

CREATIVE THINKING - THE USE OF BRAINWAVES

"*Sometimes I sits and thinks, and then again I just sits.*"¹

WHAT IT IS

Creative - real, original - thinking is the productive mental activity of real people.

It is the process of turning our imagination - sometimes called phantasy - into reality.

It is an activity that is in part conscious and in part unconscious. "Brainwaves" - the unconscious part - are something none of us can claim credit for. What we can do is to make ourselves ready to receive them when they arrive.

Since *listening* to our unconscious forms so great a part of creativity, it is vital that our attempts to do so are not swamped by 'crackle in the headphones'. We need ways of processing our inner garbage.

The quality of your creativity will depend on the quality of you as an individual. Do you know WHO you are ?

WHO YOU ARE

"Know yourself" was a basic precept of classical Greek thought, and is still fundamental to most of the world's major faiths. Our attempts to become original, creative thinkers will stand or fall by our own self-knowledge. How clearly do we understand WHY we do things the way we do ? Do we know our own mind ?

WHAT YOU DO

Treat your mind as a living organism with a life of its own. It has needs like any other organism. It needs to be fed and nourished. It needs to (re)create and rest and it needs opportunity to discharge its by-products.

Your unconscious mind has probably got a very clear idea of what it wants to create; which may be very different from what your conscious mind expects. So you will have to listen to it.

This means taking time each day to be still and sort out the rest of our mental processes so that we can hear our brainwaves when they arrive, above the level of our internal clutter. The greater the tranquillity within, the greater will be our creativity.

I gave an illustration of this process in an article written back in 1988 :

"Diverting thoughts will come, and keep on coming. If I wish to remember them, I write them down into my notebook and so clear my head. It may indeed be no more 'spiritual' than an item for the shopping list or a reminder to do something like write a letter or make a phone call. What has happened ? By pausing ... we have begun to organise our life, so removing some of the chaos that reigned before. This may not be what we came for and it requires no supernatural explanation. But we have started; and we have started to slow down. When we rise and go about our day we have at least an agenda."²

Don't force it : let it happen. If what *you* want to happen doesn't, find out what does. By analogy, a musical child who struggles with difficulty at the piano may actually turn out to be a very talented violinist.

¹ *Punch*, Vol 131, p. 297 (1906).

² Martin Mosse, *Alternative Christianity* (1998 reprint) p.11.

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WHEN ELSE TO LISTEN

Besides our regular daily time of reflection we are most amenable to brainwaves when we are still, at peace and contented. In particular:

- * During the first waking minutes of the day after a good night's sleep
- * During the tranquillity which follows sexual release.

WHAT YOU NEED

- * Time
- * Inner 'space'
- * Privacy
- * Silence
- * Sleep : time to dream
- * A bed / favourite chair / floor / bath
- * At least one wise listening friend (a moderately experienced teddy bear would in some cases be considered acceptable)

Resources for charging up / stimulating :

- * Books
- * Art : favourite picture
photo
- * Music : play / listen
- * A walk in the country
- * A sunset or beautiful vista

Resources for discharging :

- * Notebooks
- * Journal
- * Typewriter / word processor / keyboard
- * Sketch pad / canvas
- * Tape recorder

WHAT COMES IN

'Take heed what you hear' : what comes out will inevitably be a product of what goes in. Consider carefully the range of material with which you feed your mind.

Extreme specialisation can be the enemy of creative thinking unless our particular specialist subject is integrated with the rest of our mental activity. We need to make connections crosswise - laterally, in Edward de Bono's term - between the different interests in the several compartments of our minds.

If our background lies in the arts, we may need to study, say, mathematics (strongly recommended by Plato for anyone wanting to become a serious thinker). If we are scientists, we may need to grow in our understanding of the humanities - literature, history, art, music, drama, philosophy, psychology, theology and so on. All of us need to deepen our perspective as to where we and our society have come from. Much of the 'greatness' of the great works of art, music or literature lies in their ability to inspire us in this way.

WHO CAN HELP

Anyone can help who is a good *listener*. Someone who is prepared to listen carefully to what you are saying as you develop your ideas out loud, and then to make thoughtful comments, suggestions or criticisms, can be of enormous help as a catalyst even if they know little of the subject in question.

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One's family are the obvious choice, one's friends the next. Hence it is vital to cultivate our friendships; and the encouragement and mental stimulation passes both ways.

There are also professional listeners or counsellors who are trained to reflect back aspects of you of which you yourself may be quite unaware, thereby taking the process a stage deeper.

WHAT COMES OUT

(1) Discharge garbage

Keep a notebook, journal or old envelope to hand, beside your bed or wherever you do your thinking. Put down any stray thoughts you may wish to record for later but which are not of immediate relevance. Today's garbage may be tomorrow's gold dust. Your listener will be invaluable in garbage disposal.

(2) Express creativity

Write slowly, carefully. If unsure what to put next, pause and do something simple. If writing a letter, address the envelope. Alternatively, go to the loo; tidy the room; make some coffee. Treat each 'brain failure' as an opportunity to enquire what your mind (or unconscious) is trying to tell you - and expect answers! If all else fails, sleep on it and come back tomorrow.

As you lovingly care for the object of your creativity, polishing its every detail little by little, it will turn into a thing of beauty - like your mind, with a life of its own.

EXAMPLE

Professor Andrew Wiles, demonstrably one of the foremost mathematical thinkers alive since his proof of Fermat's Last Theorem in 1994, described his methodology as follows:

"...I just had to find something completely new. It's a mystery where that comes from.

"Basically it's just a matter of thinking. Often you write something down to clarify your thoughts, but not necessarily. In particular when you've reached a real impasse, when there's a real problem that you want to overcome, then the routine kind of mathematical thinking is of no use to you. Leading up to that kind of new idea there has to be a long period of tremendous focus on the problem without any distraction. You have to really think about nothing but that problem - just concentrate on it. Then you stop. Afterwards there seems to be a kind of period of relaxation during which the subconscious appears to take over and it's during that time that some new insight comes."³

Here I would say is a man who knows how to use his unconscious and with proven success. Notice how he disposes of his garbage (by writing it down to clear his thoughts); how after intense study he seeks stillness (relaxation), having reached which he trusts his subconscious (= unconscious) to deliver the insight (which we have called the brainwave). And it works !

³ Simon Singh, *Fermat's Last Theorem* (London: Fourth Estate, 1997), p.228.

FOR FURTHER READING

On mathematics :

W. W. Sawyer, *Mathematicians' Delight* (Pelican, A.D. 1943).

On psychology :

C. G. Jung, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* (A.D. 1933, now published by Ark Paperbacks (Routledge & Kegan Paul)),

M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Travelled* (Rider, A.D. 1978).

On history, politics :

Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War* (c. 400 B.C., still available in Penguin Classics, tr. R. Warner, A.D. 1954),

Chief Rabbi Dr Jonathan Sacks, *The Politics of Hope* (Jonathan Cape, A.D. 1997).

On romance and adventure :

Homer, *Iliad* and *Odyssey* (both pre-600 B.C. but still available in Penguin Classics, tr. E. V. Rieu, A.D. 1950 and 1946 respectively),

J. R. R. Tolkien, *Lord of the Rings* and other tales of Middle-Earth (Unwin, A.D. 1937 onwards).

On just about everything else :

Plato, *Republic* (c. 375 B.C., also available in Penguin Classics, tr. H. D. P. Lee, A.D. 1960).