The Generative Way of Life:
A Practical Perspective

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I have been asked to follow Dan McAdams' talk on the theory of generativity with some reflections on generativity from a practical point of view. I have also been asked to illustrate how stories might play a role in encouraging generativity. It so happens that I have just now finished writing a book with those very objectives in mind, so I will try to convey to you the approach I adopted there.

That approach is really quite simple: to take research conducted by McAdams and others; to add insights from history, biography, literature, and religion; and to cast it all in the ancient metaphor of the Way. By the "Way," I mean the road or the path along which a spiritual journey takes place. What I call the Generative Way describes certain aspects, certain phases even, of the generative experience, whether that experience lasts an adult lifetime or a brief portion thereof.

I have found it helpful to illuminate this Generative Way by telling stories. One kind of story that I use is the teaching tale, whether a fairy tale for adults or a parable from one of the world's religions. Another is the life story--the actual words of people who have been through a variety of generative experiences. The latter is especially important. Probably the best way to "teach" generativity is to take the words of those who are further down the Way and pass them on to others who are not so far along. Sometimes these words provide an "answer" to a dilemma involving generativity, but often their contribution is to articulate the dilemma in a clarifying way. The words of fellow travelers can give us an idea of what to expect if we wish to adopt a generative way of life.

What I will describe in this talk, then, are phases of a process that can take place in any and all of generativity's domains:

(1) in the biological domain, which covers the begetting, bearing, and nursing of children--the passing on of living substance (genes and blood and milk)

from one generation to the next;

(2) in the parental domain, which refers to the rearing of children and the initiation of them into a family's way of life;

(3) in the technical domain, which describes the teaching of skills and procedures--how to play games, how to work with wood, how to write, how to handle money, how to repair a car, how to perform surgery, how to program a computer, and so on;

(4) and in the cultural domain, which refers to conserving, renovating, or creating a meaning system and passing it on to others. In the cultural domain, one teaches not only how to do things (technical generativity) but also what beliefs inform them, what values sustain them, what theory lies behind them, what they "stand for," what their "soul" or "spirit" is.

The phases I will describe are eight, and they can be considered steps on the Generative Way. They are: (1) talking to your past, (2) stopping the damage, (3) finding a voice of your own, (4) blending your voice with another's, (5) creating, (6) selecting, (7) letting go, and (8) responding to outcome. These are not "self-help" steps; they are not terribly distinct; and their sequence can vary somewhat. But they do serve as markers. You can see a particular episode of your life in terms of them, or your life as a whole. You can go through them--travel the Way--more than once. And though I call them steps, they do not always involve an active doing. Often on the road I describe there are moments of standing still as well as walking, of being passive as well as active, of receiving as well as giving. We do not always dictate the terms of our generativity, in other words. Sometimes we have to let those terms come to us.

Let us look at each of the steps in turn.

(1) Talking to Your Past

The first step on the Generative Way involves the past. Before we can leave a legacy for future generations, we must first come to terms with the legacy we have received from previous ones. If that legacy is benevolent, we can pass it on intact. If it is

malevolent, we can stop its transmission. And if, as in most cases, it is a mix of good and bad, we can transform it. But in all these circumstances we need to find a way of "talking" to the legacy. How to do that, especially when the legacy is overpowering, is suggested by a teaching tale entitled "The Fisherman and the Djinni."

This story comes from the Arabian Nights collection, the one in which the maiden Scheherazade keeps herself alive by telling the king stories every night for 1001 nights. It is one of the oldest and simplest stories in the entire work. Scheherazade's tale begins with a poor fisherman standing on the shore and casting his net into the sea. He is "getting on in years," the story says, but he still has a wife and three children to support. So he needs a good catch. When the time comes to pull in his net, it won't budge. So he stakes part of it to the ground, takes off his clothes, and dives in after the rest. He finally manages to haul everything in, only to discover that the net contains nothing but the carcass of a dead ass. Disappointed, he cleans the net and throws it in a second time, this time praying to Allah for good luck. Now his net strains even more than before. The fisherman thinks it is teeming with fish, but once he gets it up on shore he sees that he has dredged up a huge jar full of sand and mud. He makes a third cast, but all he gets this time are the shattered remains of pots and bottles.

In despair, the fisherman prays again to Allah and makes his final cast of the day. This time, when he pulls in his net, he finds in it a small copper bottle sealed with lead. It appears to be very old. The fisherman digs out the seal with his knife, shakes the bottle, and out comes a column of smoke that turns into a huge and terrifying djinni (or genie) who was imprisoned 1800 years before by the prophet Solomon. Enraged at having been confined so long, the djinni looms over the fisherman and threatens to kill him. "Prepare to die," he says, "and choose the way it will happen."

But the fisherman is clever. "I can't believe you fit in that little bottle," he says, and soon he has tricked the djinni back into the bottle and reinserted the lead stopper. "Now you choose the way <u>you</u> will die," he declares, and threatens to throw him back in the sea. "I will stay on this very spot and warn everyone who passes of your treachery."

The djinni struggles to escape but cannot. So he tries a different approach, begging humbly for his life. Then a curious thing happens. The fisherman tells him a

story.

"You deserve the fate of the king in the tale of 'Yunan and the Doctor,'" says the fisherman.

"How does it go?" asks the djinni.

So the fisherman tells him a long story that turns out to have stories within the story. When the fisherman is finally done, the djinni offers to tell a story of his own. Gradually, the two become acquainted with each other. The fisherman relaxes his guard, the djinni promises him no harm, and the fisherman cautiously reopens the flask. Then the djinni takes him on a magic journey that eventually leads to the freeing of the fisherman's land from the spell of an evil sorceress.

Although this tale was never intended as such, I have found it to be an apt metaphor for the first step of the Generative Way. In the tale, a man retrieves from the sea--a symbol of his own inner depths--legacies left by previous generations. He is fishing for something to sustain himself and his family, but all he gets is brokenness (the pottery shards), burden (the urn filled with mud), and death (the carcass of the ass). Waste, all of it. Then he comes to the smallest of the legacies and the only one that is sealed up. When he breaks the seal, terror leaps out and overpowers him. But the fisherman takes the time to talk to the terror and to learn what lies behind it. After a while, the contents of the bottle seem less frightening. When the fisherman releases them, they become life, powerful and energetic life, and they steer the fisherman into a kind of generativity he could not have imagined. In the end, he reaches far beyond his family and liberates his land for future generations.

The djinni in this story had been put in the copper bottle 1800 years before by the prophet Solomon. The length of time involved and the status of Solomon suggest that the legacy in question was cultural. But legacies come in all sorts of guises, good as well as bad. The symbolic bottle may contain talents or diseases encoded in our genes (in the case of biological generativity), a history of family love or violence (parental generativity), a mentor's approach to solving a problem, whether elegant or awkward (technical generativity), or an artist's view of good and evil (cultural generativity). Some of these legacies--our genetic makeup, for example--go back millions of years, while

others--beliefs about good and evil--go back thousands. Still others are the remnants of the many experiences we have had in our own short lifetime.

In the language of psychoanalysis, one learns to "talk" to the past by having one's defense mechanisms mature. A longitudinal study of men conducted by George Vaillant provided empirical evidence that such maturation does indeed lead to generativity. Of the men with predominantly mature defenses by their mid-30s, 64 percent were generative at age 47. Of those with predominantly immature defenses, none were. In research on parent-child attachment, there is a related finding: approximately 75 percent of mothers who had made their memories of the past "coherent" (even when the memories were painful) had children who were securely attached to them. "Coherent" meant that the memories were integrated, that specific examples supported generalizations, that connections between past and present made sense. On the other hand, nearly 75 percent of mothers with incoherent memories had children who were insecurely attached. The men with mature defenses and the mothers with coherent memories had learned to "talk" to their past, and that made a difference in their generativity.

(2) Stopping the Damage

Sometimes a legacy from the past is so damaging that it cannot be talked to. The bottle with djinni must be thrown back into the sea, and warnings posted of the danger it poses.

Many people--probably more than we imagine--do just that. They receive a crippling or even life-threatening legacy from the past, absorb it, and try to live so that none of it infects others. These people possess extraordinary generative qualities; but, paradoxically, they express those qualities by not passing something on. Though they themselves may bear scars, they say of a sequence of intergenerational damage, "It stops here. It ends with me." I call these people intergenerational buffers. Not all of us have to do what they do, but their actions are distinctive enough to be considered a second step on the Way.

A young married couple I once interviewed--I will call them Karen and Don--illustrate intergenerational buffering in the biological domain. They wanted to start a

family but were troubled by a puzzling coincidence. A few years before, Don's sister had given birth to a daughter with abnormalities that matched a pattern in Don's younger brother: a heart defect, a double thumb, a club foot, and severe mental retardation. One child like this in the family could be attributed to "accident" or "fate," thought the couple, but two could not. Karen and Don went to a human genetics clinic and began a process of discovery. With the help of a counselor, they constructed a family tree, identified potential carriers of the disorder, and persuaded them to get a blood test. Don's test confirmed the couple's worst fear: he was a carrier and potential children were at risk. A hidden legacy in his life had been revealed, a bottle from the sea opened to view.

As a result of this revelation, Don fell into a guilty silence. Not only was he the carrier of a genetic defect; he was disappointing his wife, who desperately wanted to have a baby. He thought of artificial insemination, rejected the idea, and came close to abandoning altogether the idea of having children.

Then, suddenly and surprisingly, after beginning to look into adoption, Karen discovered that she was pregnant. (The couple had also been having problems with infertility.) Now the process of discovery was extended one generation down, as Karen underwent amniocentesis to determine the status of her unborn fetus. Along with discovery there occurred a process of definition: "damage" would be considered a child with the same pattern of problems that existed in Don's family. Definition is important because in matters of buffering people often make different and even conflicting judgments. Karen's mother is an example. She would not tolerate an abortion, Karen told me. "She kept saying, 'There is no way that you will terminate your pregnancy if you get bad news. There is just no way.' She didn't tell anyone I was pregnant." To an opponent of abortion, "damage" is not a child with an abnormality but the ending of fetal life. And so one who buffers damage in one domain and from one point of view inflicts it in and from another.

Karen's amniocentesis revealed that hers was to be a child with severe abnormalities. "Maybe I should go ahead and have the child," she remembered thinking, "because it could be the only one I'll ever have." But she and Don had already decided under what conditions they would terminate their pregnancy. "If the fetus had been a

carrier, then we were going to go ahead and go full term and have the child. But we did not want to have a child that we knew would have physical deformities and be mentally retarded." They had to inform their families of their intentions, and that included Karen's mother. "When we called and said, 'It's bad news and I'm terminating the pregnancy,' she just couldn't believe it."

Karen's abortion was no easy matter for her. "It's not like I just lost the baby, I had a miscarriage. I willfully went in and terminated a pregnancy, and it was hard for people to deal with it. My mother called to find out how I was doing afterwards but then dropped the subject. When I went back to work, everyone acted like things should be normal, like nothing had ever happened, and I was definitely mourning."

The experience left Karen more determined than ever to have a baby. She and Don talked again of artificial insemination, but Don knew he could not accept a child she conceived through that process. Karen had corrective surgery to help her become pregnant and began taking fertility drugs. Three months later she conceived once again. "Although the odds were that it wouldn't happen again, we were very, very reserved. I never thought past the amniocentesis. It was: I'm not going to buy any baby clothes. I'm not going to get a crib. I'm not going to do anything until I know everything is okay." They got the results from amniocentesis on a memorable Friday morning. "The phone rang," said Karen, "and when I talked to the nurse, I tried to read into her voice whether it was good or bad. And she said, 'I've got good news. Everything is fine.' The baby was not even a carrier. And then I asked the sex. I thought if any human being knows, then I'm going to know. So we found out it was a boy. We started planning and we started coming up with names. When he was born, they took a blood sample and double checked. He was perfectly normal."

What happened in this story in generativity's biological domain happens in other domains as well. Kathy Kotre and I have written about a mother who stopped a tradition of abusive childrearing in her family (the parental domain); about a physician who refused to perform traditional, and questionable, surgical procedures on women (the technical domain); and about a married couple who tried to change their church's teaching on birth control because of the burden it was imposing on younger families (the cultural

domain). In his or her own way, each served as an intergenerational buffer who said, "The damage stops here."

(3) Finding a Voice of Your Own

Part of what enables a person to served as a buffer is a third aspect of the generative experience, finding a voice of your own. This is what Erik Erikson called establishing an identity; and identity, incidentally, is an aspect of generativity that has been studied extensively by Dan McAdams and his colleagues.

I know of no better example of finding a voice than that provided by a 37-year-old African-American named Herb Robinson. Herb's life story tells us that even a legacy of value, even a benevolent djinni, can be overpowering. Herb's earliest memory of life is being in church on a Sunday morning, a small church with dark, high-backed pews. There he is held securely in his mother's arms while he looks up in awe at his father, who is preaching the word of God.

From the time he was four years old, Herb experienced callings to do the work his father does. For twenty-five years he wrestled with the questions they posed. Was he truly called, and, if so, when would he answer? And could he even come close to being as great as the man he looked up to? His struggle was with a legacy of value, one worth passing on. But such legacies have their own problems. To a young man, a great father can be as imposing as the djinni encountered by the fisherman. How do you become your own person when you stand in awe of such a man? How do you put your voice--not his--into your generativity?

I cannot imagine forces of modeling more powerful than those in the Robinson home. Herb was the oldest boy and had been given his father's name. Herb, Sr., was "stern" but not "strict." An excellent bowler and golfer, he taught his son baseball, basketball, and football, and Herb played them all. This is the ordinary stuff of male generativity, but in Herb's case there was more. As few boys do these days, he saw his father outside the family context, saw him at work--witnessed individuals coming forth, trembling, in response to his call, witnessed entire congregations being raised by him to a climax of dancing and shouting and ecstasy. "Years ago, my grandmother told me,

'There's something special about your father. He's a blessed man. So you just pay close attention to him.'" Herb did just that, making even loftier identifications. Seeing his father cry over the assassination of Martin Luther King, he began to draw comparisons. "I used to put my father and Martin Luther King in the same category because someone once told me that they were just alike, but one had fame and the other didn't."

When Herb told his parents of his childhood callings, they were encouraging but noncommittal. It proved to be a wise position, for in his adolescence Herb became "bullheaded." "When my father would tell me to turn right, I would go left. If he'd tell me to go straight ahead, I'd back up. All because I wanted to be my own man." Still, at age 19, he announced to his father that he wished to be a minister. He told him why: "People were saying I looked like a preacher, I acted like a preacher, I talked like a preacher, I sang like a preacher. So I might as well be a preacher. My father said, 'No, son, that's not it.' He rebuffed me. He sent me away. At first I felt rejected. But then I thought, well, maybe I'm not supposed to be a preacher."

But the memory of his callings stayed with Herb as he left home and went off to college. For the next ten years he worked, mostly full time, and took courses at several colleges. He no longer lived under the direct, daily influence of his father. "I put the ministry on the back burner because I didn't see how it could get me what I wanted out of life." But there was a greater obstacle: "I never thought that I could be the preacher my father was."

Psychology has a number of i-words to describe the process of "taking in" other people. Incorporation, introjection, imitation, internalization, idealization, and identification are six listed by George Vaillant. Vaillant likens them to ways of digesting food. At the one extreme--incorporation--we take in a presence whole but fail to metabolize it. We are like the boa constrictor who has just swallowed an elephant. With introjection, we take in only parts of the elephant--facets of another person--but even those parts remain foreign to us. In imitation, we act like the other person ("I talked like a preacher, I sang like a preacher") but we do not become like them. Internalization and idealization are terms for the actual becoming; in the latter instance, we use the internalized presence to represent what we want to be. Identification, says Vaillant, is the

most graceful way of "digesting" others. The metabolism is both selective and complete. Elephant turns into snake; the other becomes the very bones of our subjective self. "Incorporation and introjection are ways of believing that one has the other person. Idealization and identification are ways of being the other person and yet being oneself at the same time. . . . With identification we can say to ourselves. 'He did it and, if I choose, I can do it too.'" The i-process leads to an I.

By the age of 28, Herb Robinson had been away from home long enough to actually identify with his father. He was ready to say, "He did it and, if I choose, I can too." That year of his life proved to be critical. Herb was told by his girl friend of five years to make up his mind; it was now or never regarding their marriage. In a culture where spiritual calls were both valid and valued, he was also told by his God that it was now or never. Would he be a minister or not?

"I told my father that I was now ready to accept my calling. I felt that if this is what God wanted me to do, He would give me the tools I needed. We announced it to our church and they gave me a date for a trial sermon. I delivered a trial sermon and they gave me a license to preach. Five years later, I was ordained by the same church, and I'm still a minister."

In his 30s, Herb has learned that he does not have to measure up to the daunting figure of his father. His job, rather, is to "be what God has made me." In that effort, God will give him what he lacks. Herb now sees ways in which he differs from his father--regarding church rules about women's attire, for example--and even sees areas in which his father is lacking. Herb would be more "economically aware" than he, investing church monies in businesses that would employ its members, for instance. He would do more financially for his own family.

Yet even with a sense of being his own man, Herb at 37 still looks up to his father the way he did in his first memory of life. When I asked him if his father, now 67, was a great man, he quietly admitted to feeling that he was "the greatest I've ever known." But this father seems to know what helps in the turnover of generations. "My father has already told me that I'll be greater than he is. He bases that on the fact that he sees me doing at my age things that he didn't do until he was in his late fifties. It encourages me,

but it frightens me at the same time."

In the story of the copper bottle, the fisherman had to get the djinni down to size before he could release his power. Herb had to do something similar with the figure of his father. He had to seal it up for a while, become "bullheaded" until he found out who he himself was. Then he could say, without being overwhelmed, "The father is in me, but I am not the father." And even, "I will be greater than he." This is what Erikson meant by establishing an identity, and what I mean by finding a voice of your own.

(4) Blending Your Voice With Another's

Not only did Erikson write about the role of identity in generativity, he also wrote about the role of intimacy, implying that it was a necessary precondition. Extensive research on marriage and the family in the United States confirms that, as a general rule, Erikson was correct: children do better in two-parent families where a strong and committed relationship exists between mother and father. There are exceptions to the rule, of course, but they do not negate it.

When we move beyond the family into the technical and cultural domains of generativity, however, we are struck immediately by a paradox: many creators who work in these areas lead lives of intimacy that are anything but strong and committed. Studying the lives of seven creators of the modern world (Sigmund Freud, Albert Einstein, Pablo Picasso, Igor Stravinsky, T. S. Eliot, Martha Graham, and Mahatma Gandhi), Howard Gardner found that most had enormous difficulties with the normal forms of intimacy. Neither of Albert Einstein's marriages was a success; he denied fathering his first-born daughter, who was born out of wedlock; and his relationship with his two sons, one a schizophrenic, was poor. He did not miss the loss of human contact, often preferring to be left alone: "Isolation is sometimes bitter but I do not regret being cut off from the understanding and sympathy of other men." Mahatma Gandhi, who had entered an arranged marriage at the age of 13, had a conflicted relationship with his wife. He renounced sexual relations in midlife (just as Freud did) and was almost cruel to her when she became sick. His relations with his children were even worse. When they failed to live up to his expectations, he turned on them, disinheriting his oldest son on several

occasions. T. S. Eliot was virtually celibate and living in an unhappy marriage during his most creative years. More than once he devastated those close to him by abruptly cutting off all connections. Later in life, when he divorced his wife and remarried, he became much happier--but, significantly, far less productive.

The lack of normal intimacy did not hamper the creativity of these individuals; it may in fact have helped it. In some cases, isolation was an escape from complexity and chaos; it cleared the desk for more important work. In at least in one case, the chaos itself seems to have been stimulating. Pablo Picasso's personal life was a tangle of involvements with women, some of them the wives or lovers of friends. "When I die," he prophesied, "it will be a shipwreck and as when a huge ship sinks, many people all around will be sucked down with it." The prophesy was not far off.

In varying degrees, the creators Gardner studied had decided to sacrifice normal personal relationships in order to develop their talent. But one cannot conclude from the price they paid--and the price they extracted from others--that intimacy played no part in their creativity. In fact, if you look at the moment of creation, and at the period of tension immediately preceding it, you will find striking manifestations of close human contact, whether with a single individual or a small group. There may not have been commitment to the family, but there was contact at the creation. Consider one of Gardner's cases--Pablo Picasso--in which the contact involved a single other person: fellow painter and inventor of cubism Georges Braque.

A year apart in age, Picasso and Braque met in 1907, when both were in their late twenties. As different in temperament as they were in appearance--Picasso, the short, expansive Spaniard; Braque, the tall, shy Frenchman--they nevertheless became friends. A year later they began to work together, painting separately during the day, then coming together at night to compare what they had done. As Braque recalled years later, "We lived in Montmartre, we saw each other every day, we talked . . . . Picasso and I said things to each other during those years that no one says anymore . . . things that would be incomprehensible and that gave us so much joy. . . . It was like being roped together on a mountain. . . . We were above all very absorbed." For his part, Picasso was to call this the happiest period of his life. It was the time of his creative breakthrough.

Cubism is a set of techniques for breaking objects down into their geometric forms--into "little cubes," an early critic said disparagingly, giving the movement its name. Initially, Braque and Picasso were inspired by Paul Cezanne, as well as by more distant sources--African tribal masks, Egyptian bas-reliefs--but then, more and more, they fed off each other. "When we invented cubism," Picasso said, "we had no intention of inventing cubism, but simply of expressing what was in us." In some fields (contemporary science is one) such collaboration is the norm, but in painting it is rare. And it was out of character for the egotistical and destructive Picasso, marking the only time in his life when he failed to make regular entries in his written notebook.

Between 1910 and 1912 Picasso and Braque produced paintings so similar that today only an expert can tell them apart. (There were a number that neither painter signed.) Some of the little cubes looked like box kites, so the collaborators jokingly referred to themselves as Orville and Wilbur Wright. When Picasso began gluing oilcloth to his canvases to create "collage," Braque began using paper cutouts in the same way, creating "papier colle." Then Picasso started experimenting with wallpaper and newspaper, employing decorator techniques that Braque had learned from his father. For several years, says Gardner, their talents meshed perfectly:

> As a more proficient depicter of the natural and human worlds, Picasso may have been responsible for the stronger representational aspects, the focus on objects with their idiosyncratic peculiarities, whereas Braque pushed more toward abstraction. Picasso's virtuosity also contrasted with Braque's interest in, and contribution to, more technical aspects, particularly those having to do with the creation of purely spatial effects and experiments with composition.

In this fertile coming together we can see what Erikson meant when he said that intimacy entails "a counterpointing as well as a fusing of identities . . . in joint inspiration." Some of the counterpointing involved competition, and there were times when Picasso and Braque separated, held back on sharing new ideas, and hid their work from each other. As the competition grew, so did the tension between them. But it never reached the breaking point. Their relationship was ended instead by World War I, which erupted in 1914 and called Braque into service. A collaboration that had lasted six years,

that had an enormous impact on twentieth-century art, ended quite suddenly. "Thereafter I never saw Braque again," said Picasso simply.

What of the others Gardner studied? At critical junctures in their creative process, they too had individuals or small groups providing a matrix of support. Einstein had a fraternity of intellectuals nicknamed the Olympiad; Freud, the confidence of fellow physician Wilhelm Fliess; Stravinsky, an ensemble of artists gathered by the impresario Serge Diaghilev; T. S. Eliot, the friendship, counsel, and sponsorship of Ezra Pound; Martha Graham, the love, the guidance, and the musical accompaniment of Louis Horst. Only in Gandhi's case was Gardner unable to identify a clear and significant source of support.

This support is critical, writes Gardner:

> At times when creators are on the verge of a radical breakthrough, they feel the need to try out their new language on a trusted other individual--perhaps to confirm that they themselves are not totally mad and may even be on to something new and important. This desire to communicate has both cognitive and affective aspects, as the creators seek both disciplinary understanding and unquestioned emotional support.

For a creation to emerge, it seems, there must be an exchange of life in its history, and a powerful one at that. Listen again to what George Braque said: "It was like being roped together on a mountain. . . . We were above all completely absorbed." ..... " When life is exchanged, even in a conflicted way, ideas are exchanged too. And in the exchange, society's storehouse of ideas (we call it culture) acquires a variability akin to biology's (we call it a gene pool). Creators may find it necessary to go it alone in the aftermath of an exchange, to shape its results in their own unique way, to recover their distinctive outlook. But without a period of blending, their creations would not merely be poorer; they might very well be nonexistent.

(5) Creating

I have already illustrated the creative phase of the generative process with the story of Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque. Their experience reminds us that, in practice,

not all the steps on the Generative Way are distinct from one another. Nor do they always occur in the designated sequence.

Instead of citing another example at this point, then, let me reflect briefly on the meaning of creativity in relation to generativity. The two concepts cover a great deal of the same territory. How are they different?

I used to look to the past for a way of answering that question: generativity meant that something old was passed on, whereas creativity meant that something new was made. That was clear enough but there was a problem: creators have a notorious habit of forgetting the "old" sources of their "new" ideas. The architect Frank Lloyd Wright was 65 when he first published his autobiography. "By then," says a biographer, and a sympathetic one at that, "he was unwilling to concede that he had ever been helped, or that anyone whose ideas predated his own could possibly have influenced him. He came from nowhere and out of nothing, a full-fledged genius."

If you poke around in history a bit, you'll begin to see how old some new ideas really are. Nicolaus Copernicus, for example, is given credit for coming out of nowhere with one of the most revolutionary concepts in the history of the world--the notion that the sun, not the earth, is the center of our planetary system. But his idea was actually proposed by Aristarchus (and neglected by Greek science) almost two millennia before his time. And Copernicus's system was only a modified version of the Ptolemaic system it replaced. The same celestial machinery was involved, orbs of crystal carrying the heavenly bodies on their surface, like knots on planks of wood. Their movements were calculated not from the sun, but from the center of the earth's orbit, which was at a slightly different point. Far from rebelling against Ptolemy, Copernicus spoke of him with reverence and criticized contemporaries who questioned the accuracy of his observations. Indeed, Copernicus himself was later criticized for remaining too close to the system he supposedly had overthrown. There was much that was old in his new idea.

If the past offers a poor basis for distinguishing creativity from generativity, the future offers a better one. To put the matter simply, generativity is creativity <u>that lasts</u>. Creativity ends once a product is made, but generativity goes on to take care of the product as it seeks an independent life. It prepares the product to survive the creator's

departure, whether through death or simple leave taking. Thus, if you give birth to a new business, you have been creative. But you are not generative until you pass it on to successors.

What a generative perspective adds to the understanding of creativity is an awareness of connections--connections to the past, the present, and the future. One becomes sensitive to all the influences that are exchanged during a period of blending. These influences are easily forgotten: experiments in psychology have shown that people often misremember the contributions of others as being their own, a phenomenon known as "source amnesia" or "cryptomnesia." They also take more credit for a collective endeavor, if it is successful, than others in their group assign to them.

It is worth noting that Erik Erikson seems to have taken a generative perspective on his own creativity, for he consistently downplayed his originality, especially with regard to the concept of identity. Apparently he feared being cut off from the psychoanalytic community if he departed too extensively from Freud.

(6) Selecting

As creations come into being, their makers face the task of making choices among them. Which shall be nourished and which shall not? And, in some cases, which shall live and which shall die? The selecting that occurs in the aftermath of creating is critical to the entire generative process. But it can be very difficult. Indeed, there may be no other phase of the process where one's ethical sense must be more alert. Paradoxically, there may be no other phase that has been studied so little.

The difficulties involved in selecting were evident in the story of Karen and Don, the young couple who wanted to stop the transmission of genetic damage in their family. After one amniocentesis, they decided to abort the abnormal fetus Karen was carrying. "I willfully went in and terminated a pregnancy," she said, "and it was hard for people to deal with it." Hard for her, we might add. When she became pregnant again, she had another amniocentesis, this time with good results. "When he was born, they took a blood sample and double checked. He was perfectly normal."

History has witnessed situations far more extreme. In the concentration camps of

World War II, where the very word "selection" sent inmates to the gas chambers, mothers were forced by the SS to choose from among their children: one must die so that another might live, which would it be? During the massacre of Armenians in 1915, mothers voluntarily killed some of their children to protect the lives of others. In his old age, a surviving son told me the story of one such episode. His mother, his sister, and he were fleeing the slaughter when his sister became sick with measles. His mother took her to a place apart. Over sixty years later, the son had vivid memories of her return:

> I came, and I asked my mother, "Where's my sister?" She started crying. I said, "What happened?"
>
> "I drowned her."
>
> You haven't got medical care, so what the hell you gonna do? My sister, she had her eyes blind and filled with maggots. My mother couldn't help her. She said, "There was a little lake over there, and I took her there, and I took her clothes off and said, 'I'm gonna wash you a little bit.'" She took her in the water and got out about this far and dropped her. But when she dropped her, my sister came back up and said, "Ma-ma, what have I done to you? You gonna drown me." My mother went back and picked her up and "her flesh came all over me," so she couldn't do nothing. She took her back out again and dropped her. My sister, she came up once again, and that was it. And then my mother sat down under a tree for hours. And this old man came and said, "She's gone now, so forget it." He brought her back, and she told me all that story.

It was a terrible assault on her generativity, but it may have saved her son's life:

> My mother was in her nineties when she died, and she would always talk about my younger sister that she threw in the water. She always talked, and then the tears came out of her eyes. Probably she dreamed about her. She closed her eyes, she thought that she's still over there. That voice coming from the water, that "Why do you do this to me?" She would hear that young girl crying all through her life. That's all written in her life.

Few of us will face circumstances so excruciating, but as parents we are bound to face tough choices--as did the "moral exemplars" studied by Anne Colby and William Damon. In order to work with Mexico's poor, one of them had to deny necessities to her

own offspring. "My $35 that I got for working at the hospital I couldn't spend more of it on my children because it was going for the orphans." There were times when she gave her own children's shoes to others with bare feet. A white woman who became involved in the Southern civil rights movement had to watch her children become social isolates because of public stands she and her husband took. "It did hurt the children," she says. "They were perfectly miserable. And none of them wants to come back to Montgomery now. Not one of them will even come back for a visit. That is the most painful part of the whole thing." While the exemplars affirmed the choices they made, they deeply regretted the cost to their children, which was often very real.

As creators, citizens, and shapers of worlds, no matter how small, we sometimes have to "kill" projects, abandon efforts, "cut bait," and move on. As a writer, I must do the same thing. And I part very reluctantly with long sections I have crafted that are somehow off the mark. I create; I find the good in what I have created; I destroy the rest. Over and over again. And the book that results becomes itself an instrument of selection, pulling some readers in, pushing others away--a voice finding an audience.

Ethical alertness is essential during a time of selection. We cannot simply wipe out descendants who have, in our eyes, "gone bad." But we do have to make choices, rejecting some of our creations--or some things in our creations--in order to develop others. Here is a man who did the latter. He had taken over the coaching of a boys' football team because they hadn't won a game. The problem was selection, so he decided on some races and a game called Suicide:

> I'd have them run around the park. Then I'd be watching to see who had the best speed. See, they were all playing the wrong positions, and that's why they lost all their games. I had to reposition everybody. I had to see who was aggressive and who was not aggressive. When you play the game of Suicide, you'd find out the aggressive person, because he would hold onto the ball and get tackled. The other one would throw it away. So it was simple. You didn't embarrass anybody in that sense. So then I rearranged the whole team, and they came up with a pretty good team. I think they won the rest of the year.

(7) Letting Go

The seventh step in the generative process is nearly as difficult as selecting. How and when do we let go of our child, our idea, our program--whatever our creation has been? Even if that creation is taken out of our hands, we must at some point release it emotionally. "I feel separated from the wonderful thing that was created," said a woman of people who have entered her life. "I lose it because I can't hold on to it. It slips like water through my fingers."

Releases are required almost from the beginning of a creation's life--the very first time, for instance, that parents entrust their baby to someone else. Small releases become larger as children grow. When they set out for school, the children enter a world of unknown friends and unseen forces that no parent will ever be able to control. Demands for release never stop coming until the nest is empty, and perhaps not even then. And sometimes it is the parent who must force the adult child to leave home, not the other way around. It is the master who must push the disciple away.

Timing is critical in matters of release, and it is difficult to coordinate the clocks of parent and child. When a mother of three decided to divorce her husband, her children were on the verge of adolescence. The separation came too soon for them, and the mother will never forget the day she made her announcement:

> I sat the kids down on the couch and said, "I would like to talk to you. I am going to leave." My husband was silent. Paul said, 'I understand.' Anne started crying. And Marie looked at me with dark, deep brown eyes--I still remember her eyes piercing through me--and said, "I'm very angry at you."

Mothers are not supposed to leave their children; their children are supposed to leave them, and never before the "right" time.

But for every premature abandonment, there is a release that comes too late. Another mother told me on one occasion how hard it was to stop rescuing her adult children, even though she knew that doing things for them prevented them from becoming self-sufficient. I remember how her arms went out in an enveloping womb as she described a protective instinct that would always be with her. Yet another mother

resonated with that; her arms had gone out too often and for too many years to her alcoholic son. He had not gotten better, she said, until she was willing to say to herself, "Let him die, if that's what it takes. I cannot continue to do this." Artists can exhibit the same refusal to release, clinging to their work, protecting it, trying to orchestrate every review and reaction to it. And so can those who set in motion waves of social change.

Why do people not release? Seeing flaws in their creation, they may try endlessly to fix what cannot be fixed and end up "throwing good money after bad." Parents may be terrified by a child's terror at the thought of separation; they may envision no role for themselves once the children are gone. Better, then, to keep them tied to the apron strings.

Difficulties of release in the technical-cultural domain appeared in the life of Martha Graham, the founder of "modern" dance. Graham's "children" were the roles she choreographed for herself, and for many years she refused to let her favorite ones go. No one else was allowed to perform them. No one was allowed to preserve them on film. "As a mentor, she abandoned a whole generation of performers," writes Susan Lee, an authority on psychology and dance who has studied Graham's generativity. Graham could not imagine her creations "in" the body of another; better that they die when she did. Like many dancers, she was determined to defy aging; and so, as she got older, she designed roles for herself that minimized the demands on her body. Finally, someone told her, "Martha, you are not a goddess. You must admit your mortality." Members of her dance company demanded the right to perform without her. But she did not retire from the stage until the age of 74. Significantly, when she choreographed dances for others after that point, they were different from the kinds of dances she had choreographed for herself.

Why was it so hard for Martha Graham to release her work? She was a dancer, she said. She didn't choose to be one; it chose her. "It is a very terrible and deeply rewarding experience." To give up her dances was not only an admission that she could no longer perform them. It was the end of all she knew herself to be.

For those who fear to let go of their creations, it may help to remember that when we release a person or a product, it releases us. We lose the burden of responsibility. We

can care without carrying. We can take energy that would otherwise go into "saving" the creation--futilely so--and invest it in another. As a counselor said of people who come to her in crisis, "I never let them become overly dependent on me. I never let them hold on too long. . . . I try to hold them when they need to be held and give them the courage to go out and be free."

(8) Responding to Outcome

As people struggle with matters of release in generativity, they are being affected by outcome. They are seeing their business take off or fail, their children sink or swim, their words being honored or put to uses not of their choosing. How they respond to what they see constitutes the eighth phase of the generative process, the final step on the Way.

Watching how our creations turn out is like looking in a mirror, for what leaves our hand does indeed reflect on us. One mother looks at her adult daughter's problems with anxiety and depression, thinks back to her own mental state at the time of her pregnancy, and wonders about the similarity. Can these things be passed on in the womb? Another mother feels responsible for the accident that permanently disabled her son. Couldn't she have done something, anything, to prevent it? Still another, one who witnessed her daughter's slow deterioration into the "living death" of schizophrenia, wonders what might have been different if she had recognized it sooner. "It is a darkness," she says simply. "I try to forget her. She was my favorite child." We can never escape the feeling that we are implicated in the fate of our creations, even when we have had little control over it.

Like children, cultural innovations can go in a direction their makers never intended. Erik Erikson wrote that after Martin Luther took his stand on religious reform in Europe, fellow friars disbanded, changed the Mass, destroyed sacred images, banned music from church, and married--none of which Luther wished to see, all of which he subsequently preached against. Peasants revolted against their overlords; and although Luther had once called for rebellion ("we would smile did it happen"), he later turned against the idea. Peasants needed spiritual freedom, he wrote, not political freedom; if they rebelled, they deserved "a fist that brings blood to the nose." Seeing what was

happening, Luther began to hear a voice: "What if you were wrong, and if you should lead all these people into error and into eternal damnation?" Whenever that voice came, he would ask friends to reaffirm his doctrine of justification by faith so he could still believe in it. "Luther could hardly recognize what he had generated," said Erikson. "The universal reign of faith envisaged in [his] early teachings turned into an intolerant and cruel, Bible-quoting bigotry such as history had never seen."

When an outcome is positive, however, a creator's joy may know no bounds. A 40-year-old mother speaks for many: "I'm lucky to have two very open, sweet, good children, and I'm not just saying that because every other mother says that about her child. I think they are." A slightly older mother, damaged as a child, speaks for those who buffer: "When my daughter graduated co-valedictorian with a GPA of 3.987, it was one of my proudest moments! I had won the battle I vowed to win. I had eradicated the repetitious cycle of abuse!" Another mother, older still, is speechless with gratitude over what her adult son has become. She wonders, "Could this be attributed to me?" And a man near 70 takes deep satisfaction from work in a different sphere. A state legislator, he helped convert abandoned oil wells and strip mines into a public lake and park. "I was only a little cog in the wheel that made it possible, but I appreciate the part I was able to play," he says. In his old age, he knows that families will enjoy his efforts for generations:

> After I was elected to the legislature, one of the first bills that I prepared was for two million dollars to start that. We had to make sure that all those oil wells were perfectly sealed, so they could never come back and pollute. Had to refill a lot of those strip mines so that we'd keep the acid out. I think we must have done a pretty good job of it, because today it's one of the best fishing lakes in Western Pennsylvania. I don't think you're gonna go to a place that's more beautiful in the fall of the year, when the leaves are turning. Everybody should go up and just sit there. It's a good place to go to dream.

The Christian Gospels abound in parables that depict the variability of outcome. One of the best known is the parable of the sower, a brief tale about a man who walks a field, casting seed as he goes. The seeds fall to the ground, but by the time each finds its

niche in the earth, the man has already moved on. He loses track of what he has sown because it always lies behind him. At some point, however, he returns to see the results:

> Behold a sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

This parable's images--snatching birds, impenetrable rocks, and choking thorns--depict the fears of anyone who would generate. Will my creations be stolen by those who take advantage of their vulnerability? Will they wither from apathy or inattention? Worse still, will they take root and grow, only to be strangled by forces beyond my control? The parable also conveys a harsh truth about generativity: most of our efforts will go to waste. Still, there is hope: only a few "hits" are needed to produce in superabundance.

If the parable of the sower contains wisdom about what to expect when we sow, it also contains wisdom about what to do. We are to keep on sowing despite the inhospitality of the world to what is young and vulnerable, despite all the discouraging results. The Bhagavad Gita goes further: we are to practice "nonattachment" to the fruits of our actions. Speaking of images of the Grail and the inexhaustible fountain, mythologist Joseph Campbell put the matter this way: "The source doesn't care what happens once it gives into being. It's the giving and coming into being that counts." He explained with an agricultural metaphor of his own: "Think of grass--you know, every two weeks a chap comes out with a lawnmower and cuts it down. Suppose the grass were to say, 'Well, for Pete's sake, what's the use if you keep getting cut down this way?' Instead, it keeps on growing."

Detachment of this kind characterized a number of individuals in a recent study of committed lives. "Success is not the measure of a human being," said one of the subjects, a legislator. "Effort is." Another, a woman working to reduce violence in public schools,

said she had to be realistic about outcome: "I won't see peace in my time." But she kept on working. Both of these people practiced a kind of detachment that shielded them from discouragement and burnout. As the Buddhists say, "Act always as if the future of the universe depended on what you did, while laughing at yourself for thinking that whatever you do makes any difference."

At the beginning of the Generative Way, it seems, we must learn to see that our actions--our inactions as well--do indeed have consequences. We must learn to peer down the generational chain and think of the links they are forging, become aware of the trail they are leaving. But at the end of the path, when generativity is mature, we are to do the reverse. We must free ourselves from concern about the future, surrender our children and our works to life, let another reap what we have sown. The teachings of the centuries tell us that we are to respond to outcome by getting beyond it.

Conclusion

These eight "steps" on the metaphorical Generative Way describe, in rough chronological fashion, some of the issues that arise if one embarks on a specific generative project, or if one sets out to make generativity an enduring way of life. Research since Erikson's time has made it clear that generativity is not confined to middle age, as he originally posited. How the generative process differs in early, middle, and late adulthood, and how it relates to human development at large, is a subject for fruitful discussion in the days ahead.