



[\(https://www.sdicompanions.org/\)](https://www.sdicompanions.org/)



Never Lost in Darkness: Doubt as the Beacon of Transcendence, or The Divine Message of Inextinguishable Faith

by Diane Lucille Meyer

◀ [BACK TO PRESENCE \(/MEDIA/PRESENCE/PRESENCE-27-1-MARCH-2021/\)](/MEDIA/PRESENCE/PRESENCE-27-1-MARCH-2021/)

There is a koan offered by Zen teacher Roshi John Tarrant:

Q: When times of great difficulty visit us, how should we greet them?

A: Welcome.

These are strange times of great difficulty, and as a helper, whether you are a therapist, spiritual director, or teacher, the challenge of assisting someone in locating their strength and resiliency can feel like an impossible task. As

faith weakens, fear and panic increase, then depression and despair set in. Offered words may seem frivolous and weak and can be met with cynicism and shame.

What we forget is that we are born masters at working with uncertainty, difficulty, and strife, and as practitioners, the way to guide someone through the dark forest without language, maps, or magic is to help them reconnect to the creator that resides within their own hearts and souls, their creative source. It is there where they will find the natural movement through, by wordless dialogue with the Divine.

Faith is a journey, a personal pilgrimage on an untidy path of twists and turns, where we fall and lose our way over and over again. Agility of faith is unique to each soul, as the progress through the stages of development is influenced by beliefs and events that illuminate and define our course. Regardless, faith originated as a verb and still assumes an action that includes struggle. Unlike beliefs, faith is ever-moving, where beliefs become destinations and homesteads; and though belief systems differ, the processes of faith universally follow the same trail of crisis, doubt, and emergence continuously. In his book *Stages of Faith*, James Fowler offers that “faith involves an alignment of the heart or will, a commitment of loyalty and trust. . . . Faith, therefore, involves vision. It is a mode of knowing, of acknowledgment” (11). The vision he speaks of originates in our imagination and the alignment is reconciled through the agency of doubt.

When we imagine the possible and take steps to follow, regardless of whether it is a beautiful painting or a cure for a disease, we engage the creator within. Along this path, we encounter crisis and wrestle with doubt and fear to gain the faith and courage to risk the unknown.

My doctoral research (Meyer, *Reaching into Shadow*) sought to understand the nature of crisis within the creative process and how the shared space of artist and art that is penetrated by creativity as a third participant enlists crisis to move toward transformation. My participants were artists, including myself, who have lived our adult lives practicing art. What emerged were connecting themes about artistic crises, faith, and transcendence.

Essentially, my research was about the mystery of creation, an artist's relationship with his or her drive to persist and toil through difficulty so that the art can be born. Within these processes, my artists shared that they felt a connection to something greater than themselves, a connection to spirit that directed them and urged them forward even when they felt lost in the struggle of the work. There is something to be learned from this as companions—we may not have the power to reach into someone and turn the light back on, but we can direct them to a source that is already within them that will light the way as they look for comfort.

This article examines the interdependence of fear, doubt, transcendence, and faith as promises embedded within us and natural gifts from engaging in the creative process and engagement in inquiry. While offering some correlations to theological and philosophical sources to further reflect this interdependence, I offer the prospect that we can never lose our faith as it

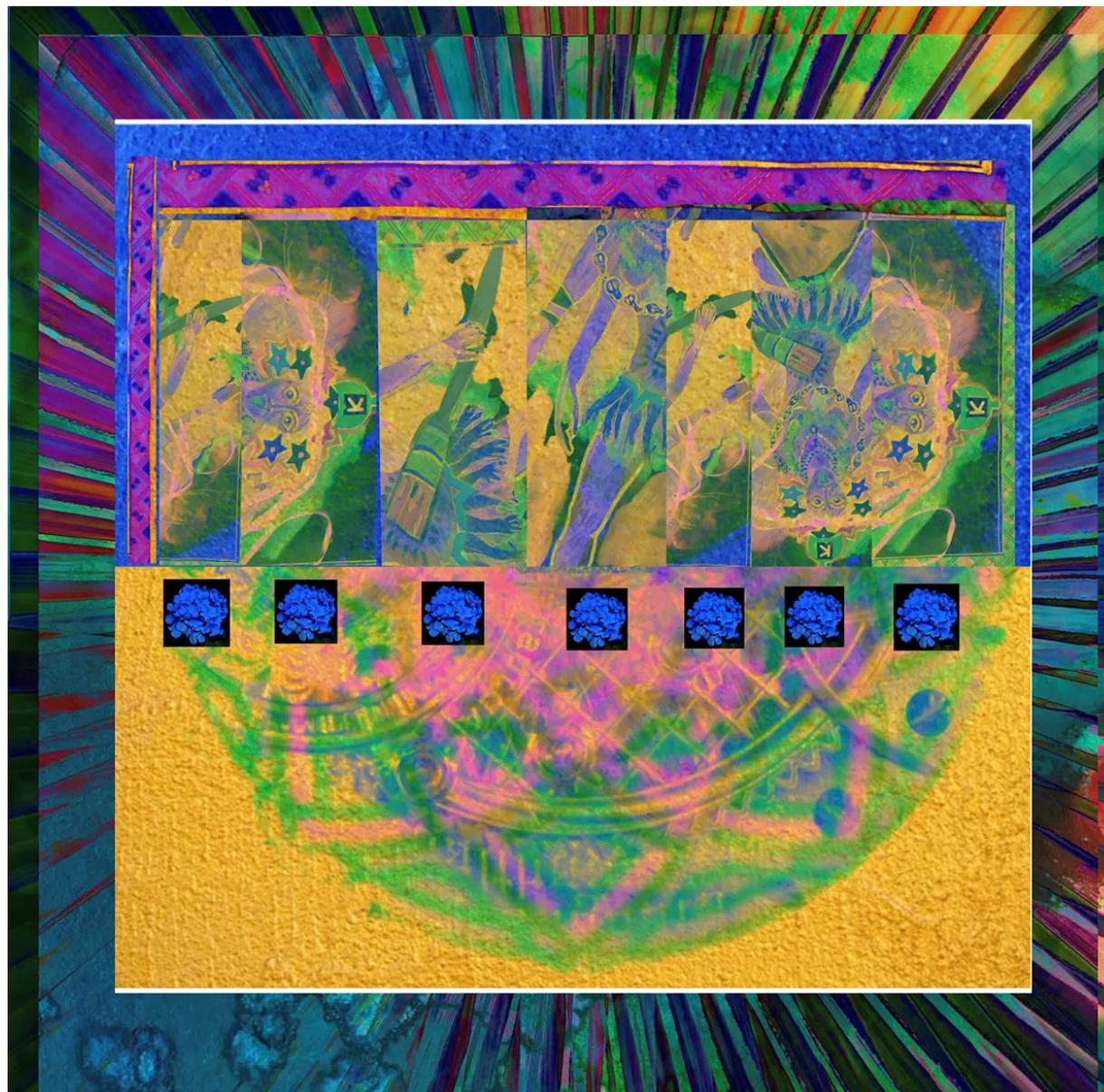
is held for us within our creative lives. For those moments when we are at a loss while attempting to help someone in a crisis of fear and uncertainty, redirecting them to their creative place can be the first step homeward.

Into the Mystery of the Penetralia



And I have filled him with the spirit of God, with the ability to distinguish between the good and the bad, and with the ability to discern the processes of construction, and with an intimate ability to perform the tasks, and in all manner of workmanship.

(Exodus 31:3)



“The Seven Sorrows” — Lisa Palchick

A bird weaves an intricate structure that will be a home for her eggs and babies. Are her thoughts of her offspring or of the sturdiness of the nest so it will weather wind and storms? I imagine there is forethought on some level as the work goes on. Perhaps some small knowledge of potential risk,

yet she builds the nest anyway, and as the wind blows and knocks her tiny twigs out of her carefully placed order, she continues and continues. To build the nest is instinct; there's a knowing that tells the bird where to find the materials and what to use and then when the nest is right.

Research suggests that creativity follows a spectrum of ability for humans and animals that includes the recognition of novelty, seeking of novelty, imitation or observational learning, and the attempt at innovative behaviors that would actually produce novelty (Kaufman et al., 256). We now know that other animals with complex brains seek out novelty, but those creatures with less complex brains still engage in the parts of creation that they are capable of, at more primitive levels on the spectrum. At the stages when higher attempts are made to produce novelty, disbelief appears. A bird building a nest does so with no interference of doubt, yet as complex beings we hesitate, lose faith, and suffer to regain it. Amazingly, at this point on the creative spectrum where doubt appears, spirituality also ignites, giving us little choice but to engage in the conversation between known and unknown, doubt and faith, or innovation and spirit.

All human beings possess the gift of creativity that can manifest in any endeavor, not just those producing music, paintings, or poetry. Embedded in these creative processes with desire for novelty and innovation are moments of doubt and uncertainty along with urgings toward transcendence and faith. The “intimate ability” makes us unique in our personal connection to our Creator or God; in my own research (Meyer, 101–78), artists attribute their moments of revelation as communication with something divine. This ancient message is a message of our continuance,

and as an artist who has grown familiar with that message, I have come to understand that when we engage in the intimate process, we build courage, faith, and spiritual strength.

The nineteenth-century English poet John Keats coined the phrase “penetralium of mystery,” a place of nothingness and not-knowing that becomes part of the essential condition for creativity (Bate, 17). The *penetralia*, being the innermost or secret areas of ourselves, are a source where art or any creative act originates. This cistern is deeply hidden, the scheme often cryptic and indecipherable, sometimes seen as having a will

of its own that punishes when neglected, allowing or denying nourishment to the artist altogether. Though terrifying at times, the artist attempts pilgrimage to the penetralium of mystery with each artistic question.

Once the artist reaches her penetralium, gestation of the work begins. During stages of gestation, a truly creative act employs both an observing self of the artist and a critical self. The sense of uncertainty is expected from the very start of the creative endeavor, from the blank canvas or paper or from the first word or note on through the building and uncovering of visual, musical, or narrative culture. The uncertainty either pains or enchants the artist so she will move to resolution and answers by exploring the darkness. This is a dance within and around the elements—and as one would say, the “mojo” gets going, soon revealing beats and rhythms between not-yet-known and known. This field of indeterminacy has been discussed by artists as disorienting and even disturbing, and the surrender

to the uncertainties of a creative work can feel quite dangerous (Meyer, 47). In the development of internal stamina and safety for needs that may not be art related, the mechanisms that strengthen the artist's ability to confront creative unknowns within herself at some point transfer to other aspects of her life. The observing self serves as a voice of muse inviting the artist to remain open in order to allow meanings, experiences, rhythms, revelation, and transformative processes to emerge. As the artist grows stronger, the observing self can then silence the critical self. What is seen as contrivance is allowed *in* as legitimate voice and a recognized facet of the unconscious. What is considered "outside the lines," or a mistake by the

critical self, is reconciled by the inner observer by hearing the message these unwanted parts bring to the culture of the work and further leading the artist along.

As a watercolor painter, I have found in my practice that the unpredictable nature of water presents the greatest risk and anxiety. Similarly, with a ceramicist the fire, or with a sculptor the hidden cleavage in stone, any artistic process employs an element that has the potential to go rogue. Each encounter is a practice of moving through risk to courage, and in time the process becomes an engagement of faith. Paintings left on the studio floor were all attempts at conversing with doubt and uncertainty, yet I return to this conversation again and again even when things do not go as planned. Reengaging in the process of risk and discovery develops fluency with the medium and sureness that artistic answers will surface and new paths will be revealed.

A quote from the memorable character Peter Pan says, “The moment you doubt whether you can fly, you cease forever to be able to do it” (Barrie, 136). To me, this quote speaks to the magical meanings and significance that artists will attach to their wordless language and indescribable persuasions and processes that come with fear of sudden abandonment, failure, self-doubt, and self-loathing. There is fear of *fear* in that they will lose the ability to cross the threshold and lose fellowship, lose their connection to spirit in their process. Barrie adds to this quote that “the reason birds can fly and we can’t is simply that they have perfect faith, for to have faith is to have wings” (ibid.).

I am reminded of so many childhood days where I attempted flight from tree limbs and stair landings, and from the story of Peter Pan I knew I had to believe before all else. In the beginning years of an artist’s career, fear and doubt strike terror not in the notion of the painting’s failure but in the effect the presence of doubt may have on “flying”; perhaps this would be the *final* failure, and the mysterious ability to paint will vanish and the spell be broken. Yet, the process that ensues with confronting doubt and giving up control leads the artist to discover that even with doubt, there can still be lift. The painting has supplied a field of possibilities, replies, and the magic the artist needs to sustain flight.

Theologian Paul Tillich has written that there is a close connection between courage and faith:



Being itself transcends every finite being infinitely; God in the



Being-itself transcends every finite being infinitely, God in the divine-human encounter transcends man unconditionally. Faith bridges this infinite gap by accepting the fact that in spite of it the power of being is present, that he who is separated is accepted. Faith accepts "in spite of"; and out of the "in spite of" of faith the "in spite of" of courage is born.

(Tillich, 172)

In my exploration of artistic crisis and creative courage, uncertainty always led to transcendence. "Discovery only happens if you let go" or "the excitement happens when the painting goes in a direction you had no concept" of (Meyer, 224) are comments from artists in my doctoral research

who spoke of this releasing and allowing the work to "speak," and though we strive for certain knowing, with no mystery there can be no art. Certainty is a room with locked windows and doors.

Henry Corbin maintains that when the imagination becomes "the slave to the calculative faculty" (*The Voyage*, 129), it convinces the soul to deny the realities of the spiritual world. However, it also presents as a disconnection or dissociation of fellowship to the Kingdom of the Divine. In other words, it denies access to transcendence. This agnosticism is the crisis of artists. Though it would seem, and it is often held, that doubt is the cause of this denial of access to the Kingdom of the Divine, once understood, doubt is

the very mechanism that offers a lighted path to our return. The artist risks uncertainty to try to render certainty, yet it's in the doubting, which tempts avoidance and fear of reaching, where we encounter our most brilliant passages.

Corbin was a theologian and philosopher who, though raised Protestant and Catholic, encountered the teachings of the Persian mystic Shihabuddin Yahya Suhrawardi while studying in Paris. Because of Suhrawardi's influence, Corbin regarded creation as theophany of the divine and a process of God, and imagination as a function of engaging with God. By this belief, art is a form of prayer, and a final work of art is the prayer answer or deliverance from the struggle within the process.

Processes of disbelief, uncertainty, and doubt flow as undercurrents to knowledge and personal beliefs. Creative and spiritual quests for answers follow along the lines of what Corbin refers to as *ta'wil* (Cheetham, 96), an

Islamic language of urgings that seek hidden or esoteric meanings, moving past the literal or obvious. Doubt functions in the ethereal language as part of the *operation* that provokes and creates consciousness, as a veil that obscures and reveals like a billowing drapery over an open window. The airy movement of doubt allows for glimpses and impressions, desire and possibility; and it is harmonic in essence as we are hearing and understanding on several levels simultaneously. In artistic language, harmonic perception is challenged by these very illusive veils, offering questions to the imagination that lead to discovery. It is in the rhythmic obscuring of the light where the artist learns to struggle in shadows by placing faith in that harmonic breeze.

The conversations that take place between artist and the work are known and manifested at the intuitive level, then realized and expressed within the imaginal. Islamic philosophy views prophet and philosopher as being led by the same impulse. From this stance and by including artists as visual iconic sages, we can better understand the exchanges in visual questions, answers, and revelation that are brought about by moving through the doubt to faith continuum. From early Islamic philosophy, Persian sages were mystics and ecstasies who drank from a source of divine knowledge and suspended the need to rationalize and prove, much like artists while immersed in their creative processes. They were seers and visionaries, and as sages they granted vision that in ancient Persia was called “The Light of Glory” and was known as an indwelling called Sakina (Corbin, *The Voyage*, 129). “This Sakina is the indwelling of the descended divine Lights in the temple of the mystic-soul” (128).

From the point of possession of the Sakina, there follows agency, a movement that parallels the artist’s engagement from the light to image. Corbin offers this as “agency of Intelligence of philosophers with the figure of the archangelic pleroma known to tradition as Gabriel, Angel of Revelation” (*The Voyage*, 121). Angel of revelation is considered interchangeable with angel of knowledge, appearing within the mystery of the struggle. Given the term *Javidan Kharad*, or *Sophia Aeterna*, an angel operates outside the rational world, in the liminal realm of uncertainty and with *soul-intellect*, which includes all that is irrational in its scope. This is purely imaginative and sense-disorienting perception, a place referred to by Corbin as the country of Not-where (*na-koia-abad*), a term Suhrawardi gives

to the imaginal world (121). Not-where is the place where the “body becomes spiritualized” (128). Corbin writes:

[Suhrawardi] fully realized that if this [imaginal] world were to disappear—if we were to lose all trace of it—then prophetic and mystical visionary experiences, as well as any event of Resurrection, would all lose their place. They would literally “no longer take place,” for their place is neither of the sensory nor the intellectual world, but that of the intermediary “eighth climate,” the world where the body is spiritualized, and the spiritual is embodied. . . . In the absence of the imaginal world, we are reduced to mere allegory, for the active Imagination itself has been degraded to the status of producer of the imaginary. . . . To

summarize, this ontology presupposes a metaphysics of the active Imagination; without such a metaphysics, there can be no theory of visionary knowledge.

(Corbin, 125)

In Christianity, as often examined, before his death, Christ experienced doubt as he felt his fellowship with the Father to be broken. Matthew 27:46 describes a thick darkness covering the day—not merely the absence of light but metaphorically a spiritual darkness—and he cries out on behalf of humanity’s fear of abandonment. Doubt as disbelief can be indicative as a

spiritual darkness if we consider that we must detach our spirits and hearts and endure the discomfoting fear that our fellowship with the unseen in the name of finding absolute truth has been erased. Christ carried our doubt to his death on the cross so that we would never be abandoned in our own darkness.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.

(Eph 2:8–9)

Derek Newton, theologian and professor of biblical interpretation, discusses biblical examples where faith and doubt are addressed (i.e., Eph 2:89, Col

1:29, 1 Pt 1:3–5) and maintains:

These New Testament texts show us that faith itself cannot be detached from its source and origin in God himself. If that is the case, then the very least we can say is that when we struggle in faith or “lose faith”, we are not actually deserted by God. If it is God who gives and sustains faith, then we are not in the struggle alone.

(Newton, 329)

Where fear, doubt, faith, and salvation live interdependently, it would follow that we naturally move in and through these chord progressions in the melody of our creative endeavors and the melodies of our lives. Within the movement of creativity is a dynamic that must play out. The encoded message that we are naturally programmed to meet doubt with faith is a map, an innate “GPS” home to God. It almost seems too simple to rest in this realization.

Returning to Tillich and the interconnection between faith and doubt, he offers that



if doubt appears, it should not be considered as the negation of faith, but as an element which was always and will always be present in the act of faith. Existential doubt and faith are poles of the same reality, the state of ultimate concern.... Serious doubt is confirmation of faith. It indicates the seriousness of the concern, its unconditional character.

(Tillich, 21-22)

Truth and Doubt as Evolving Principles and Channels of Discovery

Hungarian-British scholar, scientist, and philosopher Michael Polanyi discusses the character and function of doubt as it has served humanity in

our development of knowledge and consciousness. In the early days of science, it was held that “the acceptance of unproven beliefs was the broad road to darkness” (Polanyi, 269). Doubt was revered as an essential tool for uncovering truth, and in a sense truths were hidden in myths and lies until all of doubt had been exhausted.

Early on, René Descartes, seeking knowledge that was indisputable and grounded in solid reason, viewed the function of doubt as a mechanism to purge his mind of any ideas or beliefs that were based on trust alone. “In its stricter formulations the principle of doubt forbids us altogether to indulge in any desire to believe and demands that we should keep our minds empty, rather than allow any but irrefutable beliefs to take possession of them” (ibid.). For Descartes, without the employment of strong doubt, one was surrendering to impulse and imagination over reason.

Descartes began with the firm principle to accept no belief whatsoever that had not passed the test of unrestricted doubt. With this notion, doubt as a double-edged sword moves us toward the inclination of skepticism. As a skeptic, one must always doubt and disbelieve that which is proven, a move back into the comfort of doubt in a *reframing* of doubt. The proven theory then becomes the object of agnostic doubt—not believed and needing more proof—presenting the spiritual dilemma of avoiding the discomfort of accepting something false in order to choose the discomfort of doubt.

Descartes truly struggled with the spiritual dilemma of doubt and could not dismiss his desire to know his own imagination. In his First Meditation, Descartes points out that in his dreams, he experiences a reality as

Descartes points out that in his dreams, he experiences a reality as convincing as his waking reality. He can find no sure way to distinguish between waking life and sleep. He eventually concludes that if we dream of hands, feet, eyes, and bodies, then they must actually exist. With regard to the existence of God, Descartes offers a concession to Saint Thomas Aquinas's proof of the existence of God by saying the existence of the thinker cannot be explained,

save by the existence of an infinite being who created him, and indeed sustains him in being from one instant to the next. Now if an infinite being, that is, [G]od exists, possessing all perfections [for this is part of what Descartes understands as infinite], it is clear he must be no deceiver: for deception involves malice, an imperfection.

(Moriarty, xxxi)

The nineteenth-century Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard understood the dynamic between irony (doubt) and faith in that doubt represents an unavoidable movement toward something in the quest for truth and certainty but assures that this movement is ever-continuous, as nothing can be truly known (Stack, 195). Yet he reflects that as doubt appears, it invites us to leave that place of not knowing and set out on the journey to the possible. It is in the possible where the notion of something from nothing can be imagined, and where faith is the only thing that lies between.

As living systems change and develop, Rupert Sheldrake suggests that laws of nature do as well and these laws evolve forever. All laws change as phenomena become more complex. Truth as the destination will always elude, moving out of grasp as knowledge advances. Fixed answers eventually give way to new truths (Sheldrake, xiv). The movement from disbelief to truth must pass through unstable territory where “either-or” can mislead or deceive. Curiously, with our intellectual evolution, the characteristic of *doubt* seems to have changed and moves more from chaos to stability as the physical world evolves. If we consider *process* as a creative movement, and the progression of acceptance of new ideas as following an *evolution* of the larger scheme of knowledge, then disbelief, doubt, change, and new truths are the living elements in this system.

Even the physicist Albert Einstein understood the harmonic movements as vehicle of spirit and sense data as nonlogical, noninferential movements of intuitive apprehension (Monti, 18). The movement from doubt to *knowing* is easily ripened to the movement of doubt to *faith*, suggesting the naturalness of this persuasion for spiritual beings. The movement of doubt to faith is an innate process that can be engaged through safe milieus for the individual by spiritual or artistic seeking. The artistic field as “kingdom” acquires innovation from doubt, offering the ponderance that doubt, grace, and deliverance spring from the same source and function perfectly as interdependent gifts.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi describes similarities of the creative flow process to

religious rituals in that both are attempts to create order in consciousness. While one engages in flow experiences, one moves from anxiety or boredom (uncertainty states) into the flow channel where one then feels limitlessness, confidence, assuredness, and faith (Csikszentmihalyi, 74–76).

As the notion of truth evolves and transcends, we have to validate that the intuitions come from our imaginal realm—those sparks of God; the anomalous happenings grow more stable as doubt advances to the realm of *not yet proven*. Even answers to the eschatological questions of eternal life and transcending the physical realm seem more reachable and slightly more in focus.

Richard Tarnas offers a rationale of doubt's function and evolution when he writes:

With the advent of reason, everything seemed open to doubt, and each succeeding philosopher offered solutions differing from his predecessor's. If the world was governed exclusively by mechanical natural forces, then there remained no evident basis upon which firm moral judgements could be founded. And if the very true reality was entirely divorced from common experience, then the very foundations of human knowledge were called into question. It seemed that the more man became freely and consciously self-determining, the less sure was his footing. Still, that price appeared well worth paying if human beings could be emancipated . . . into the genuine order of things.

(Tarnas, 24, 25)

Only in looking back to the early days of knowledge can we see how the process of knowledge evolution *required* fear of the unseen, fear of the unprovable, and doubt. Things had to be this way for knowledge to progress. Yet we can see Descartes wanting so badly to preserve the small corner of his heart for sacred mystery, faith, and fellowship, there again acknowledging the need for harmonic resonance and a place to rest transparently in something more. As we move along in our creative searching, denial weakens, and imagination for what is possible grows increasingly more powerful. In a world that seems to grow more hostile and socially divided, as a living system could we be evolving in spite of ourselves toward greater fellowship with God? When considering process and living

systems, Fritjof Capra discusses the ambiguities within a living system as both determined and free, and the behavior of organisms as influenced within its own structure. He writes:

Living systems, then, respond autonomously to disturbances from the environment with structural changes, i.e. by rearranging their pattern of connectivity... More than that, the living system not only

specifies its structural changes; it also specifies which disturbances from the environment trigger them. In other words, a living system maintains the freedom to decide what to notice



and what will disturb it. . . . The structural changes in the system constitute acts of cognition. By specifying which perturbations from the environment trigger changes, the system specifies the extent of its cognitive domain; it “brings forth a world,” as Maturana and Varela put it.

(Capra, 36)

Through the process of living or the bringing forth of a world, humans grow more fluent in reading the language of the process. This is where artists and mystics nurture along humanity in its conjuring of the world. The artist or mystic knows the unseen and births it into a reality that is digestible by current understanding. The artist or mystic knows the language of the imaginal where all that is bound in the rational realm by doubt or reason can speak freely. The fact that we now have science *listening* affirms a shift in the character of doubt that seems remarkable.

From my own personal experience as an artist, I recall my awareness of color before learning to see and mix color during my art school days. It was so difficult to see the subtleties and the complements in order to grey or tone down the color. My teacher would say, “If you think you see it, then you *do* see it.” This may have been training in color theory, but it taught me to trust and believe my liminal language. It sharpened my sensing and intuitive skills until I eventually could see the colors and accurately replicate them. In a passage from a personal journal of my early artist days, I wrote about my own experience with the uncertainty of the unknown. Now late in my career, I have faith during moments of “disorientation” that I will

eventually understand the work:

Embracing the discomfort and knowing that I am in uncharted territory, the goal of this painting is to create a feeling that something “just happened”—a disturbance, a breeze, a simultaneous movement of before and after. The impression of a divine occurrence when the “during” was in my sleep, a trance, or my unconscious. The moon is now a place in an ideal sky with a divine protector. This painting becomes a pure and deliberate effort to get lost, disoriented, turn upside down in a chaotic world of process and trust much like a child spinning and spinning to enjoy the dizziness. At this stage, color mixing is easier, intuitive and small things become big things. What is orderly loses meaning and impact, and what is chaos becomes a sublime flow. There are no words to describe this, only a knowing.

(personal journal entry, 2004)

Encountering Crisis, Disorientation, and Seeing Uncertainty as a Gift

One of the amazing developments of thought in modern times is the glad acceptance of doubt.

(Christian Kettler)

We must believe we have lost our faith and work to regain it for transcendence. An artist's use and purpose are always in the margins and not quite in focus. To some extent, there is a constant losing and regaining of faith, wrestling with doubt in the imaginal, that constant losing and regaining of that fellowship between humanity and the divine. It is the soul's nature to be a stranger in the literal world. "When a person feels thrown into a world as a Stranger, then something is amiss with both the person and the world—the soul is disoriented, and things must be set right" (Cheetham, 75). This disorientation is the crisis in creativity where one dutifully works to transcend. From this perspective, we can understand how one can grow familiar with disturbance, disorientation, or uncertainty in a way that could be appreciated.

Perhaps in any circumstance, crisis can be defined as a perceived break or weakness in the continuance of a previously comfortable system, but crisis is inevitable if anything new is to be brought forth. There must be a shift in stability to allow for new life, but one cannot predict the moment of occurrence or the character of the crisis. Crisis appears as a condition of doubt in the imaginal realm and is often perceived as disconnection from creator, loss of faith, or denied access to God; but it is the struggle with this perception that proves necessary to our transcendence as the mystery beckons.

Creativity and creation are a living force that comes out of the dark penetralium (Bate, 17), the space of "Not-where" (Corbin, *The Voyage*, 125),

the nothingness. That in itself suggests from nothing *a something*, and by stepping into the nothingness, we become available to that something.

Christian Kettler offers that without doubt, faith loses vitality (41). With complete certainty, there is no reason to tolerate another viewpoint or an alternate solution. The “mystery” of faith is disregarded and denied. Real and true love humbles us to acknowledge the bewilderment and perplexity of uncertainty. Those who reside in the desert of certainty merely hold on to what Geddes MacGregor refers to as “wonderless belief” and can offer only wonderless (narcissistic) love rather than an outpouring of love for another (115).

Keats used the term “negative capability” as a way of describing the openness and posture of the artist while engaged in the creative process (Bate, vii). He spoke particularly about poetry and literature, but any

maneuvering through the world of the imagination requires that one endure the discomfort of negative capability in order to create anew. In a letter to his brothers George and Thomas dated September 21, 1817, Keats offers Shakespeare as a prime example of “mastery” of negative capability giving the definition as the ability to inhabit “uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason” (xii). He refers to Shakespeare as a “Man of Achievement” because of this ability (ibid.). Negative capability by Keats’s terms is the ability to remain “content with half-knowledge,” and with artists, the “sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration” (ibid.). This is not an easy achievement and takes a lifetime of courage gathering to grow

content in this condition.

That realm of doubt and uncertainty offers possibility and calls for and demands a response from the source; as in any urging to estuary, the passage requires crisis as a wearing away and consummation of the river banks by the waters that flow between the instability of the unknown and the bright new land. Both light and shadow have their place in the order of creation, and both offer blessings. With the notion that doubt and faith are necessary as the movement toward transcendent truth, creative discovery, or divine access, we can see that art offers us assurance in its processes, which are ultimately faith building and healing in areas too dangerous to venture. As a process that existed before humankind, as a process that is universal in movement, creativity or creation is in essence the vehicle that carries our doubt or faith dynamic for us. We learn to trust this process in art, and by this we learn to trust in our salvation.

Encoded in creative process is a message from the Creator, that in our struggle with doubt and faith, we cannot fail as children of God. We will always find our way home. We are wired to tolerate uncertainty, and our souls thrive in the dense forest of the unknown. Uncertainty is familiar to us from the time we are thrust into this world, as discovery is essential to our growth. Acquiring the spiritual hardiness to face yet another dark forest requires us to reach for courage within our deep well of experience with fear, doubt, and transcendence. We can encourage our clients, patients, and students to bid “welcome” to these difficult times by activating their creativity and look for the help that will come from that unknown place.

References

Barrie, James Matthew. "Peter Pan." In *The Little White Bird*, 131–40. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913.

Bate, Walter Jackson. *Negative Capability: The Intuitive Approach in Keats*. 1939. Reprint, New York: Contra Mundum Press, 2012.

Capra, Fritjof. *The Hidden Connections*. London: HarperCollins, 2002.

Cheetham, Tom. *All the World an Icon: Henry Corbin and the Angelic Function of Beings*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2012.

Corbin, Henry. *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi*. 1969. Reprint, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998.

———. *The Voyage and the Messenger: Iran and Philosophy*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1998.

Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. New York: Harper & Row 1990.

Fowler, James W. *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*. New York: HarperCollins, 1995.

Kaufman, Allison B., Allen E. Butt, James C. Kaufman, and Erin N. Colbert-White. "Towards a Neurobiology of Creativity in Nonhuman Animals." *Journal of Comparative Psychology* 125, no. 3 (May 2011): 255–72.

Kettler, Christian. *The God Who Believes: Faith, Doubt and the Vicarious Humanity of Christ*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2005.

MacGregor, Geddes. *Christian Doubt*. New York: Longmans, Green, 1951.

Meyer, Diane Lucille. *Reaching into Shadow: An Exploration of Transcendence through Artistic Crisis*. Doctoral dissertation, 2014. Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Database. UMI No. 3607752.

Monti, Anthony. *A Natural Theology of the Arts: Imprint of the Spirit*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003.

Moriarty, Michael. *René Descartes. Meditations on First Philosophy: With Selections from the Objections and Replies*. New York: Oxford Press, 2008.

Newton, Derek. "Faith, Doubt and Biblical Criticism: Spiritual Survival in the Shifting Sands." *Evangelical Quarterly* 82, no. 4 (2010): 326–39.

Polanyi, Michael. *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958.

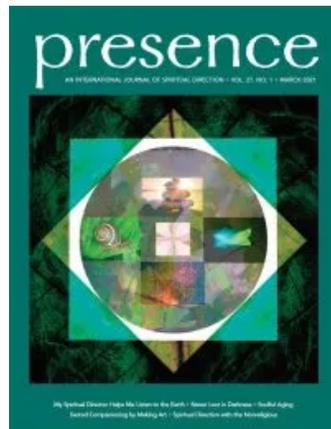
Sheldrake, Rupert. *Morphic Resonance: The Nature of Formative Causation*. Rochester, VT: Park Street Press, 2009.

Stack, George. "Kierkegaard's Ironic Stage of Existence." *Laval Théologique et Philosophique* 25, no. 2 (1969): 192–207.

Tarnas, Richard. *The Passion of the Western Mind: Understanding the Ideas That Have Shaped Our World View*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1991.

Tillich, Paul. *The Courage to Be*. 2nd ed. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000.

This Article Appears In



[\(/media/presence/presence-27-1-march-2021/\)](/media/presence/presence-27-1-march-2021/)

presence [\(/media/presence/\)](/media/presence/)

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

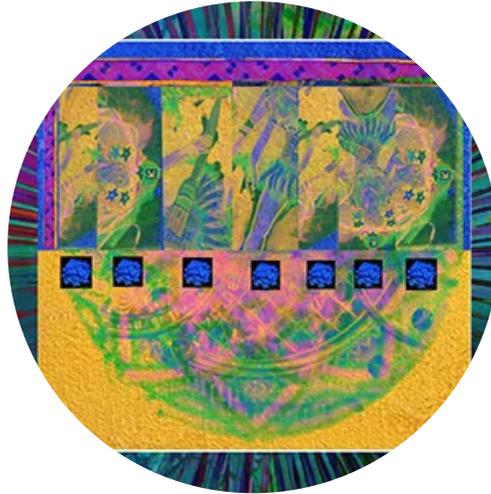
Volume 27, Number 1 – March 2021

Author



Diane Lucille Meyer, PhD, is a professional artist and research psychologist. She received her doctorate in psychology from the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology in Palo Alto, California, USA, with a specialization in creative expression and an emphasis in spiritual psychology. She can be found at www.dianemeyerart.com (<http://www.dianemeyerart.com/>).

Artist



Lisa Palchick graduated from the Rhode Island School of Design with a BFA in painting, an MA in education, and an MA in communications from Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, Michigan, USA. Lisa is now a working artist and a spiritual director and is affiliated with the Spirituality Network, Columbus, Ohio, USA. Contact Lisa at lisa.palchick@icloud.com (<mailto:lisa.palchick@icloud.com>).



Mission
Statement

About

Quick Links

Simple Home Page
(/easy)

The Home of Spiritual Companionship

Contact Us

PO Box 3584
Bellevue, WA 98009
USA

1-425-455-1565

office@sdiworld.org
(mailto:office@sdiworld.org)

SDI is an educational nonprofit, serving 7,000 members in 42 countries around the world, committed to supporting and growing access to spiritual companionship and the deep listening, open questions and compassion our healing modality offers.

SDI is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Tax ID: 94-3156697

What Is Spiritual Companionship? (</what-is-spiritual-companionship/>)

Do I Need A Spiritual Companion? (</do-i-need-a-spiritual-companion/>)

Who Is A Spiritual Companion? (</about/am-i-a-spiritual-companion/>)

Getting Started (</getting-started/>)

Portrait of a Spiritual Director/Companion (</media/portrait-of-a-spiritual-director-companion/>)

Guidelines For Ethical Conduct (</media/guidelines-for-ethical-conduct/>)

Meet the SDI Staff (</about/staff/>)

Meet the Coordinating Council (</about/coordinating-council/>)

Buy or Renew Membership (</shop/membership-features/>)

Print Membership Form (</docs/media/SDI%202020%20Member>)

Login or View My Account (</my-account/>)

Forgotten Password (</my-account/lost-password/>)

Subscribe to SDI Updates (</media/subscribe/>)

Find a Spiritual Companion (</find-a-spiritual-companion/>)

Donate to SDI (</shop/donate/>)

SDI Store (</store-home/>)

SDI Events (</sdi-events/>)

sdievents.org
(<https://www.sdievents.org/>)

sdijourneys.org
(<https://www.sdijourneys.org/>)



History of SDI
(/about/history-of-sdi/)

(https://www.twitter.com/SDI_world/)



(<https://www.facebook.com/sdiworld/>)



(<https://www.instagram.com/sdiworld/>)



(<https://www.linkedin.com/company/spiritual-directors-international/>)



(<https://www.youtube.com/user/sdiworld>)



(<https://www.sdicompanions.org/feed/>)