

## Session 2 mixtape transcript: Attention

Curated and hosted by Marc Rettig  
marcrettig.me/creativity-practice-x6

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### Introduction

Marc Rettig Hello. This is the second mixtape in the Creativity Practice series. I'm Marc Rettig.

We began our creativity practice group by looking at what it means to practice. And the first set of suggested practices had to do with “Flow”—practicing open expression without interruption by internal judgment. Expression without editing. Treating expression and editing as two separate activities, two different parts of the creative process. First flow it out freely. Then make the mess better. That second part, judgment and editing, we've all had a lifetime to develop the voice of our inner critic, so we have some of what we need for that. But the flow part—letting something inside us flow freely out to take form in the world—for most of us that part has atrophied under the stern gaze of our highly developed inner critic. So yeah. Let's keep practicing flow.

And now it's the second week. We turn to another essential aspect of creativity. Attention.

I don't remember where I first heard this, but I think about it at least once a week. “The quality of the result reflects the quality of attention.”

John Cleese reminded us that, [audio quote] “creativity is not a talent, it's a way of operating.” I find it helpful to think not so much about whether I'm being creative, or about creativity as a quality I do or don't have today, and think more about a creative process.

1. Pay open attention.
2. Reflect.
3. Make.

Repeat until you feel done or something makes you stop.

This is a sensing and steering process. A way to walk through the forest of uncertainty, emerging from the other side with something in your hand.

This mix works with that first step, with the idea of attention as a key to creativity and the creative process. We'll hear some practicalities and some poetics. We're going to hear several different ways of thinking about attention. In one segment it's “listening.” In another it's “presence.” We'll hear language about attention as a kind of conversational relationship with the world. And we'll hear it framed as curiosity—essential to the magic of creativity.

3:00 One last note. I chose these voices to help us have language and framing for the role of attention in creativity. They are more thoughtful and soulful than they are practical, I know. But don't worry. The practices we'll try in the coming weeks are much more practical and playful. Expect to get out and put your nose in the world.

## Introducing Gilbert and Tippett

Marc Let's begin with curiosity. Krista Tippett created the radio program and podcast *On Being*, and is its host. It is a remarkable collection of conversations and interviews, and often touches on creativity. This segment is drawn from her interview with Elizabeth Gilbert. She's best known for her book *Eat, Pray, Love*. This interview is sparked by her more recent work, *Big Magic: Creative Living Beyond Fear*.

Here is part of their conversation.

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### Krista Tippett and Elizabeth Gilbert, *Choosing Curiosity*

Krista Tippett So I kind of resisted interviewing you earlier, because there was a time when *Eat Pray Love* was everywhere. And what I've been so interested in is watching this evolution and development of you into, through, and beyond that, and so, watching how you're processing that and how you're articulating what you're learning about life and inhabiting this role you have in people's lives, whether you ask for it or not. And so much of that coalesces around this idea of what it means to be creative and, I think, demystifying that. And then, so on the one hand, demystifying creativity — what did you say? What's your definition? "Creative living..."

Elizabeth Gilbert "...is choosing the path of curiosity over the path of fear," which is pretty straightforward. [laughs]

Krista But also, using the language of "magic" in your latest book, *Big Magic*. So on the one hand, demystifying it, and on the one hand, revealing it as magic; but every-day, attainable magic.

Elizabeth Practical magic. [laughs] I think there's even a thing such as that, isn't there? I do think that just because something is mystical doesn't mean it shouldn't also be demystified. [laughs] And maybe it's the mystical things that we need to demystify the most, in order to lay claim to them and to not keep thinking of them as something that only belongs to a very special class of people. The more mystical and precious, in a way, that we make creativity and spirituality both, the more people get left out of it. And I think that's a pity and a loss, and sometimes, even a tragedy. So it should be that all are invited, or else what are we even doing here?

Krista 6:00 Just starting to read you on this, it brought back — I grew up in a very small town in what feels like a faraway place. And I wonder, actually, if a lot of people have this experience, and I always thought it was so singular to me, but I was fascinated with the whole idea of creativity. But it was almost more like a longing than a fascination. And I wanted to understand it. And I wanted to be it. But I saw it as something that was somewhere out there in the world, in other people, and that you had to be, in some special way, gifted; in some special way, original — an artist. And that didn't feel attainable to me, or to describe me. And it seems like people are coming — a lot of people come to you with precisely that longing and feeling of being left out of the experience of creativity.

Elizabeth Most people are left out of it, which is not even the right way to say it. Most people are cast out of it — because I think it's innate, and I think the evidence that it's innate is pretty airtight. [laughs] And that evidence is multifold, but here's some pieces of it. One, all of your ancestors were creative — [laughs] all of them. You and I and everybody we know were descended from tens of thousands of years of makers. The entire world, for better or for worse, has been altered by the human hand, by human beings doing this weird and irrational thing that only we do, amongst all our peers in the animal world, which is to waste our time making things that nobody needs, making things a little more

beautiful than they have to be, altering things, changing things, building things, composing things, shaping things. This is what we do. We're the making ape. And no one is left out of the inheritance of that — that's our shared human inheritance.

And another really strong piece of evidence is that every human child is born doing this stuff innately. It's an instinct. There's no child that you put crayons and paper in front of who doesn't get it, what you're supposed to do. No four-year-old boy was ever sat in front of a pile of Legos and said, "I don't know, I'm just — I'm not feeling it." [laughs]

Krista [laughs] Right.

Elizabeth You know, "I'm not — I don't know if can ever do..."

Krista Right. Or, "I'm not a Lego master, so I won't even try."

Elizabeth You know, "I'm not as good," or, "Last week, I did one that's so good. I don't know if I can ever do another good one."

Krista [laughs] Right, right.

Elizabeth And I think what we find often happens is that most people that I talk to can usually pinpoint, with quite specific accuracy, moments in their lives where certain artistic expressions were taken away from them; where, suddenly, they were informed that they were not a good singer or that they couldn't dance or that they couldn't draw. And there's usually some shaming around it; often, some public shaming. Somebody decides along the way, "Well, no, Heather is the creative one." "Joshua is the creative one."

9:00 "She's good at music." "He's a good artist." And you get pushed out of it, in a way. And the other weird side effect of that is that those "special" kids who get shunted into the category of being "artistic" or "creative" — they often become neurotic basket cases, [laughs] because it's a great deal of pressure to put upon two kids out of 100, to say, "You're the special one. Now go deliver unto us our artistic dreams that nobody else is allowed to do." [laughs] It's crazy.

Krista Well, right. And it also does have that — you're right. Even when we cultivate and celebrate that, it has an effect of separating it out from everybody else, and it becomes something that only special people do.

Elizabeth And it becomes something that is not part of you and part of your daily life. It's not embroidered within you. It's not natural to you. It's some artificial thing that you then have to get very expensive training in. And then, you have to immediately start worrying about whether you can make a career out of this and whether you can make money out of this and whether you'll get acclaim from this and whether you can continue to be recognized for this.

And all of that is a very strange way to see creativity and, I would say, a very new way. And by "new," I mean post-Enlightenment, the last couple hundred years, and very Western — and, I would also say, very macho, in a way, very male, [laughs] because it comes with this grandiosity that's on the individual, and this pressure to be great and to be a genius. And it's strange.

Krista And also, that it has to have some kind of quantifiable, demonstrable value that is defined in certain linear ways, what value is. So I think, one thing — and I think you, also — it took you a little while to come to this. One thing that you have started to say that is really helpful is that you've started to see the danger of this refrain that's everywhere out there in our culture — to "follow your passion, follow your passion" — and that that, also, becomes a way that people feel themselves excluded, because they're not sure what their artistic passion would be. Or again, if it's their passion, can they really measure the value they're creating?

And I love the language of “curiosity” you use, and I’d love for you to talk some more about that. One thing you’ve said is, the difference between passion and curiosity as something you’re following is that “curiosity is a milder, quieter, more welcoming, and more democratic entity.” [laughs]

Elizabeth [laughs] Oh, I love curiosity — our friend. I think curiosity is our friend that teaches us how to become ourselves. And it’s a very gentle friend, and a very forgiving friend, and a very constant one. Passion is not so constant, not so gentle, not so forgiving, and sometimes, not so available. And so, when we live in a world that has come to fetishize passion above all, there’s a great deal of pressure around that. And I think if you don’t happen to have a passion that’s very clear, or if you have lost your passion, or if you’re in a change of life where your passions are shifting, or you’re not certain, and somebody says, “Well, it’s easy to solve your life. Just follow your passion,” [laughs] I do think that they have harmed you, because it just makes people feel more excluded and more exiled and, sometimes, like a failure.

Krista Yes, exactly.

Elizabeth And it’s a little bit like — gosh, I mean, even the word, “passion,” has this sort of sexual connotation that you’re — I’m much more interested in intimacy [laughs] and in growing a relationship, than everything has to be setting your head on fire. And curiosity is an impulse that just taps you on the shoulder very lightly, and invites you to turn your head a quarter of an inch and look a little closer at something that has intrigued you. And it may not set your head on fire; it may not change your life; it may not change the world; it may not even line up with previous things that you’ve done or been interested in. It may seem very random and make no sense. And I think the reason people end up not following their curiosity is because they’re waiting for a bigger sign, and your curiosities, sometimes, are so mild and so strange [laughs] and so, almost, nothing — it’s a little trail of breadcrumbs that you can overlook if you’re looking up at the mountaintop, waiting for Moses to come down and give you a sign from God.

Krista You said curiosity “gives you clues.” [laughs]

Elizabeth It’s clues and...

Krista Doesn’t necessarily give you a destination at all, right?

Elizabeth [laughs] It doesn’t. And here’s the thing. Sometimes, following your curiosity will lead you to your passion. Sometimes it won’t; and then, guess what? That’s still totally fine. You’ve lived a life following your curiosity. You’ve created a life that is a very interesting thing, different from anybody else’s. And your life itself then becomes the work of art — not so much contingent upon what you produced, but about a certain spirit of being that, I think, is a lot more interesting, and also, a lot more sustainable.

Krista You use the language, “the virtue of inquisitiveness.” That’s great.

Elizabeth I think a definition of an interesting person is an interested person. I’ve never met an interesting person who’s not also an interested person.

## Introducing Otto Scharmer

Marc Curiosity. Inquisitiveness. Attention. And in Otto Scharmer's case, who we'll hear from next, listening. He has a lot to say about listening. But really he has such a broad definition of listening, I hear him talking about all kinds of attention.

It's helpful to have language for these different kinds of listening. Different kinds of attention.

15:00 Otto Scharmer is a leader in leadership. He is the author of the book, *Theory U*—that's the letter U not Y O U—and founder of the Presencing Institute at MIT. In this eight minute clip, Scharmer offers a description of four levels of listening. His emphasis is on leadership. I expect you'll easily find the mapping to creativity in general.

By the way, as Scharmer talks he is referring to a diagram. I think you can get his drift just by listening. But so you know, I've put the diagram in the transcript.

Here's Otto.

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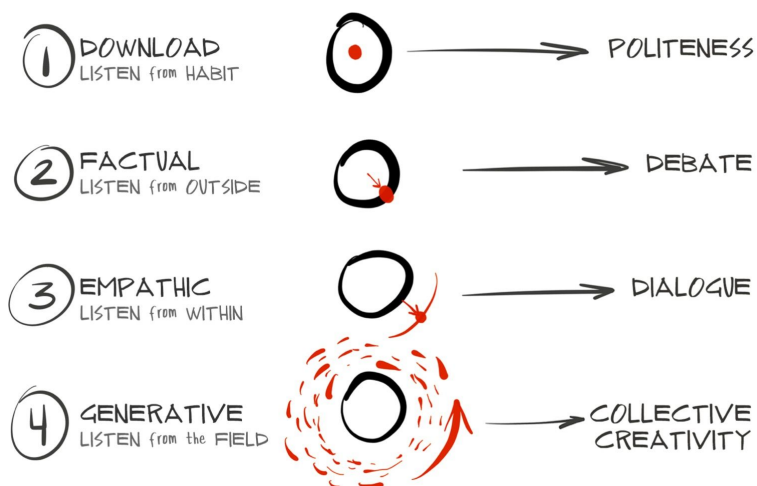
## Otto Scharmer, Four levels of listening (attention)

Otto Scharmer

Listening, from all leadership capacity, is probably is the one that's most underrated. Everyone talks about vision and about this and about that. But listening is really at the source of all great leadership. Whenever I see leadership failures, and these days we have many occasions to do that, very often at the source of leadership failure is lack of listening. It's lack of connecting with what's really going on in reality right now. It's a disconnection between leaders on the one hand and the situation on the ground, on the other. So listening really is a core skill, not only for leadership, but really for all domains of mastery, of professional mastery.

So we all practice listening sixteen- plus hours a day. So it's not something you know, that we only engage with every now and then. And it is as important for our professional life as it is for our personal life. I observed listening for many years. And I came up with a very simple distinction, which is four different levels of listening.

### FOUR LEVELS of LISTENING & CONVERSING



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So here is the first level. The first level is basically listening by what I call downloading. Right? Downloading is basically that from your habits. Kind of, you listen to what you already know. And the results, know, you know, not that this is a surprise, but the result of course, in that case is that you reconfirm what you already know. You reconfirm your opinions and judgments.

And he is kind of how this **first level of listening, listening by downloading works**. Let's say this circle here represents the totality of what I know. Kind of it's the, the, the black circle is the boundary of my organization. Kind of off kind of my concepts. Kind of everything we I know, and the red dot is the place from where my listen happens. So when I listen from the center of my own prison, What is it that I recognize? What is it that I'm listening to? I pay attention to what I already know. It's like projecting my own slides on the wall. So I'm in a closed room. All the windows are closed. All the curtains are down and everything I see is limited to what I am projecting kind of my own concepts, my own slides, what I am projecting onto the wall.

18:00

I'm not saying what you are projecting is not good or not appropriate. All I'm saying is it's not, what's really going on outside. It's kind of a result from your experiences of the past it's reflecting the past, not the present moment. And it's something kind of that you project onto the wall. That's listening one. The outcome is we reconfirm what we already know.

Here is listening two. **Listening two is factual listening**. And the essence of factual listening is that we accept, we notice what's different. Right. We know we are noticing differences. We access the open mind. And the outcome is that we, you know, notice disconfirming data. We notice what is actually different from what I expected to see. Charles Darwin was a known to always have a notepad on him where he would write down observations that contradicted his theory. Because he knew he knew exactly what our mind is doing. When we notice something that doesn't fit our theory is in contradiction with that, our mind is over time getting rid of everything that's not you know, confirming what we expect to see. So, but he knew that disconfirming data is actually the source of innovation. So that's why he wrote that down. It helped him to evolve his own theory.

So here is what factual listening is. It's now you get up, you go to the window, you open the curtain and you actually look what's going on outside. You watch what's going on outside. That's factual listening. Now, that's, you know what we train in all good science. Is all good science is, you know, notice disconfirming data. But for all of you, for all of us who deal with complex social change processes, this is not good enough. There are two additional sources of listening that are very critical and that need now our skills an intentional skill development.

**The third level is empathic listening**. It's listening with an open heart as an organ of perception, which leads to seeing the situation through the eyes of another. And which also leads to not to an emotional connection to the other person. That's not going away very quickly. So empathic listening is allowing you to step to connect with the experience kind of off another person.

21:00

And when I asked a cognitive psychologist what really is happening here when you access this deeper way of operating, she said, Listening begins to happen from the field or from the other person that you are connecting with.

So this is what happens. Your listening begins to happen from the place, from where that other person is speaking from articulating from. That's a listening three.

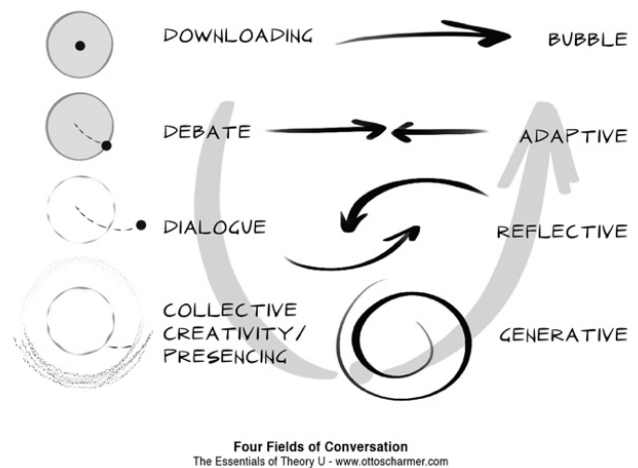
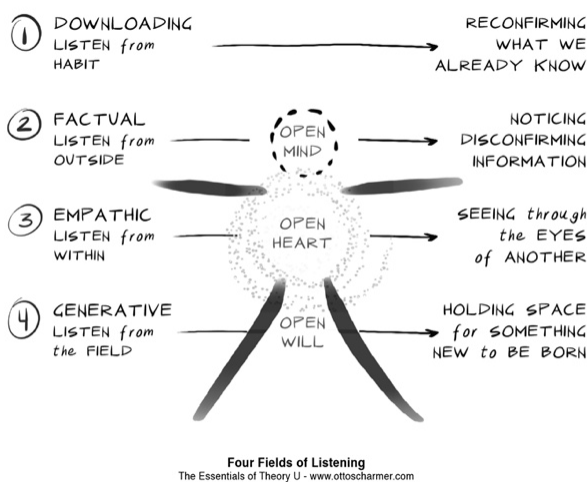
Now that so far, I haven't said anything new. Kind of, all of that, is well known. That doesn't mean that we do it, but it's all, all of that is well known.

Here is the one thing that maybe is new. And that has to do with **the fourth level of listening, generative listening**, which requires us to connect with our open world. That is our capacity to let go and let come. And that leads to connecting with an emerging future possibility that is helping us to connect more fully with our real source of who we are, who we are and who we want to be.

So, you know whether or not you are operating on level four, listening when you watch your level of energy. And when you watch whether or not your sense of self, your sense of identity has shifted a little bit towards who, the person who you really are and who you are moving towards.

So what are examples for level four listening is great coaches, right? A great coach is listening to you, is listening to me, only in terms of listening to all my struggles and empathizing with them. No, a great coach is listening to my current struggles in terms of noticing already the arrival of my highest future possibility. So connecting, seeing in me that my tomorrow self, my emerging future self. And by paying attention to it, helping me to actually connect with that.

So that's what great educators do. That's what great leaders do. They don't see you in terms of only your past but they see you in terms of your highest future possibility. And that's kind of what this fourth level of listening is about.



### Introducing David Whyte

Marc David Whyte is an Irish poet now living in the US. Creativity has been a theme in his work his whole career, and for me he is a great source of language for aspects of creative life that are otherwise difficult to express.

24:00 He publishes poetry, and also he writes poetic essays and speaks around the world. This segment is taken from a talk on Zoom, in which Whyte is reading and elaborating on an essay from his book *Consolations*. The essay is titled, "Beauty is the harvest of presence."

Presence. Attention. Beauty. Creativity. And the bridge between our inner life, those around us, and the wide world.

Here's David.

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## David Whyte, *Beauty is the Harvest of Presence*

David Whyte Beauty is the harvest of presence. Beauty is the harvest of presence. I love that line. I knew I was in there as soon as I said that. It's interesting to think about the harvest of presence. You know, not having a thought in your head while you converse with your loved one. Just coming from the place of appreciation and seeing, and hearing and being present. The privilege of proximity. Not what they've done, what they haven't done, what you need them to do, but just the harvest of sheer presence.

Beauty is the harvest of presence, the evanescent moment of seeing or hearing on the outside

what already lives far inside us; the eyes, the ears or the imagination suddenly become a bridge between the here and the there, between then and now, between the inside and the outside; beauty is the conversation between what we think is happening outside in the world and what is just about to occur far inside us.

Oh, that was a lovely sense of both rested presence in that the world, letting the world come and find you in its deep seated physical "isness." And the sense that it's finding something actually quite tidal inside us and moving.

That when we're in touch with the world—the moon, the cloud, the sky, the earth, another person's face in a really physical way—we actually find the place where things are just about to ha... you get the latest version of your own self, in a way. As it's precipitating. As the wave is actually breaking. Thinking of yourself in an oceanic sense: the wave of yourself breaking on reality. That's who you actually are and you are no one else. The rest is a bundle of opinions and versions of your history.

27:00 But to get a physical sense, just, of what's breaking right now, the pattern that's forming and reforming—this is attested to in all the experiences of breakthrough revelation and enlightenment throughout human history.

Beauty is an achieved state of both deep attention and self-forgetting: the self-forgetting of seeing, of hearing, smelling or touching that erases our separation, our distance, our fear of others. Beauty invites us, through entrancement, to that fearful frontier between what we think makes us, and what we think makes the world. Beauty invites us, through entrancement, to that fearful frontier between what we think makes us and what we think makes the world.

Beauty is almost always found in symmetries and intriguing asymmetries: the symmetries and asymmetries seen out in creation, the wings of the moth, the airy sky, and the solid earth. The restful focused eyes of a loving face which we see our own self reflected. The symmetry also, therefore, of bringing together inner and outer recognitions, the far horizon of otherness seen in that face joined to the deeper inner horizon of our own being. Beauty is an inner and outer complexion living in one face. Beauty is an inner and outer complexion living in one face. Beauty is an inner and outer complexion living in one face.

Beauty especially occurs in the meeting of time with the timeless; the passing moment framed by what has happened and what is about to occur: the scattering of the first spring apple blossom, the turning, spiraling flight of a curled leaf in the falling light, the smoothing of white sun-filled sheets by careful hands, setting them to air on a line, the broad expanse of cotton filled by the breeze only for a moment, the sheets sailing on into dryness, bellowing toward a future that is always beckoning, always just beyond us. Beauty is the harvest of presence. Beauty is the harvest of presence.



### Introducing extract from *The Heart Aroused*

Marc Thanks David. I don't know whether this poetic language is landing for you. It works pretty hard for me. This whole thing of "practicing creativity" on the one hand has utterly practical human stuff like putting our butts in the chair and making something.  
30:00 And then the bottom can drop, and we find ourselves in the deep water of soulful considerations. The conversation we had toward the end of our first session got into this territory. In the context of open mode and closed mode, and freeing ourselves from what inhibits our flow, I found myself bringing up the idea of alchemy in creativity. So I want to add one more thing from David Whyte, written almost thirty years before the piece you just heard.

And for this part it's less like I'm... well, I am going to read something. But I'm not formally reading every word. My image is that you and I are sitting in the same room, and we've got this book. And I'm reading from it, but at the same time, you know, we've been talking about creativity. And we've been talking about attention. And I have this suggestion I want to make that this theme of attention is not only about observing the world, listening to the world, turning our attention outward. Putting our ourselves in conversation with what we see. But it's also an interior attention, you know, getting ourselves in conversation with our inner processes so that we can eventually, in the reflection and sense-making stage of a creative process, put our interior processes in conversation with what we see in the world. A deep conversation between ourselves and the world as part of the creative process.

So I have this book. It's an older book from the poet, David Whyte, "Whyte" with a Y. The title is *The heart aroused: Poetry and the preservation of the soul in corporate America*. So he's a poet writing to people who work in corporations, and there's a lot in here about creativity.

I'm going to start reading in the middle of chapter three—"Fire in the earth: toward a grounded creativity." And I may not read it all straight through. His language... sometimes his sentences are kind of long. So I may repeat things for emphasis or go back and help us make sense together. Here we are sitting in this room. I wish you were here so we could actually talk about it. But... here we go.

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### Selection from David Whyte, *The Heart Aroused: Poetry and the Preservation of the Soul in Corporate America*, pages 111-114.

The sudden and intuitive capacity to feel deep emotion, what the romantic poets called *sensibility*, is the power of appreciation for *things as they are*.

33:00 He's saying the capacity to feel deep emotion is appreciation for *things as they are*.

Creativity means first accepting creation as it is and then joining the embryonic flow of patterns and events we see emerging from its center. We learn to discern and decipher when to float in the subtle turn and flow and when to strike boldly for shore, breaking through those flows and eddies as we go. We do this not only in the wide open water of possibility and success, but also in the dark, still-water knowledge of our limitations and failures. Joining these together, we acknowledge the ever-present portion of existence that refuses to absolve us from the cycles of decay because we work for successful companies. We find we do not have to be on top, in control, or in the driver's seat to feel we are participating, paid-up members of the world. We join the soul in its textured and maddening entanglement with everything that comes its way.

There's a section that begins called "Contained Fire."

Moving back to the image of flame, which began this chapter, we ground our creativity by making a hearth for our creative fire. With a hearth to warm the house in which we live we have a place to rest at the center of things. There is a long human relationship with the phenomenon of contained fire. It formed the basis of our ability to forge metal, to make exquisite Ming china, to propel a space shuttle beyond the clasp of our atmosphere, and, more soberly, to fire a bullet from a gun.

Contained fire is the vital force that we direct to accomplish first a task, but, more important, a way of being.

“Contained fire is a vital force we direct to accomplish a way of being.” That’s interesting.

As the fire of our creativity burns its way into our interior life as much as it transforms the world at large, we experience what the medieval philosophers called *the alchemical wedding*, the meeting of the interior world of a human being with the great soul of the world.

The meeting of the interior world of a human being with the great soul of the world.

36:00 This betwixt-and-between world is the very touchstone of creativity. It exists as much in a development plan as it does in a great canvas. At that border,...

(between the interior world of a human being and the great soul of the world)

...at that border the initial myopic concerns of the individual are burned away, first in the endeavor itself and then in the annihilation that occurs where the two worlds meet. It is this self-forgetfulness for which human beings long; the dross of self-preoccupation is burned away, leaving the pure gold of the ancient philosopher’s stone. A numinous engagement where the soul is seated on the bridge between the world we imagine and envision and the world as we find it. Refusing to choose, we do not sacrifice our practical duties for the mere seductions of fire, but become tenders of the flame, using it to fuse and hold together elements that would fall apart at room temperature.

The alchemists maintained that we can create only in our own image. That is, everything takes form according to the consciousness that shaped it. If our self-image is small and restricted, or cold and inert, then what we produce will most probably be stillborn, like its maker. It is essential, then, to know what is vital and alive inside us and shape our lives in its image. With a leaden appreciation of ourselves, everything we make takes on that dull weight. To create the golden moment, we must know where the gold lies in ourselves, but we must not have narrow, tidy images of what makes up our “gold.” Without the fiery embrace of everything from which we demand immunity, including depression and failure, the personality continues to seek power over life rather than power through the experience of life.

Ooh, that’s powerful. Without the embrace of depression and failure, things like that, without the embrace of the thing we wish we were immune from, including depression and failure, *we keep seeking power over life rather than power through the experience of life.*

We throw the precious metal of our own experience away, exchanging it for the fool’s gold of a superimposed image, an image of what our experience should be rather than what it actually is: the final element in the act of creation.

39:00 There is an ancient Chinese story of an old master potter who attempted to develop a new glaze for his porcelain vases. It became the central focus of his life. Every day he tended the flames of his kilns to a white heat, controlling the temperature to an exact degree. Every day he experimented with the chemistry of the glazes he

applied, but still he could not achieve the beauty he desired and imagined was possible in a glaze. Finally, having tried everything, he decided his meaningful life was over and walked into the molten heat of a fully fired kiln. When his assistants opened up the kiln and took out the vases, they found the glaze on the vases the most exquisite they had ever encountered. The master himself had disappeared into his creations.

Work is the very fire where we are baked to perfection, and like the master of the fire itself, we add the essential ingredient and fulfillment when we walk into the flames ourselves and fuel the transformation of ordinary, everyday forms into the exquisite and the rare.

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## Slava Polunin, What is Creativity?

Lastly, let's hear again from our friend the Russian Clown, Slava Polunin. This is another from the Russian television feature, "Seventy non-childish children's questions for Slava Polunin."

Listen for the connection to our theme of Attention. To my ear, Slava's definition of creativity partly involves paying attention to your own quirks and delights. He says "toy," I'll echo Elizabeth Gilbert and suggest that we could put "curiosity" in Slava's sentences and they'd work just fine. I know in my life, curiosity is itself a very fun toy.

I'll let you hear Dmitri Brikman ask the question, then a little of Slava answering in Russian, then I'll read the English translation.

Dmitri Brikman

13 лет. Мальчик. Что такое творчество?

Slava Polunin

Ой, в моем мире, Вот у меня есть маленький мир свой всегда. То есть вообще, вот как я подхожу к этому Мой принцип найти какуюнибудь хорошую....

Marc 13 years old. A boy. What is creativity?

Oh, in my world, you know, I always have a little world of my own. So, in general, this is how I approach it. My principle is to find a good toy for myself and create a harmonious world around that toy. Let it be for one person, then someone else for two, then for three, then for a room, then for a courtyard, then for a district. But gradually expanding, so that this toy brings joy to everyone. And when everything is in harmony, it means that everything is happening correctly.

42:00

And creativity is that little engine and key that give life to all of this. Because in order to unite all of this and have it involved in a single surge of interest, energy, and so on, it is necessary for this aspiration to be from each of those who surround you and to bring pleasure. And it turns out that creativity is just an endless source of pleasure. Because when you do what you love, what you like, and it works out for you, it's just amazing.

And most importantly, you break away from the inertial life, typical actions, and the mechanical principle of behavior. So, I do it like you, I do it like I did yesterday, and so on. That is, you transform from a mechanical character into a luxurious bud, unfolding endlessly, giving an infinite number of buds. Because I do everything not like others around me, but as I want. So, you unfold your inner resources and let them go, giving the opportunity to let go of this Golem, not to walk unsteadily. To look at the sky instead

of looking down, to spread your arms wide instead of standing, carefully nodding your head, and so on.

You act unusually, and you're unusual because you're different from everyone else. And that's natural. And if you don't imitate anyone but everything oozes out of you, comes out, you become an individual and a force. And creativity is just a great, great opportunity to be happy.

Thank you for listening.

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## Sources

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**David Whyte, *The Heart Aroused: Poetry and the Preservation of the Soul in Corporate America***

2002, Doubleday revised edition.

**Slava Polunin, *What is Creativity?***

This segment appears in part 1 of a three-part series with Slava Polunin as a guest on the program, "Children's Non-Childish Questions," hosted by Dmitri Brikman.

Here is Dmitri's description of the program: "The first episode of "Childish Non-childish Question" aired in 2006 during the Second Lebanon-Israel War. Adults were nervous. Would the rockets reach Tel Aviv? My eight-year-old son Misha, watching this, asked, "Why do people fight?" That's how this program was born, based on real questions that children ask adults: "Why is a person born?" "What is love?" "What is friendship?" and so on.

The program from which Slava's answer was taken appears here: "Seventy Children's Non-childish Questions for Slava Polunin, second series"—

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=8AzKWZKTt6g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8AzKWZKTt6g)

Marc Rettig produced the Russian-English translation with two essential tools: [happyscribe.com](https://happyscribe.com) and ChatGPT 3.5.

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This mixtape and its transcript were produced by Marc Rettig for the January 2024 conduct of *Creativity Practice x6*, a learning group for people who seek to kindle and deepen their creative practice.

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