.

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Beauty Enhances and Enriches the Spirit The Necessity of Beauty in Your Life

“Hidden beyond the veil of mystery, Beauty is eternally free from the slightest stain of imperfection. From the atoms of the world, He created a multitude of mirrors; into each one of these He cast the image of His Face; to the awakened eye, anything that appears beautiful is only a reflection of that Face...Now that you have seen the reflection, hurry to its Source!”- Jami

We’ve touched on beauty in its most common sense and in how even “ugly” art can be beautiful. Either way, beauty is a necessity. It fosters your spiritual transformation.

Similarly, don’t begrudge yourself beautiful possessions. You need only avoid becoming obsessed with material objects. Think of your life as the cake and the adornments as the icing. Though the cake itself is sweet and delicious, the icing makes it that much more special.

As in all things, moderation is the key. Bahá’u’lláh advises:

“Whoso cleaveth to justice, can, under no circumstances, transgress the limits of moderation. He discerneth the truth in all things, through the guidance of Him Who is the All-Seeing. The civilization so often vaunted by the learned exponents of arts and sciences, will, if allowed to overleap the bounds of moderation, bring great evil upon men.”²⁰

On the necessity of beauty in our lives, Tuman posits:

“Acting as an agent of spiritual attraction, beauty thus plays an essential role in the process whereby art seeks to help ennoble the human soul.”²¹

This kind of artistic ennoblement is at the crux of our spiritual development. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá provides this example:

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

“For the noblest part of the tree is the fruit, which is the reason of its existence. If the tree had no fruit, it would have no meaning.”²²

‘Abdu’l-Bahá also writes:

“All that has been created is for man, who is at the apex of creation, and he must be thankful for the divine bestowals. All material things are for us, so that through our gratitude we may learn to understand life as a divine benefit. If we are disgusted with life, we are ingrates, for our material and spiritual existence are the outward evidences of the divine mercy. Therefore, we must be happy and spend our time in praises, appreciating all things.”²³

And for those who create the beauty with which we surround ourselves, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá suggests:

“It behoveth the craftsmen of the world at each moment to offer a thousand tokens of gratitude at the Sacred Threshold, and to exert their highest endeavor and diligently pursue their professions so that their efforts may produce that which will manifest the greatest beauty and perfection before the eyes of all men.”²⁴

Indigenous cultures weave beauty into every aspect of life. Most don’t even have a word for “Art.” It is just one of the essential elements that makes people and society whole, and their incorporation is automatic, not something that has to be debated or decided.

Appropriately, let’s end this section with a Navajo prayer, part of a nine-day ritual called the Night Chant:²⁵

In beauty may I walk.
All day long may I walk.
Through the returning seasons may I walk.
On the trail marked with pollen may I walk.
With grasshoppers about my feet may I walk.
With dew about my feet may I walk.
With beauty may I walk.
With beauty before me, may I walk.
With beauty behind me, may I walk.
With beauty above me, may I walk.
With beauty below me, may I walk.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

With beauty all around me, may I walk.

In old age wandering on a trail of beauty, lively, may I walk.
In old age wandering on a trail of beauty, living again, may I walk.
It is finished in beauty.
It is finished in beauty.
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THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Art and Science—a Symbiotic Relationship

“... there is really no such thing as a primacy of art or physics, but both disciplines, each way of apprehending the world we experience, is part of a complementary pair...” ~

Howard Rheingold

On initiating my search for references to The Arts in the Bahá'í Writings, it

immediately became apparent that in almost every instance where The Arts are mentioned, science is referenced as well. None specifically relate them to each other, but they appear to be given equal importance.

It seems they are like two halves of a whole, and if Art is a key to spiritual transformation, then so can science be, as well, when the two are married and used for the right purposes.

An Internet search resulted in a plethora of articles and talks that point to the reality that the art in science and the science in art combine these seeming opposites till they are harmonized and inseparable. Historically this concept has not been accepted by the majority of the populace, yet there have always been some who understood it and foresaw it becoming universally accepted. According to French novelist Gustave Flaubert:

“The more Art develops, the more scientific it will be, just as science will become artistic. Separated in their early stages, the two will become one again when both reach their culmination. It is beyond the power of human thought today to foresee in what a dazzling intellectual light the works of the future will flower.”¹

Physicist Adam Frank explains:

“Very often it’s through art (dance, poetry, painting, sculpture, etc.) that we get to explore the half-recognized relationship between ourselves and the world we inhabit. We often discover meaning through art.

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

“There are deep connections between meaning-making and object-making. Those connections are exactly where the resonances between art and science find their potency.”²

Frank offers these examples of the way art and science are two parts of a whole:

“Every painter experiments with the colors they can, or cannot, create from tubes of acrylic or oil. Every sculptor must confront the actual brittleness of their stone or the flexibility of their metal. Every dancer experiences the limits of muscle and sinew as part of the language of choreography.”³

The importance of recognizing that the two disciplines hold equal value and should be integrated became most apparent when I read an article by Robert Root-Bernstein, Professor of Physiology at Michigan State University about how Nobel Prize winners in science also are adept in at least one art form. (See Wherefore Art?)

Art and science intersect in various ways. Think of the science involved in much Art: music and mathematics, sculpture and physics, mixing paints and chemistry. Scientists utilize artistic techniques in both their research and in their graphs and charts for their reports and presentations. They just never recognized that these steps are Art.

Science can in fact inspire the artist. Quantum physics interests painter Jalaliyyih Quinn. Her fascination with the subject, coupled with her imagination, has translated into some intriguing artwork that compels the viewer to study the painting with an intensity similar to that which captured the mind of the artist.

Arriving for a meeting at a medical research firm, I entered the building and immediately zeroed in on the brilliant colors in the apparent abstract artwork that hung in the lobby and along the stairway leading to the upper floor. They invited contemplation. It surprised me to learn they were in fact photographs of cells and other organisms within the human

body. How
delightful to see the beauty that exists within us—we are a combination of
science and
art!

Both artists and scientists begin with a premise, often initiated through
intuition.

They research the possibilities to achieve their goal. They hypothesize
different scenarios

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

to achieve their ends. Form and structure are part of both of their processes.

They accept

that failures will occur, but choose to look at them not as failures, but
rather as steps of

elimination, considering what they can do differently in order to improve on,
and move

forward with, their projects.

It is worth noting that many of the engineers helping Apple be such an
innovative

company are accomplished musicians and artists.

Artists and scientists, according to artist/historian Tamara Troup, are both:

- concerned with knowledge
- concerned with truth(s), or untruth
- concerned with universality
- reliant on systematic methodologies
- seeking to communicate⁴

Willamette University student Erynn Rebol majored in Biology and took a minor
in Art

because she understands that:

“You can talk with someone or show them a published paper saying that bad
things are

happening, but sometimes that doesn’t get through. I have realized that my
art could

be a medium through which I could speak to people about the environment.”⁵

One of her early efforts is an excellent example. She describes the concern
that she wishes

to address:

“There has been a lot of negative coverage of the terns in the media because
they eat

so many salmon. However, the more research we did, the more we realized how
other

factors, such as dams, over-harvesting, illegal salmon fishing and dredging,
have a much

larger impact on salmon populations. Despite this, Caspian terns are viewed by the locals as the root cause of the problem.”⁶

Two of her paintings illustrate the problem, as described by Tamara Troup:

“Her paintings portray two human arms—one showcasing a series of blue veins and holding a healthy salmon; the other where the veins are the Columbia River and its tributaries, with a series of dams. This arm holds a small, sickly fish.”⁷

This is an excellent example of combining science with Art to help reach out to others with a message that can stimulate knowledge that may lead to volition and then to action. Only then will positive and lasting change take place—the change craved by all people all around

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

the world. The effort alone induces a healing and uplifting effect on the soul, and with each step forward, the effects grow and with them, the intention and resolve to keep improving strengthens. The union of The Arts and Science will ensure success.

Here are two steps that can be taken by scientists and artists to increase creativity and have their efforts be more effective:

First, hire artists to work in scientific environments, both doing their own art, inspired by the science, and consulting on the research and experiments. Vibeke Sorenson of the California Institute of the Arts suggests that:

“Unless the scientist is also an artist, it seems that the very best situation in a scientific environment is for scientists to work with a fine artist in a team. This artist should be a person with enough science background to understand the basis of the research, and potentially a person whose own work is related to the research field. This person can help to identify significant problem areas and keep a stimulating dialog with the scientists. This person should also be sensitive to the purpose of the research, as well as applications to society, a thinker with a conscience.”⁸

This approach has already been followed to good effect by a few companies, including IBM, Xerox, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the New York Times. The website PopTech is a believer in creating hybrid networks, including artists and scientists, to push innovation to new levels. You can read articles and watch videos on their website, poptech.org, that illustrate and stimulate successful collaborations

Next, re-establish Arts education in the schools, including the study of music, dance, drama, and visual Arts, and use The Arts to teach various subjects. (See Art Indispensable in School Curriculum.)

An important consideration is that both art and science are skills you can utilize to discover and experience truth.

Artists are often seers; they conceive of things that are considered impossible and their works are termed science fiction. Then, years later, scientists move these concepts from fiction to reality. For example,

- Credit cards were first conceived of by novelist Edward Bellamy in *Looking Backward*, published in 1888.
- Modern Electronics Magazine printed a story in 1911 by Hugo Gernsback that depicted people seeing and speaking to each other via a device he called a telephot.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

- Aldous Huxley's 1931 *Brave New World* saw mood-altering medicine used to help keep Londoners sane. Research on antidepressants didn't really get going until the 1950s.
- Air touch technology, or screenless computer screens, as seen in the 2002 film, *Minority Report*, became, less than twenty years later, available to consumers.

Physicist Adam Frank closes his NPR talk, *Where Art and Science Meet, Exactly*, with these sage words:

“One of the great ironies of human existence is that art and science are both optional costs for culture. You don't have to put any money into them if you

think
they are not worth it. And yet, the only cultures we remember, the only ones
that
matter across the long march of history, are those who did think they mattered.
From the Hellenistic Greeks to the genius of the Renaissance, art and science
have
forever been paired together as the lasting expressions of truly great
societies.

“Woe unto those who forget that lesson.”⁹

Art and Science complement each other. They make great partners with a
symbiotic
relationship.

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THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

There's a New Era Coming—

The Arts Will Usher it In

“It is an age of universal reformation. ... Sciences and arts are being
molded anew.

Thoughts are being metamorphosed.” ~ 'Abdu'l-Bahá

A new age for mankind. A new era of spiritual reality and understanding. The
beginning of a cycle which will usher in the Most Great Peace. This era began
with

Bahá'u'lláh's announcement that He is the One promised in the religious
Scriptures

of all the world's major religious faiths, as well as in the varied spiritual
traditions of

indigenous people around the world.

What does this mean? What will it look like?

Each new revelation from God throughout recorded history brings newer,
broader, and deeper ideas that manifest themselves in The Arts of the age. What
will the

current era bring? I don't know. Anything I'd say would be mere supposition
from an

uneducated individual who is anything but visionary. However, we find glimpses
of

answers in the Bahá'í Writings, and from some artists and scholars. Their
wisdom and

eloquence begs to be shared.

“There will be a new art, a new architecture, fused of all the beauty of the past, but new”.1 ~ 'Abdu'l-Bahá

“It is certain that with the spread of the spirit of Bahá'u'lláh a new era will dawn in art and literature. Whereas before the form was perfect but the spirit was lacking, now there will be a glorious spirit embodied in a form immeasurably improved by the quickened genius of the world”.2 ~ Shoghi Effendi

THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

“Every religion has brought with it some form of art—let us see what wonders this Cause is going to bring along. Such a glorious spirit should also give vent to a glorious art.”3 ~ Shoghi Effendi

“We cannot possibly foresee, standing as we do on the threshold of Bahá'í culture, what forms and characteristics the arts of the future, inspired by this Mighty New Revelation, will have. All we can be sure of is that they will be wonderful; as every Faith has given rise to a culture which flowered in different forms, so too our beloved Faith may be expected to do the same thing.”4 ~ Shoghi Effendi

“. . . the first Mashriqu'l-Adhkár [House of Worship] of the West, marking the first attempt, however rudimentary, to express the beauty which Bahá'í art will, in its plenitude, unfold to the eyes of the world.”5 ~ Shoghi Effendi

“It is from their [Bahá'í artists'] desire to glorify God through their creative activities that new arts and sciences will gradually develop to enrich a new culture.”6 ~ Universal House of Justice

“There has been released into the world a new impulse, a creative force, that is being reflected in every area of human thought, every endeavor including, of course, the arts, perhaps even especially the arts... Whatever force has been unleashed must be, I feel, benevolent and constructive. Perhaps it will lead to a greater understanding among the people of the world.”7 ~ Roger White

“...when asked, after a lecture at one of their [Bahá'í] meetings, about an official "Bahá'í Art," [Mark] Tobey replied that modern literacy has made didactic

art

unnecessary, and that ‘art would be free in a Bahá’í world.’”⁸

“Without tradition, art is a flock of sheep without a shepherd. Without innovation, it is a corpse.”⁹ ~ Winston Churchill

“Every age has its pleasures, its style of wit, and its own ways.”¹⁰ ~ Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux

“Great nations write their autobiographies in three manuscripts—the book of their deeds, the book of their words, and the book of their art.”¹¹ ~ John Ruskin

“From the mid-nineteenth century onward, the world has witnessed a spectacular growth of public interest in the arts. Many arts have come to be practiced by non-professionals on a scale that has no precedent in the history of civilization. The computer and the satellite, with their impact on education and artistic practice, are helping to bring the knowledge and the skills of art within the reach of the masses.

The emergence of art practiced by a vast number of skilled amateurs and appreciated by an ever-growing public made up of informed and sensitive enthusiasts, is one of the remarkable features of the world-wide transformation of human culture that has been set into motion.”¹² ~ Ludwig Tuman

Isn't it exciting to know that there's so much to look forward to in the coming years. You'll benefit from innovations that move the world ever forward while some classic styles keep you grounded. Who knows? You and I may not still be here to see all of it, but we can appreciate the sense of anticipation that comes with the expectation and the glimpses we've had so far, for example, in architecture. The various Bahá'í Houses of Worship around the world are an excellent example of the creative spark that's been released.

Aren't you thrilled to be a part of this? Are you eager to nurture your creativity and add to the successes of the future?

Go forth now—create!

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THE ARTS: A KEY TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

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