

## Ep #13: The Spirit of Creative Genius



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With Your Host

**Leah Badertscher**

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## Ep #13: The Spirit of Creative Genius

If I asked you to define genius, what would come to mind? A few of the definitions from Merriam-Webster's dictionary include, "Genius, a single strongly marked capacity or aptitude." And, "An extraordinary intellectual power, especially as manifested in creative activity." Also, "A person endowed with extraordinary mental superiority, especially a person with a very high IQ."

I think many of us would agree that these are the definitions that first come to mind when most of us think of what genius is. But did you also know that in Ancient Rome, the root of the Latin word genius referred to an indwelling spirit that watched over every person? And what about that story from Arabian Nights of the genie in the bottle granting you three wishes?

Although etymologists say that the similarity in the words between jinni, which was then translated to its closest English-French approximate, genie, is accidental, I still find it fascinating that that ancient story of the genie is also about a supernatural being, an angel or a demon depending on the story, that when liberated has supernatural creative powers and does the bidding of the one who liberates the spirit from its all too tiny limitations.

If you haven't guessed, where I'm going with this is, so how do we go about liberating this guardian spirit, this genie, this creative genius within ourselves? The answer to that is some of the most fascinating work I do with my clients and it's the topic of today's episode.

You are listening to *The Art School Podcast*, a show for artists and creatives who want to become the next greatest version of themselves. Learn how to cultivate an extraordinary way of being and take the mystery out of making money, and the struggle out of making art. Here is your host, master certified life coach, artist, and former lawyer, Leah Badertscher.

Hi everyone and welcome back. Thanks for tuning in. I wanted to introduce today's episode with some great news story that was not weather related

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for you, but I can't get it out of my brain, because it's even why I'm recording this podcast in the dead of the night, because we're in the thick of the polar vortex and my kids are on day three of no school. So there's no quiet time to be had in my house during the day.

And in some ways, it's really – I kind of enjoy days like this that are, like, cozy and cocoon-like and I love being around my kids and I love having them around and they're just really delightful and creative. And they fight plenty, like normal kids, but other times – as long as I'm not thinking that none of that should happen, then my days go much more smoothly. And then it also, then, I have to be creative with how am I going to get my work done and not stress? So plenty of good coaching opportunities for me there too.

I want to, just before we start, say thank you to – there was like a spike in the number of people I heard from this last week; people that I haven't met and didn't know were listening to the podcast. And you reached out and let me know that you're sharing it, and that really, I went through my day with a spring in my step thinking that somebody I don't know is on their way to the gym and listening, from what I hear, and that you're finding things useful and helpful, and that's really encouraging to me and it makes me want to do an even better job. So thank you so much for letting me know that.

So, today's topic – it's like a special interest topic, and it was really hard for me – it's pretty hard for me every week to cull things down into bite-sized podcast sort of form and deliver it that way, because I definitely have to work with that negative space principle and tell myself, "Okay, Leah, nobody wants to drink from a fire hose, just give them something that is beautiful or meaningful or useful, and then trust that, in the remaining space of their day, that that will be plenty to think about and talk about."

And it's something I always have to remind myself of when I'm coaching too, because there's just so many exciting things. And then, once I start

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working with someone, I can't, like, stop myself from all the things that we could do or all the ways I could help, and I just get really excited.

But I also know that there is a point of saturation and that I really do believe in that negative space and allowing ourselves to integrate. So with today's topic, again, I really am distilling it down because I have been fascinated with creativity and creative genius for as long as I can remember, probably before I had words for it. But then, once I could start to read, I just devoured books and biographies by creative geniuses.

I was the kid who had huge posters of Albert Einstein with his quotes on my bedroom wall growing up. So today, what I want to give you are some just different ways of thinking about creative genius, because the way I really find most exciting is that the genius that goes beyond the definition of having a high intellect.

So it was my poetry mentor, Fran Quinn, who is one of my top lifetime teachers of all time – if you're a poet, you should definitely check out his work. I'll link to his website in the show notes. And he does workshops around the country, Philadelphia, Indianapolis, Chicago, New York City. And I know the East Coast ones are probably full or fill up pretty quickly.

Chicago, we are always looking for more amazing poets to join us. But anyway, Fran Quinn is the one that introduced me to this other idea of, and really the root of the word genius, the Latin root, and what it meant in Ancient Rome, and that there was this indwelling spirit, like a guardian angel spirit within us all that watched over a person throughout their life, and that it might have also had prophetic or generative powers.

And I think the reason that fascinated me so much is because it's something that I already sensed, but then also something that ignited in me an unleashing of my own creativity and has really helped me in my work with others. Because throughout my work with my creative clients, I can

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see over and over and over again that there is some indwelling driving force that is bent on helping them.

And we also know, like, stifled creativity can come out sideways. And the way I see it is that this stifled spirit is just still trying to get our attention. It's that sometimes that discontent is the universe nudging us forward, but that it's actually working on our behalf. And if we will listen to it and let it guide us, it will guide us.

So, I want to back up a little bit and say – again, now I've said, you know where I'm going with this – but whether you are willing to believe in an indwelling guardian angel type spirit in yourself that does have these kind of prophetic and generative guardian powers that watches over your life, or whether you are willing to look at this interpretation, and also the story of the genie in the bottle as an archetypical kind of myth or allegory that can point us to how we can liberate a genius or a potential, a creativity within ourselves, if you're willing to think of creativity as this force – and I do think it is.

In a book that I've been writing for a while, there's one line that came to me a while ago and I keep coming back to it because it rings so true for me, for myself and in the work I've done with clients. And that is that our creativity carries with us the essence of who we really are.

And so again, if you're willing to consider any of these things, even metaphorically, then if you're open to that, your next question will likely be, okay then, how? How do I tap this potential? How do I go about liberating this guardian spirit, this genie, or this creative genius within myself?

So, there is a simple answer, but it's also not easy. And I think it's with practice and with conditioning and with the right environment, it can come to us with greater ease. But when I tell you, it's going to sound too easy, and I just want to caution you that I'm not oversimplifying, that I actually

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know it can be a little bit more difficult to get to that point, and also maybe not. Because I think that the two simplest answers, like how do we get there, is that we create a sense of safety and we cultivate trust.

So, with that being said, I'm just going to back up again a little bit and read a couple of the other definitions of genius. It's from the online etymology dictionary. So, just so you have these things to chew on as well, "Genius, from the late 14<sup>th</sup> century, a tutelary or moral spirit who guides and governs an individual through life." "From the Latin, genius, meaning guardian deity or spirit which watches over each person from birth, spirit, incarnation, wit, talent, also prophetic skill. It's the male spirit of a gens, originally generative power or inborn nature." So, later on, it took on the meaning of, "A personal or natural intelligence or talent or exalted natural mental ability." Those meanings were first recorded in the 1640s.

So, keeping those things in mind, that your creativity is not necessarily something you have to force yourself to do or just an IQ or a capacity that you are either born with or not but actually something within you working on your behalf, I find having that perspective can help people to relax. Because it's relaxing that allows you to slip then into that creative mode.

Because we know again, from biology, that creative mode and survival mode are at two opposite ends of the spectrum and that survival mode is for keeping us alive. But it's not meant to be how we live. And I think how we're meant to live is truly being creative. Again, in that creative state, we have that essence of who we are, like I talked about on the podcast last week, that when you're in that flow state, and it's that simultaneous amazing paradox of the ultimate self-discovery and the ultimate self-forgetting, like being more full of yourself than ever but then also this amazing absence of self-absorption and neurotic focus on the self.

So, a couple of stories from coaching this week that I wanted to share with you that, to me, demonstrate the power of how wise and intuitive this

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indwelling spirit is. So I have one woman who is asking me about joining *The Art School*. And she knows that one of the components is that I suggest that people bring a project to work on for the 12 weeks, because in addition to all the meta-life-skills and working on a creative process and working on mindset, I love for there to be this external representation and manifestation of the inner work that we're doing.

I find it helps moor us to where we are in the world and helps that there's this synergy that happens between that back and forth between you're doing the inner work, but then you can see it reflected in this work outside of yourself. Because sometimes too, you can make great progress and things can feel amazing, but then, you look back and you're not sure what the progress was or you think, well that felt great, but what do I have to show for it?

But when we can see that we're moving the needle somewhere in our life, that's deeply reassuring to our psyche and we are spiritual beings and we have this physical component. So I love to have the foot in both worlds, and again, doing the inner work and then also having something measurable, or at least tangible and visible that you can put your hands on, that you can see and put your eyes on in the outside world that helps you kind of keep track on where you are in time and space with this creative evolution.

And the other reason I love having a project or a goal in mind so much is because it will bring up the challenges and it will bring up the hard things. Because it's one thing, we'll read a book and we'll be like, yes, this information is life-changing, I'm going to do this. And then, when we take it out into the world, we're like, wait, this feels completely differently. Why can't I implement those things that I read about in that book or that I heard about from that amazing speaker or during the coaching session?

So, I like having a project so that we're workshoping real time. Because, if you have a project and you're trying to move things forward, everything in

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that small project will bring up what comes up on the macro level in the rest of your life. And then we can work through, “Well then how do you encounter that obstacle?”

And this brings me back to those two points; how do you liberate the genie from the lamp? How do you get unstuck? How do you tap that potential? How do you go from having this vision for something you want to create inside of you, whether that’s a book or your next book or additional money in the bank or a new job or a partner or a home?

Those things, in the abstract, you can think about, “Okay, I can be the person that works through that...” but when the rubber meets the road, it can become a different scenario. And so what I like to do, when having those projects in front of us, is have people cultivate a sense of safety within themselves and a sense of trust because it’s so antithetical to what we’re taught about in the rest of the world most of the time.

Most of the time, we’re taught to force and to operate under pressure. And while I do believe in working and managing your mind state no matter what the circumstances are, I also believe that it’s within our capability and it is then our responsibility knowing that to work on cultivating a sense of safety within ourselves. Because it’s from that sense of safety that then calms the psyche and draws out the muse, draws out your creativity, or in scientific terms, shifts you into a better brainwave state.

So, I’m giving you these concepts today, and also throughout everything I’ve been talking about in previous episodes, I’ve talked about tools that lead to this. And a lot of my coaching leads to that, where we talk about cultivating a way of being, in mind, body, and spirit, that makes the results that you want inevitable.

And cultivating a sense of safety within yourself so that your central nervous system can calm down and that you can create from that place is

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essential. And then also trusting – trusting that innate force within you that is working on your behalf. And I can tell you, I see it over and over again.

I can see the frustration on people's faces and hear it in their voices and hear and feel the angst and pain that there is this struggle and feeling, intensely, the gap between where they are and where they want to be, and yet, over and over again, they tell me their stories and I am just spellbound and stunned by the fact that there is this force within them that is working on their behalf and just won't give up and just keeps bringing them to the right people.

And, you know, for me, there was this time when I was so exasperated and depressed and frustrated because I'd had so many disappointments and failures and I thought, why can't I just give up? Like, what is it in me that just will not let me give up?

And it took me a little bit to realize that that was actually a good thing, that it's a benevolent force within myself that just refused to let me quit or quit forever. And, once I realized that, I could relax more into that, and it took a lot of pressure off my shoulders. It relieved me of thinking that I had to do it all with my small self. It helped me to then hear this affirmed from my mentor, Fran, when he said, "Yeah, genius, and the Romans believed that there was a spirit within us." Like, oh, that's what it is, it's working on my behalf; not just there to continually set me up for disappointment.

So, once you can cultivate that sense of safety and trust in that spirit within yourself, it allows you to relax and align with it and work more with it rather than working against yourself.

So, when I was thinking also how I could inspire you along these lines and I was thinking about things that have been most inspiring to me, more poets came to mind. And so I wanted to share a couple of poems with you today. One is from Rilke; Just as the Winged Energy of Delight. "Just as the

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winged energy of delight carried you over many chasms early on, now raise the daringly imagined arch holding up the astounding bridges. Miracle doesn't lie only in the amazing living through and defeat of danger. Miracles become miracles in the clear achievement that is earned. To work with things is not hubris, when building the association beyond words. Denser and denser the pattern becomes. Being carried along is not enough. Take your well-disciplined strengths and stretch them between two opposing poles, because inside human beings is where God learns."

So, let me just read that last stanza, because like so many of Rilke's poems, I feel like he does this build, build and you're like, wow mystery, lots of imagery. And it takes a few times reading it to really see what he's saying, and then he's like, pow, like God jumps out of a hiding place in the last stanza.

So, it's the last stanza, "Take your well-disciplined strengths and stretch them between two opposing poles, because inside human beings is where God learns."

So to me, among other things, what he's saying there in that last stanza is that that stretch that we feel when we can see where we are but we also see the vision, and the vision is also real to us, especially if we are visionaries and creatives and artists, feels very real to us. And yet, we put them between those two poles and it goes back to that chasm he talked about earlier.

It creates this chasm within ourselves. It creates this cognitive dissonance because we know the reality that most people see now, and then we know this reality that exists in our imagination, which for us is equally as real, but in a different way, and that those two poles, it does feel like a stretch. Again, there's that mental emotional discomfort of cognitive dissonance.

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And then though, he says, “You stretch because inside human beings is where God learns.” So for me, again, whether the word God works for you or not or whether you want to think of it as consciousness or a higher intelligence or your potential or creativity or spirit, or the mind, that discomfort, that chasm instead becomes an awe-inspiring place, because it’s precisely setting up that stretch for yourself, and then allowing yourself to feel safe and trusting, knowing that something supernatural – you’re tapping into something supernatural just by having created that space and created that stretch.

There’s another poem of Rilke’s where he talks about throwing up flames, making the flames big enough so that God has shadows to dance in. I love that imagery for today’s topic, potential and creative genius too.

So, the next line that I wanted to share with you is from another of my favorite poets, who we talked about just recently. She sadly passed, Mary Oliver. These lines actually came not from a poem but from *Upstream*, a book of essays.

“The most regretful people on earth are those who felt the call to creative work, who felt their own creative power restive and uprising and gave it neither power nor time.”

So, I posted that on Instagram earlier this year and wrote a little bit about it, and I got some flack about that. And basically, that negative feedback was that it was shaming. And trust me, my intent was not shaming at all and I do not believe that that is at all what Mary Oliver was doing either. I think she’s being clear and she’s being firm and that there is a kindness in that and that that creative power that is restive and uprising, to me, is akin to that forest within us; that forest that wants to create. And we can struggle against it, or we can start to follow it and relax into it and we can learn to align with it.

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So, this brings me to the part of the podcast where I want you to do more than just listen. I want you to lean in and I want you to really apply these things. I want you to coach with me.

I hope that already just chewing on the idea that there is this creative spirit and force within you that wants to create just as much as you do, I hope that taking that for a walk, reflecting on that, considering the truth of that, seeing if you can feel the truth of that and any resonance with it already within yourself, within your body, I hope that already starts to soothe you.

And then the next thing I want you to do – and this is something that would be useful for you to use a journal with – is to think about times in your life that you could look back on and say, “Yes, I was definitely being led...” or, “You know what, I’ve had this desire to be a writer since I was in first grade. Of all the things that have come and gone in my life, this desire to be a writer has been persistent.”

And maybe it’s been the source of a lot of angst for you, but start to look at it from a different perspective, that maybe it’s been a great kindness that this call has never left you. Because I love the way that Mary Oliver put that too – again, if that indwelling spirit doesn’t resonate with you, sometimes thinking of it as a call or a whisper to create, you know, what is that? And what is that that has just not left you throughout all things in your life – and pausing and making sure that you acknowledge that as sacred and don’t dismiss it.

The next thing that I want you to do for yourself – and you can answer this as a prompt as well in your journal, I think it’s really helpful to write that out – is to think about ways you’ve been trying to be creative but it hasn’t worked. And for most of us, that will look like we’re forcing some action or performance or project out of ourselves.

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And usually, we're putting the cart before the horse because, usually, the problem is we haven't even fed the horse and we haven't been taking care of the horse. And that horse is our creative spirit. So, for you to ask yourself, how can I nurture my creative spirit? And I'll tell you that one place to start is to acknowledge it and then to ask it what it needs to be nurtured, and then to give to it what it needs to be nurtured, and then also to not skip the part where you believe that it exists and you believe and trust in what it's telling you.

Because caring for that animal, caring for that creative creature part of you is going to engender that sense of safety and trust. It's going to coax that genie out of the bottle. It's going to coax your mews to come and sit with you when then you do go to write or paint or create. So again, ask yourself how can I nurture myself, and then make a very tangible list of resources and put it on the calendar. And be willing to put out some resources in order to care for it. So, don't be stingy with your mews, in other words. Take very good care of your creative spirit and it will take care of the creating.

Thank you so much for listening to another episode of *The Art School Podcast*. So, in this episode, we talked about how you can unleash your creative genius. One of my areas of genius is helping other people unleash theirs.

And here's where a secret bonus comes in if you've made it all the way to the end of this podcast and stuck with me, because in addition to cultivating a sense of safety within yourself and trust, trusting yourself, trusting creativity, trusting that spirit within you, trusting the process, the other thing that is essential, and I think is also first and foremost for tapping your creative genius is love.

And I love my clients and I nurture my clients. And I know, for some reason, that must not be for everyone, but frankly, it's what I did for myself. It was

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the way through obstacles. It was the way out of the self-criticism and the constant judgment and even the self-loathing that had just kept me blocked for so long. And it's not easy work, but it's good work.

And I knew then also with my creativity, it's also the secret not secret to my art and to my writing, is that if you fall in love with a subject, whether you're painting it, whether it's a story in your imagination, whether it's a memoir, whether you're a photographer, if you fall in love with your subject, that affection will take over and that energy will be transferred through your art form.

And coaching, for me, is an art form. And I feel a deep affection for my clients, and that, to me, is the most powerful place to be, because then the ideas for them come to me, then my intuition is alive, then all cylinders are firing and I have the best of my own capacity and capability on hand and at their disposal.

So, I'm very nurturing and I'm the kind of coach that I would love to have. So I do think that amongst the other things that makes *The Art School* so unique and so spectacular, that really, you'll feel it in the energy of the coaching and the energy of the people that are attracted to this kind of constructive and incredibly empowering incredibly creative community.

So, if you are interested, there is a handful of spaces remaining in the master class and in the open class. And it is by application not to scare you off, but just so you know that I want to make sure that it's a good fit for you and it's a good fit for the program. So I would just love to hear more about what you would love to do in the program. And I would love to hear more about how I could really nurture and support you, because I want to make sure too that you're willing to meet me there, that you are going to love on yourself and your work as much as I am.

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And if so, wow, we are really going to go to amazing places and you're going to blow your own mind. So, if that sounds like the kind of way that you want to kick off the first half of this year and really change the trajectory of the rest of not just your creative career, but really creating your life, then email me and we can set up a time to talk or you can book a time to talk with me about it with a free discovery consult.

You can find the link on my website, on *The Art School* page, [www.leahcb.com](http://www.leahcb.com). And on my homepage, you'll see a link to *The Art School*.

So, thank you again, everyone, for joining me this week. Keep emailing. I love hearing from you. And until next time, have a beautiful week.