

# Creativity & Spirituality: Are they related?

Negin Sanaei

The definition of creativity is very broad as it encompasses many things. Everyone is creative, even those of us who think otherwise. Every dream, every fantasy that we have all had as children and even those we have as adults are the manifestations of our creativity and imagination. Whether we appreciate all kinds of creativity, it surrounds us everywhere. We may ask ourselves why some creative works of certain creative and imaginative people last longer than others. We could ask why the works of Shakespeare have lasted so long, and why have the creative theories of Plato, the findings of Socrates, the imaginative discoveries of Galileo, the contributions of Einstein have made such a big impact on our civilisation? Perhaps the answer lies in the fact that Shakespeare's plays appeal to a majority of the population or perhaps the thoughts behind those ideas and works were spiritual or perhaps both.

Bahá'u'lláh states:

*Consider Hippocrates, the physician. He was one of the eminent philosophers who believed in God and acknowledged His sovereignty. After him came Socrates who was indeed wise, accomplished and righteous... What a penetrating vision into philosophy this eminent man had!... He had a profound knowledge of such sciences as were current amongst men as well as of those which were veiled from their minds... He it is who perceived a unique, a tempered, and a pervasive nature in things, bearing the closest likeness to the human spirit... After Socrates came the divine Plato who was a pupil of the former... Then came Aristotle, the well-known man of knowledge... These men who stand out as leaders of the people and are pre-eminent among them, one and all acknowledged their belief in the immortal Being Who holdeth in His grasp the reins of all sciences.<sup>1</sup>*

This quotation explains to us why such men were 'successful' in their

imaginative endeavours. It will be referred to later in an attempt to find a better method of how we can be more 'successful'.

Spirituality may seem to be a mystic word; it takes on many facets. The definitions in the Bahá'í Writings vary. Poet, Jack McLean defines spirituality for Bahá'ís as “*to be involved with the life of society in order to preserve and promote its finest heritage.*”<sup>2</sup>

Spirituality and religion are often used interchangeably. Spirituality, in fact, is an aspect of religion and perhaps the most important aspect. Shoghi Effendi states: “*no amount of administrative procedure or adherence to rules can take the place of this soul-characteristic, this spirituality which is the essence of man*”.<sup>3</sup>

At the Bahá'í World Congress in 1992, David Hofman observed:

*The world today is starving for spiritual food. It is dying of spiritual thirst. In the innermost private life of every man, woman and child on the planet, there is this inner frustration, this inner lack, this hunger, this yearning for something other than what the world is offering for them today or what they can discover in the world. When all the activities of mankind turn against him, his economics doesn't feed, clothe or shelter him, his religion doesn't inspire him to kindness and goodwill, his politics are unmentionable and his recreations are debased. Nothing today gratifies this longing, this yearning in the individual human soul.<sup>4</sup>*

This inner yearning can illustrate why Deepak Chopra or James Redfield's books are among the best sellers. It is not hard to become more spiritual, as Bahá'ís believe that man is in reality a spiritual being and only when he lives in the spirit, is he truly happy. So how do we live in this spirit? Perhaps by using our spiritual power. What is our spiritual power? 'Abdu'l-Bahá has said our imagination along with other faculties like thought, comprehension and memory are parts of our spiritual power.<sup>5</sup> The more we utilise any of these faculties, the more would we enhance our spiritual growth. This is not to say that if one person commits to memory all the books in the world, s/he is an especially spiritual person. That person also needs to use other faculties of their spiritual power. Just like the body which needs food, water, exercise and fresh air to survive, our spirituality needs to use all four faculties of our spiritual power mentioned above.

Jack McLean writes in his book *Dimensions in Spirituality* that “*imagination can transcend time and space and directly go into the world of eternity*

1. Bahá'u'lláh, *Lawh-i-Hikmat in Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988, pp. 146-147.

2. J.A. McLean, *Dimensions in Spirituality*, Oxford: George Ronald, 1994, p.126.

3. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, April 25, 1945, quoted in Helen Hornby, *Lights of Guidance* (2nd rev. ed.), New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988, p.542.

4. Bahá'í World Congress video, 1992.

5. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990, pp.210-211.

with its ethereal, airy spirits.”<sup>6</sup> Imagination is a constituent of our spirituality, therefore it has implications for spiritual growth. It also has sure implications for our spiritual detriment. Creativity has two dimensions. On the one hand, when it is focused on unveiling knowledge, the advancement of civilisation and the promotion of harmony and unification of the world, it becomes a powerful ally of spiritualisation. On the other hand, when its energies are harnessed in the service of the frivolous and self-focused gains, it can pose a serious threat to spiritual development.<sup>7</sup> It becomes a threat when our creativity is used for our own materialistic purposes rather than for the portrayal of spiritual inspiration. Therefore imagination can be viewed as a power of the soul which may either focus on higher and abstract spiritual realities or on lower objects of self-gratification.

Recall the quote about Hyppocrates, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. In that quote Bahá'u'lláh asserts that they all believed in God and praised Him and recognised that without the help of God we are not worth as much. Even someone contemporary, like Einstein, insisted that religion and science should move forward together: “*Science without religion is blind, religion without science is lame.*”<sup>8</sup>

‘Abdu’l-Bahá expands on this point in *Paris Talks*: “*By the power of the Holy Spirit, working through his soul, man is able to perceive the Divine Reality of things. All great works of art and sciences are witnesses of this power of the spirit*”.<sup>9</sup> And Bahá'u'lláh states:

*All art is a gift of the Holy Spirit. When this light shines through the mind of a musician, it manifests itself in beautiful harmonies. Again, shining through the mind of a poet, it is seen in fine poetry and poetic prose. When the light of the Sun of Truth inspires the mind of a painter, he produces marvellous pictures. These gifts are fulfilling their highest purpose when showing forth the praise of God.*<sup>10</sup>

Does this mean that if we do not write or paint about God and the Divine, our efforts are useless? I think not! I think the success of our art depends on our intentions and our purposes. Our intentions should be spiritual and wanting to portray what is in our spirit and inspiration for the sake of presenting and displaying our inspiration and not what that demonstration may pave the way for.

There are many demonstrations of decadent creativity, for example, creativity used in marketing campaigns for achieving their materialistic goals while

destroying our self-worth and dignity. We are constantly probed to buy lottery tickets so we can ‘spend every minute of everyday, of every year’. This leads us to think that money can come easily and we therefore have no respect for the time which we have spent working hard. Nuclear power has the potential to help humanity but unfortunately it has had a major adverse result of destroying parts of the world and some members of its family. Einstein had said that if he had any vision of his energy theory being used as bombs he would never have discovered it. These examples show our spiritual development being threatened, when creativity is not used to advance human civilisation.

As an individual, however, I suggest that we acknowledge the negative and find out what we can learn from it and try to make amends by concentrating on the positive side of it. Let’s utilise all the great talent we have around us and appreciate its importance. Bahá'u'lláh states: “*It hath been revealed and is now repeated that the true worth of artists and craftsmen should be appreciated, for they advance the affairs of mankind,*”<sup>11</sup> and further, that, “*Arts, crafts and sciences uplifts the world of being, and are conducive to its exaltation.*”<sup>12</sup>

6. J. A. McLean, op.cit., p.176.

7. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, op.cit., pp. 210-211.

8. Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of Western Mind – Understanding the Ideas that Have Shaped Our World View*, New York: Ballantine Books, 1993, pp.355-356.

9. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, (10th Ed.), London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1961, p. 85.

10. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, op.cit., p.192.

11. Bahá'u'lláh quoted in *The Compilation of Compilations, The Arts*, Maryborough: Bahá'í Publications Australia, 1991, p. 3.

12. Ibid.