

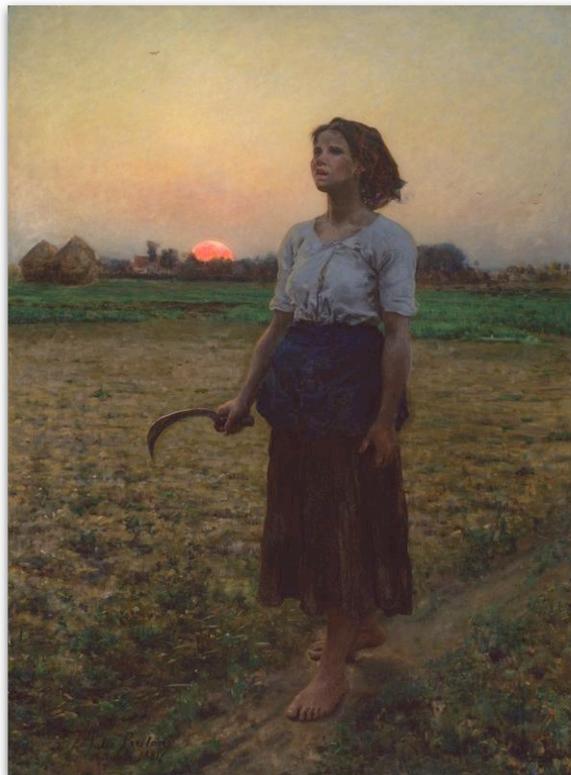
# FREE-MAN'S PERSPECTIVE

How Life, Liberty & Sanity Can Win

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## How To Become Inspired



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Just about everyone wants to be inspired. But even though people spend lots of money in search of inspiration, inspiration is not terribly common.

The problem is that people pay for triggers to *release* inspiration, rather than doing things that will *build* inspiration. And so, with little being built, there is also little to release.

The truth is that we can all be inspired a lot more than we have been. Inspiration need not be an occasional and erratic thing; it can be a common and familiar thing.

The tricky thing about inspiration is that we all get a certain number of inspirations during our youth without any cultivation – for free, as it were. After that, it's easy to think that inspiration comes unbidden and with no cultivation required. But it really doesn't, and triggers aren't enough.

As we go through this issue, I'll take some of the mystery out of what inspiration is, how it works and how to cultivate it. I'll also be illustrating my points with quotes from people who've had some notable experience with inspiration.

## WHAT INSPIRATION IS & IS NOT

Let's start with a central fact:

*Inspiration is not free. You have to work for it.*

Yes, I will momentarily explain the “free” inspirations of youth, but an understanding that inspiration is not free is an important first position. In this area, as in so many others, hoping for free magic is a fool's errand.

But as it happens, the unbidden inspirations of youth help us understand how inspiration works. So, let's start there:

As we move from childhood to adolescence, our attention-spans lengthen and our focus improves; our ability to understand ourselves also improves. To use descriptive but not scientific words, we can say that our souls coalesce during these seasons of life; that the various parts begin to cohere to each other. A psychologist might describe this as “our psyches becoming more integrated,” but we have no terms that are completely accurate: we are dealing with internal experiences here, not things that can be measured with instruments.

But regardless of how we describe this process in words, there is an organic process underway, and it delivers epiphanies to us: sudden realizations of new truths. The author Arthur Koestler described such bursts of inspiration in this way:

*An upward surge from some unknown, fertile, underground layers of the mind.*

That gives us a nice first description of what inspiration is, whether in youth or old age. But since the inspirations of youth are our first subject, let's look more closely at how these first inspirations take place. And, again, I'll be using descriptive terminology:

As the soul or psyche develops, its various parts cohere with each other more and more, and as this happens, certain influences can draw the parts together and activate them in unison, producing new combinations of thoughts and experiences. The young person then experiences at least some of these as inspiration.

These youthful inspirations seem to be the only types of inspiration that are “free.” Even later life epiphanies that seem to “come from nowhere,” usually don't; they are the culmination of internal forces fighting their way to the surface and into consciousness.

Perhaps the best scientific characterization of inspirations would be this:

*New integrations of consciousness, resulting in novel and useful concepts.*

Consciousness integrates by itself during youth and adolescence, and that gives us a certain number of free epiphanies. After maturity, however, new integrations come only with the expansion or growth of consciousness, and that requires input and/or effort.

So, once adolescence is past, there are no more free inspirations: you get what you pay for. Or, said otherwise: you reap only what you sow.

People with experience in such things tend to use an organic model to describe how inspiration works, likening it to the process of birth. This is a useful and accurate analogy. A 19th century physiologist named Hermann Helmholtz mirrored this “fertilization, gestation, birth” model by describing *unconscious inference and studied creative problem-solving* as a three stage process:

1. Saturation.
2. Incubation.
3. Illumination.

Once adolescence has passed, we get those inspirations which we plant and water, and probably not many others. This necessity of effort has been noticed by many people in fields that are known for creativity, such as these:

*Inspiration comes of working every day.*

– Charles Baudelaire, writer

*Inspiration is a guest who does not like to visit lazy people.*

– Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky, composer

These people (and many others) learned that creativity takes work. Inspiration is not free.

But while inspiration may not be free, its price is staggeringly low for the value received. Our consciousness is, more or less, an inspiration-producing machine. If we use it according to its nature, it can continue producing indefinitely.

It is also important to understand that inspiration is unique and personal. Author Herman Hesse was entirely correct when he wrote this:

*Every man is more than just himself; he also represents the unique, the very special and always significant and remarkable point at which the world's phenomena intersect, only once in this way and never again.*

So, not only is inspiration a tremendous value, but it is entirely unique to each person: The inspirations that you can produce will be different from those that can be produced by any other person on the planet... different from any other person who has *ever* lived on this planet.

No one will ever again be able to produce epiphanies in exactly the same way as you. You may wish to ponder that point for a moment, then to re-assess the value of the life you've been given.

## THE ROLE OF PURPOSE

*Inspiration follows aspiration.*

– Rabindranath Tagore

Inspiration requires a clear reason, otherwise it never takes shape. “Feeling good,” for example, is not a clear enough goal for your psyche to use in gathering resources to produce inspiration. If inspirations are to be formed, clear, valuable and passionately important reasons must be present as a core. Without this, there is nothing for the many associated thoughts and influences to tie themselves to.

That is not to say that your passionately important reason will produce the results you imagine; in fact, you'll likely get something that is different from your first guess. But the result you get will also

probably be better than what you first guessed. Inspiration just works that way.

It is worth mentioning that more or less everything we do follows this same pattern of first seeing a goal, then moving toward it. We humans operate that way. (This is referred to as being *teleological*.)

For example: If you see your friend across the room and decide to move towards him or her, you don't plan each step you take. Rather, you decide upon the condition to be reached (approaching your friend) and your interior circuitry takes care of the details. This model seems equally true regarding the operation of our muscles and the operation of our minds.

The bottom line here is this: Without a clear and valuable purpose there will be no inspiration.

Dreams of something for nothing will *not* produce inspiration. Your purpose must be something that you care passionately about, and which you are willing to work for. Once you have that attitude, you've got a start.

Inspiration is about you pursuing worthy desires and *making* things.

Inspiration is *not* about magical forces swooping down and handing things to you... or getting others to spontaneously jump up and implement your plans. Such dreams are contrary to real inspiration and lead to dark places. Inspiration is about **you** rising up and creating.

## DRAINAGE

Perhaps the greatest impediments to inspiration in our time are things that drain the components of inspiration away, before they can coalesce and produce.

The formation of inspiration is natural to us, but the energies that produce inspiration are regularly drained from most of us before they can produce their results. Here are three specific ways this happens:

### **The manipulation industry.**

We live in a blizzard of images – all of other people's making and all clawing for control over your thoughts and intentions. These images are scientifically designed to thrust desires and commands into our minds.

One of the first tragedies of this phenomena is that imagination is displaced. Humans have a unique ability to imagine, and this is a very useful and healthful ability: it forms the seeds of improvements, experiments and production. But for those who accept the blizzard of images, it is displaced as others do their imagining for them... and in service to the other's goals.

In our time, imagination has been swallowed-up in a sea of fantasies provided by and for others. Once upon a time, it was a self-operated window into endless possibilities.

Furthermore, these competitive images use emotions and instincts to gain control of our minds: Flashes (which our eyes are programmed to focus upon), pretty faces, sensual bodies, status objects, and so on: all designed to gain control of our thoughts by a sort of manipulative force: the implantation of fantasies and fears, carefully designed to benefit others.

In the end, the consumers of these images are drained of passion and strength. Thus their own natural passions – which are unique to each of us – never really form. As a result, only the basest impulses remain while the individual's higher, better and unique formations of emotions, passions and eventually inspirations, are drained away.

It would be hard to over-emphasize the loss associated with this. (And please refer to the *Sisyphus Technology* section of FPM #17 for more on the subject.) The endless distraction of TV, iPod, tweets, texts, Facebook posts, and endless video games leave people denuded of their natural forces.

The real problem with all of these vicarious experiences is that they are not *ours* – they divert us from authentic and self-generated experiences.

### **The expectations of others.**

Another major drain of inspiration – both in the old days and today – is the web of expectations that develop around us over time. To follow inspiration is to change, and the people who are most involved in your life – typically family and close friends – will generally tend to oppose change. They have arranged their lives around yours and they see you as playing certain roles in *their* lives. They rely upon you to continue acting in the same way you have been acting.

These webs of expectations have always been resistant to change. For example, Jesus, who was deeply familiar with this problem, said this:

*I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's opponents shall be those of his own household.*

When an individual significantly changes, those who are closest will feel as though they are having their lives ripped apart. They will oppose that change, sometimes bitterly.

### **Conformity fears.**

*We forfeit three-fourths of ourselves in order to be like other people.*  
-- Arthur Schopenhauer

Fear of being different has always been a problem, and no less so in our time. 'Normalcy' and authenticity have nearly always been at odds.

If we were to take Schopenhauer's words seriously – and if we flatly stopped trying to be like other people – we would become quadruple the men and women we've been. Perhaps Schopenhauer's claim of quadruple should only be double or triple, but the gain he specifies is enormous in either case, and such gains show up especially in areas like inspiration.

To stop acting like others doesn't, by the way, mean that we become cruel and uncaring toward other people, only that we act *as ourselves*, not as others want us to act.

Inspiration arises from the authentic self, not from playing roles in other people's dramas. And we are far better, kinder, more productive beings when we are being true to ourselves, rather than hiding behind masks that are pre-approved by others.

We are to cooperate with others, but never to mask and shut-down our true selves. If others don't like what we really are, that's just tough. Our path to improvement begins with recognizing, improving, and being true to ourselves, not by turning against ourselves because others demand it.

All of our best characteristics form from the inside-out. Educator John Taylor Gatto had this to say on the subject of self-direction and modern school systems, which are the greatest enforcers of 'normalcy':

*Growth and mastery come only to those who vigorously self-direct. Initiating, creating, doing, reflecting, freely associating, enjoying privacy—these are precisely what the structures of schooling are set up to prevent, on one pretext or another.*

Because of all these drainages and distractions, you'll probably find that (at least at first), most of your inspirations will come at night, as your mind calms and rests, and as distractions slip out of your consciousness.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF OUR EXPECTATIONS

The great tool of man's inner creative abilities is not hope, but expectation. You can hope endlessly, without result. But once you begin *expecting* things to happen, they generally start forming, in one way or another.

Earlier we said that purpose is essential to inspiration. Expectation is highly similar: it is a core that attracts other important pieces to itself and produces often-surprising results.

One very important area of expectation that has been lost in the West is the expectation of goodness. This was common in Europe before and during its most productive centuries and has been almost completely lost since.

Allow me to explain:

Few people can recite the sins and errors of the Roman Church better than I, but that doesn't mean I think the whole of the Church (and the culture it informed) was uniformly evil. It was not.

Like any large institution, the center of the Roman Church was corrupt and developed strong defenses for that corruption. The system corrupted the men and women who ran it. As a result, it committed horrifying evils; making a mockery of the great man (Jesus) whom they supposedly served.

Nonetheless, there were thousands of local priests, monks, nuns and lay church members and who were good men and women – who spent their lives helping the people of their parish; who did not abuse children, who did not steal money, who did not hand over 'witches' to be burned, who worked to feed the hungry, to support the widow and orphan, the guide the errant child and to strengthen the struggling adult.

Furthermore, these good deeds occurred daily, continuously, in most of the towns and settlements of Europe. The stories of these men and women haven't made our history books, but they were real and these millions of small good acts had an immensely beneficial result that bears upon inspiration:

*Europeans were familiar with goodness and expected it to exist in the world.*

To the average European of the middle ages, goodness was a common part of human life. They expected to see it and they did see it. Some people fell far short of that goal, of course, as some men always do, but goodness was expected to exist in the world. And because goodness was expected, Europeans accepted that it was attainable by them as individuals. They might not expect to become a venerated “saint,” but they could easily see themselves as a virtuous man or woman, and they very often lived up to those expectations.

It is important to note that it was *not* the Protestant reformation that killed this. The Protestants rebelled, not against the concept of goodness, but because the Church leaders were corrupt. Early Protestants, such as the Lollards, were exemplary in the goodness of their lives. (It was certain people

of the Enlightenment period who bear the most blame.)

People who believe they can actually be good are different, and better. This belief creates a virtuous cycle of expectation, action and feedback. With each cycle, more goodness is pumped into the world. This was a healthy condition and it is the Western world's great loss that it was carelessly abandoned, rather than being improved to keep pace with the times.

## CONSCIOUS GOODNESS

Even more important than our expectation of seeing goodness in the world is our judgment of ourselves as *good*. Such a judgment frees our internal gears (if you will permit me this mechanical analogy) to operate freely.

The central component of this, obviously, is that this is a judgment we make about ourselves. And we judge ourselves the same way we judge others: by observing our actions. What you observe yourself doing becomes your opinion of “what I am like.” If your actions are good, this sets up a virtuous cycle in which you do good because your picture of yourself features you doing good. This is built in to Aristotle's famous statement:

*We become just by doing just acts.*

Here is another statement of Aristotle's, explaining how he had improved his own nature:

*I have gained this by philosophy: that I do, without being commanded, what others do only from fear of the law.*

Which is essentially the same idea expressed by Paul the Apostle in one of his letters:

*These, having not the law, do by nature those things which are contained in the law.*

At our deepest levels, we know that we are good when we know that we create benefit in the world, not because we kept someone's rules. We judge ourselves *good* when we know that we are a positive force in the universe.

This confidence of our actions is a powerful thing, and one that we should enjoy more than we do. If we did, we'd experience a lot more inspiration.

## MORAL CLARITY

A necessity for any of us to hold an “I am good” opinion, is to have a clear concept of what the *good* is. We are, unfortunately, living in an age when moral clarity is all but impossible inside the institutional system that seeks to contain us all.

Inside the modern mental bubble, morality is portrayed as an indistinct morass. As a result, most of us wander in a gray zone, where right and wrong are barely acknowledged. But when people become clear as regards morality, they are proud to react with honor and with strength. There is not a real lack of nobility in most people, but a lack of a clear moral vision.

And the truth is that distinguishing right from wrong really isn't that hard. Here it is in two simple statements:

1. *What is hateful to you, do not do to any person.*
2. *Do not encroach upon anyone or their property, and keep your agreements.*

Number one is the original statement of the Golden Rule, and number two is the essence of the

common law; more or less an extension of #1. And that's all that we really need. Sure, a philosopher can come up with weird exceptions, but that's not a serious concern. Send the one-in-a-million scenario to a specialist and get on with the other 999,999.

Are there situations in life that are complex, and that require careful use of these basic statements? Of course there are. But that's no reason to toss them out. And it's certainly no reason to think that you can't know right from wrong.

#### ACCEPTING THE SUPERIOR MAN

One of mankind's great and common errors is that of envy. This is dangerous, not just because it poisons our actions toward others, but because it poisons our opinions of ourselves:

*When you engage in envy, you are judging yourself as unable to obtain the things that make you envious.*

If, on the other hand, you accept the superior man and appreciate his skills, you join him and begin to elevate toward him.

How we feel about the man above us determines how high we will go. At a minimum, when we see someone succeed in a notable way, we should say something like "God bless him; may I be next."

Again, this is not about how we treat others, it is about how we judge ourselves. And we should judge ourselves as inherently capable.

#### AN EXERCISE

I'd like to give you a basic exercise that may help you to build inspiration:

First, answer this question clearly:

*If there were absolutely no obstacles in your way, what would you do?*

Take your time answering that question. Remember, the answer is what you DO want, not "I want to be free of \_\_\_\_\_." Specify something you really want. Forget about obstacles or lacks and answer the question: *What would you do if there were no obstacles?*

Next, do this:

*When you go to bed tonight, start playing your scenario. Imagine waking up tomorrow morning with absolutely no obstacles in front of you. What, precisely, would you do? Start with getting out of bed and imagine your first utterly unobstructed day. Where would you go? What would you do? Who would you get to cooperate with you? What supplies or information would you get? Where would you get them? What would you do next?*

Once you work this scenario for a while, you can move on to variations on the theme.

#### BEING MORE

*All men can be heroes, if inspired.*  
– G.K. Chesterton

Inspiration, and especially repetitive inspirations, make us more than we have been. And this produces a follow-on effect: Whatever obstacles exist within us tend to be drawn out and repaired. These two quotes (the first from a modern American author named Nick Boddie Williams, the second from an ancient Indian philosopher named Patanjali) explain this process very well:

*Once we hear the voice of inspiration, accept it and act on it, another energy is activated - invisible collaboration moves to support us... The details start to be taken care of. All that we have created that stands between us and our freedom will also come up to be healed.*

*When you are inspired by some great purpose, some extraordinary project, all your thoughts break your bonds: your mind transcends limitations, your consciousness expands in every direction, and find yourself in a new, great and wonderful world. Dormant forces, faculties and talents become alive, and you discover yourself to be a greater person by far than you ever dreamed yourself to be.*

## THE PRACTICE OF INSPIRATION

Once the pieces that create inspirations are in place, the question faces us of how to handle inspiration in our daily lives. The first issue is handling the eruptions of inspiration. Let's begin with some advice from the great John Locke:

*The thoughts that come often unsought, and as if they were drop into the mind, are commonly the most valuable of any we have, and therefore should be secured, because they seldom return again.*

When inspiration happens, you must *act* upon it, or else it may wither and vanish, not to return. Strangely enough, inspiration will return in strength if you write it down and return to it promptly. This is very common when flashes of inspiration come during the night. If you write them down, you can return to them in the morning and they will still operate. But you must act in some way to preserve them, or they may be permanently lost.

Here is a thought on the same subject from the very practical Earl Nightingale:

*Ideas are elusive, slippery things. Best to keep a pad of paper and a pencil at your bedside, so you can stab them during the night before they get away.*

From author Lewis Carroll:

*Sometimes an idea comes in the night when I have to get up and strike a light and note it down — sometimes when out on a lonely walk, when I have had to stop and with half-frozen fingers jot down a few words which should keep the new-born idea from perishing — but whatever or however it comes, it comes of itself.*

From the great composer, Ludwig van Beethoven:

*I always have a notebook with me, and when an idea comes to me, I put it down at once... I change a great deal, eliminate much and begin again, until I am satisfied with the result; then the working-out, in extension, in diminution, in height and depth begins in my head, and, since I know what I want, the basic idea never leaves me, it mounts and grows. I hear and see the work in my mind in its full proportions, as though already accomplished, and all that remains is the labor of the writing it out.*

And, of course, once it arrives, inspiration must be followed by work. The great psychologist Abraham Maslow said this:

*The difference between inspiration and the final product, for example, Tolstoy's 'War and Peace', is an awful lot of hard work, an awful lot of discipline, and awful*

*lot of training, an awful lot of finger exercises and practices and rehearsals and throwing away of first drafts and so on.*

Here is painter Joan Miro, explaining how he allows inspiration to be born in its own way:

*Then, when the first moment has passed, I put the canvas aside, facing the wall, and get on with living; but I feel it 'working' within me. Then one day, and a completely unexpected way, something is triggered: I pick up the painting again, and, as I proceed, a host of new ideas come in. It is like being in a state of drunkenness.*

I mentioned earlier that at first, inspirations tend to come at night, as your mind calms and rests; as the modern world's myriad distractions slip out of your consciousness. After years of cultivating and capturing inspiration, however, the process becomes heartier and easier to access, as this quote from Albert Einstein illustrates:

*Although I have a regular work schedule, I take time to go for long walks on the beach so that I can listen to what is going on inside my head. If my work isn't going well, I lie down in the middle of a workday and gaze at the ceiling while I listen and visualize what goes on in my imagination.*

Beneath all of this, you must feed your inner man with the best fuel you can find. As philosopher Alfred A. Montapert said:

*We should get into the habit of reading inspirational books, looking at inspirational pictures, hearing inspirational music, associating with inspirational friends.*

One of the great inspirational practices of the world is the Jewish Sabbath dinner, known as *shabbos* or *shabbat*. Believe it or not, even ancient Romans often adopted the practice, which involves setting apart a number of hours to sit with your family and discuss things that matter. It is a healthy tradition.

## TRIGGERS

*Poets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration; the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present.*

– Percy Bysshe Shelley

A hierophant is a person who brings religious congregants into a holy presence. So, to paraphrase Shelly:

*Poets guide us to inspirations that have not yet been grasped; they reflect the outlines of the future into the present.*

And as are poets, so are all the other triggers of inspiration, including beautiful sights and sounds, inspirational stories, and so on.

Triggers, of whatever type, convey to you a sense of wholeness, emergence, beauties, wholesomeness or health.

We humans are very, very good at pattern recognition, and by stepping back into a place where we once thought a certain way, we can easily begin thinking that way again. For example, a study conducted about fifteen years ago (I no longer have the details) showed that old people actually de-aged when they lived in houses that were the same as those they grew up in; the reconstructed environments of their youth.

## A FINAL THOUGHT

I shall leave the subject of inspiration with this thought from Bessie Anderson Stanley:

*He has achieved success who has lived well, laughed often, and loved much; who has enjoyed the trust of pure women, the respect of intelligent men and the love of little children; who has filled his niche and accomplished his task; who has left the world better than he found it whether by an improved poppy, a perfect poem or a rescued soul; who has never lacked appreciation of Earth's beauty or failed to express it; who has always looked for the best in others and given them the best he had; whose life was an inspiration; whose memory a benediction.*

\* \* \* \* \*

I will be speaking at the (wonderful) [Libertopia](#) show in San Diego on October 12<sup>th</sup>. If you'll be there, please say hello.

See you next month.

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