

Creative Mirror Workshop

Zorba the Buddha, Ghitorni, New Delhi

8th September 2012



Dancing to ease tension in body



Working inside - doing exercises

Quite some years ago, I began realising that I was talking to myself through my art. I was expressing ideas intuitively. There was no way that my mind could consciously have arrived at them. I had taken some kind of a quantum leap, the ideas I was expressing defied the limitations of a logical progression of thought.

Once I saw my visual work as a reflection of my own mind, I paid greater attention to what I said. But this had a flip side; I wanted to control what it said - to say things which I desired. Insecurity made me want to believe that I was on the track, I thought was the right one. Big mistake! This is when it became very stressful. Those drawings or paintings or embroideries just never worked. There was not enough honesty in them. The expression was not authentic.

So I stopped trying to present ideas and focussed instead on working with materials. The newer material and techniques involved allowed a greater sense of play and I started speaking again, albeit in a creatively camouflaged way. It did not matter whether it was sampler where I was learning to use materials or new stitches, or something else. Whatever I did, I was talking, expressing myself, and this opened me up to look at my creative work for guidance. But then, greater emotional challenges came my way which tested my levels of knowing and I could not express myself well enough.

I started feeling aches and pains in the body. A friend had been pushing me to do a course in Reiki but I resisted. I thought the meditation and self-analysis, learned through YSS and The Self-realisation Foundation, I was doing were enough and that I just needed to persevere with this. However, after a long journey from Colorado to New Delhi, lugging heavy baggage through airports and bus stations, my right shoulder started giving problems. I went for an x-ray and when the technician tried to flatten the joint on the table to be able to get a good look, it was so utterly painful, I cried like a baby. I could not stop crying and when I reached home, I made an appointment to see a Reiki master. My intention had been to get treatment, but when I saw how I healed, I enrolled to learn and have not missed a day of self-healing in all these years.

Soon after the initial treatment started, I found myself doing very evocative drawings, speaking of many issues in relationships that had been bothering me but which I could not deal with or had not until then. I had never been able to express myself this candidly before. The spiritual connection between art and healing was becoming apparent, where I had needed to open the channel of energy

blocked by emotional pain, to be creative. And through my creative expression I was able to see what was going on at a deeper level to being dealing with it.

Through years of working this way, I evolved a system to share the ideas. At first I was diffident about stating the spiritual concept behind this but when I saw what a little meditation and writing could do for design students in the NIFT classroom, I found the confidence to conduct a day long workshop to introduce the concept of The Creative mirror.

The participants came from diverse backgrounds. Some had art training and many did not. Some came with the intention of making art, but found that there was a writer in them and as Arti said she found the visual difficult but was inspired to “write up a storm”.

In this day long workshop held at Zorba the Buddha in Ghitorni, I brought into play affirmations, prayer, meditation, mindful looking, a little dancing to ease up the body, exercises in gratitude and self-analysis – various methods to open up the heart so that the participants could begin to express. And of course there was opportunity to do some creative work too. The emphasis was on allowing people to see for themselves how the different exercises worked. The effect is subtle but with a little guidance most were able to see the connection and as Ananda said it was “quite revealing.”

As a student in London, in the 1980's I had chanced upon some writings by ‘Ananda Coomaraswamy who wrote that in ancient India “*an artist was not a special kind of person, but every man a special kind of artist, otherwise less than a man*”. And that devotion was integral to the practice of the arts which nourished the body, mind and spirit- providing for the practitioners physical, emotional and spiritual well-being.

It is well known that in ancient India Art was not a special activity. In the 64 *shilpas* or *kalas* of ancient Indian art, cooking was as much an art as weaving, kissing or horse riding. It was the way that they did everything that made it an art and this entailed more than skill in execution. But this is not the way we look at art today.

I have been curious as to why the concept of “*every man being a special kind artist otherwise less than a man*” changed, to an artist being a special kind of person, even some kind of a demi-god, in some cases and realized that the missing ingredient was devotion to the divinity in us that is the ultimate creator of us and all that we do. So, I introduced the idea of devotion into the workshop. Sarita did not relate well to the concept of prayer as part of the process but Sujata found it “*very inspiring*” saying that she did it regularly and “*understood the importance*” of this well, and Anuradha found that it had “*a calming effect.*”

In our religiously fragmented age, such rituals are circumspect, especially for intellectuals, but there is growing realisation among ‘healing communities’ that devotion is imperative for a healthy life. The sages encourage us to rise above subjective views and look at the world objectively, but unless we express ourselves how can we transcend our feelings that arise in respect of situations we face in life that irk or hurt or confuse us?

Reiki masters and other healers often suggests that we allow ourselves to feel our feelings fully before we can be guided to the other side. This however requires tremendous courage and often great self-control not to vent them in a way that could emotionally or physically harm others in our environment. In our world, where chaos, dishonesty, anger, abuse and more, greet us each morning in the newspapers, how do we allow ourselves to feel fully? For me the answer lies in creative self-expression which can heal us and helps us transcend the subjective, more judgemental and protective view towards an objective participation in the world.

Being aware of what we are feeling is imperative for empowering us so that we can be objective and not defensive. Knowing engenders comfort and a sense of being in control of our lives. However, we are not always aware of what we are saying and doing. To help those who were not cued into looking deeply and analytically into themselves I introduced some exercises on gratitude,

forgiveness, unfulfilled and unacknowledged desires and what on what the participants wanted to change in their lives. Some, not all, found they were able to confront issues they had been avoiding for a while. Mid-way through the programme, the participants were asked to remain silent for about three hours. Ananda found this “irksome” but Arti said “what a joy to not have to speak! I feel energized by the silence, not missing the words for half a tick!” and this reflected the views of most others too.

For Banhi a designer by training, working as an academic administrator, the workshop experience was that of *“a completely new perspective of merging creativity and spirituality. In connecting the world ‘within’ and the world ‘without’, it has sharpened and focussed the vision – where the smallest detail and the largest, engages the eye, mind and the soul, leading to a discovery of creativity anew.”* And for Shalini, a practicing designer, said: *“as a person constantly working in an art field, I have never sat back and analysed my choices. It was enriching to notice the depth of personal discovery hidden within. Instead of finding inspiration for things from forecast books, it was possible to find them from within and the process was fun.”*

The whole day was designed to orient participants to understand the interdependence of spirituality with creativity and then learn to look in a different way - within and without. They were encouraged to express feelings through affirmations and prayers; cleanse through self-analysis and meditation; relax, unwind and keep the energy within rather than chatter. Nipun found *“it an altogether beautiful experience. Yes, one has to feel before expressing his thoughts. I was taught to go at a much deeper level and touch a creative part of me.”*

It was a gratifying experience to be able to share ideas that I had been working on for many years and to see how it did touch many lives in just one day. However, practice makes it perfect and the onus of this is on the participants. The workshop introduced ideas that were simple to implement and continue with. Today, there is better understanding of spiritual precepts and many practitioners have written books and there are many teachers for yoga, Reiki meditation and more to augment what was initiated through the Creative Mirror workshop, conducted at Zorba the Buddha, Ghitorni, Delhi.



Making visual notes from environ



Observation through drawing

Gopika Nath