



The DNA of Inspiration

How the Genetic Makeup of
Inspiration Stimulates and Motivates

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“From a little spark may burst a flame.”

– Dante Alighieri, Poet, Author, and Philosopher

“When you are inspired, all your thoughts break their bonds; your mind transcends limitations; your consciousness expands in every direction; and you find yourself in a great, new, and wonderful world. You discover yourself to be a greater person than you ever dreamed yourself to be.”

– Patanjali, Author and Ancient Indian Sage

ESSENTIAL TO LIFE

Inspiration is indispensable to life; it is the essence of our existence, the substance of our spirit and soul. As such, inspiration is often described as *our breath of life* in that it gives us who we are being in this moment in time and, most importantly, who we are becoming. In view of that, inspiration furnishes us our *nextness* in life. It stimulates our imagination, ignites our creativity, and, by and large, it motivates us in the choices we make and the actions we take. The common currency of being human is that all life is created from that which inspires us; we improvise and extemporize life as we go along. Arising in our inspiration and imagination, life is one continuous process of created positions and improvisations.¹ According to Sir Ken Robinson, author, speaker, and international advisor on education, “You create your life as you move through it and you create it with the opportunities you see around you, the talents you find within you, and whether you are open to both.”²

What makes inspiration so inspiring is that it is essential to our individuality and distinctiveness as it is fundamental in how we imagine, innovate, and invent our self. Nothing in life drives our growth and development like inspiration. Inspiration is the fuel of our imagination and creativity. We see something we never saw before; we hear some-

thing that we never heard before; and it takes hold of us. It captures our attention; it moves, touches, and inspires us giving us new meaning, purpose, and direction for who we are and what we can achieve in life.

Of the three principles on which human life flourishes, inspiration prevails over all our individuality, inquisitiveness, and inventiveness.³ Consider, for a moment, humans are inherently individual. We are naturally unique in our diversity and difference not only in our physicalness but also in our thoughts and feelings, opinions and judgements, attitudes and values; we are unique in our perspectives, perceptions, and preferences in life. Of the estimated 60 to 100 billion people who live or have ever lived on planet Earth, no two people are, were, or ever will be the same. That thought, in and of itself, and the miracle of life, is truly inspirational. In our individuality, every life is inspiring. Every life is unique and singular; every life is an extraordinary, unrepeatable, improvised moment in time. There never was nor ever will be an individual with your unique, exclusive knowledge, abilities, experiences, and passions or, for that matter, your unique curiosity and creativity.

In our individuality, humans are inherently inquisitive. We are naturally curious in wanting or needing to know

thoughts and things about people and places and life in our occurring world. Add to that, we are also naturally curious in wanting to know the meaning of everything. We ponder and probe, question and query so that we can determine, in our self-interest, the meaning of things and their relevance, importance, and value. It is our nature to nurture our interests and intellect, intuition and insights; we are instinctively inspired to experiment and explore, examine and discover, understand and learn new things especially in our ongoing desire to satisfy our curiosity while enhancing and expanding our imagination and inventiveness.

In our individuality and inquisitiveness, humans are also inherently inventive. We are naturally creative and imaginative. Unlike other sentient beings, we have the exclusive ability to imagine things, the ability to bring into mind things that are not present to our senses.⁴ We can speculate and hypothesize, we can anticipate and to some extent predict, and we can contemplate and acknowledge the ideas and points of view of others. In our imagination, we are able to originate and create ideas; we are able to innovate old ideas and invent new ones. What's more, we can retreat into the past and, likewise, launch into a future we imagine. We can create that which is new, that which is more or less, better or different by putting our imagination to work for the value innovation and invention offers us; we can create that which fulfills on and satisfies our needs, wants, and desires in life. Arising out of our inspiration, we are inherently imaginative and inventive because we are inherently individual and inquisitive. We develop and grow in our inspiration giving us new meaning, hope, purpose, and direction in life.⁵

IN THE MIND

When we reference the principles on which human life flourishes, we understand inspiration sources each and that inspiration is indispensable in the sense that it initiates our imagination and invention as well as our interest and individuality. We also recognize inspiration and imagi-

ination, interest and invention as states of mind, cognitive processes, giving us intellectual and emotional individuality, although we also consider individuality in the physical sense; that is, not only how and what we think but also how we behave and what we look like. Nevertheless, our individuality, inquisitiveness, and inventiveness arise in our inspiration, interest, and imagination.

Inspiration occurs only in our mind. Continuously, we sense, perceive, and interpret our occurring world when, in an unexpected, spontaneous moment, we are sparked, we are stirred in our mind, we are inspired by some fascinating thought or thing. And so, our attention is captured. In that moment, our interest and imagination influence our thoughts and feelings potentializing our individuality, inquisitiveness, and inventiveness. Inspiration occurs with our awareness and attention.

“Of the three principles on which human life flourishes, inspiration prevails over our individuality, inquisitiveness, and inventiveness.”

Attention and inattention are psychological conditions of life; they describe not only the conscious interest and awareness of our occurring world but also our indifference and unconscious apathy. Attention defines the deliberate, intentional thought or thing in our

focus distinguished in the moment whereas inattention defines the unintentional *all else*. Life and, as such, our occurring world, is experienced and perceived in this dynamic relationship of attention and inattention, awareness and unawareness, which is best described as a *figure / ground relationship* as part of Gestalt principles of perception.^{6,7}

Ground describes the settings, surroundings, and backgrounds we experience in life; it is our inattention to thoughts and things, people and places, events and environments, conditions and circumstances, and *all else* in our existence and being. In other words, *ground* is principally and predominantly our context and backdrop in life. Conversely, *figure* is our attention to something within our ground. We are aware and focused giving our attention to something. We give our attention to some thought or thing, to some extent or magnitude, every moment we are con-

scious whether we realize it or not, whether we are mindful of it or not. Constantly changing, the *figure / ground relationship* is an active, uninterrupted phenomenon as our awareness, attention, and interest, in some measure, occurs moment by moment. In view of that, *ground* remains as a backdrop of our inattention until we focus attention on some other aspect within the *ground* rendering it as *figure* in that very moment of our awareness and attention.

Attention and inattention shift with our experiences of our occurring world, as we experiment and explore, examine and discover, understand and learn things in life. As psychologist, author, and educator Victor Shamas states, “Thoughts arise and subside allowing other thoughts to arise and subside.” *Figure and ground* shift with our attention and inattention, awareness and unawareness, interest and disinterest. Our thoughts and feelings and thus our focus emerge and merge and emerge and merge again from formlessness to form to formlessness to form and so forth.⁸ As such, the relationship of figure and ground is never static for any extended period of time. Of course, individual attention spans vary individually with our interest, inquiry, and involvement which are usually determined by the importance we place on the subject of our attention. Accordingly, attention and inattention, awareness and unawareness, as *figure and ground*, change ceaselessly.

In our normal mindfulness, we routinely and automatically, instinctively and unthinkingly, respond and react to our occurring world; in other words, we live life as usual. And of a sudden, an inspirational moment spontaneously takes

over. The moment is a spark, a stimulating, moving, and uplifting *figure* as it surpasses our normal mindfulness of *ground*, creating a new awareness and attention, clarity and freshness of thought and emotion.

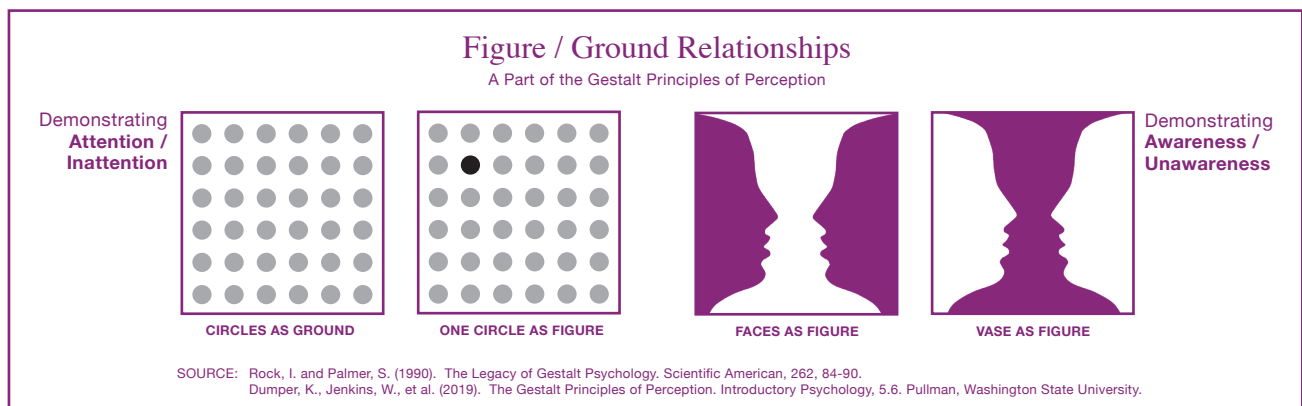
And yet, in another moment, it evaporates. And although the inspirational moment vaporizes and vanishes, although the spark fades, it is the effect of the inspirational moment that moves, touches, and inspires us; it is the resonance and residue of the inspirational moment that remains with us.

Accordingly, inspiration is an experience and the effect of that experience.

THE RESONANCE OF INSPIRATION

The experience is an event, a moment in time, of having been moved, touched, and inspired by some thought or thing. However, once the experience occurs, it evaporates leaving behind its resonance which remains as the effect. Inspiration effect is always stimulation and often motivation. As stimulation, inspiration sparks awareness, appreciation, and acknowledgment of some thought or thing; as motivation, inspiration initiates opportunities for us to make choices and to take actions. And while the inspirational moment is an experience, the resonance of the inspirational moment is also an experience, one appreciated and savored over time beyond the initial spark.

Stimulated and (or) motivated, the resonance of inspiration is often described as experiences of being excited and energized, enthused and enlivened, encouraged and engaged.



Taking a closer look at each effect of the experience, we know the experience of being excited and energized describe, in part, the feelings of being stimulated. When we are excited, we feel stirred and aroused, electrified and exhilarated; and when we are energized, we feel full of life, empowered, and perhaps even emboldened. We are also familiar with the experience of being enthused and enlivened which also describe, in part, the feelings of being stimulated. When we are enthused, we are interested, passionate, and eager and when we are enlivened, we are lit up with feelings of elation and joy, of being lifted, lightened, and even illuminated.

While being excited, energized, enthused, and enlivened contribute to our being stimulated in our experience of being inspired, being encouraged and engaged contribute to our being motivated. When we are encouraged, we are activated, we discover a reason, purpose, or cause for our self and we discover perhaps a direction in which we choose to take an action; in other words, we are motivated. In making choices and taking actions, then, we are engaged; we are involved, connected, and imaginably committed because of that which inspired us.

Appreciating the effect of the experience, we can understand how the spark, how the inspirational moment, can give us new hope and meaning, purpose and direction, for who we are and what we can achieve in life. In short, the resonance of inspiration consists not only of being excited, energized, enthused, and enlivened but it often consists of being encouraged and engaged in ways beyond our imagination.

THE QUALITIES OF INSPIRATION

Psychologists Todd M. Thrash and Andrew J. Elliot define three principal qualities of inspiration in their extensive work studying this wonderful sensation in life.⁹ The first principal quality of inspiration, according to Thrash and Elliot, is that “*inspiration is evoked naturally,*” that

it is stirred up spontaneously in the mind without intention. Suddenly some inspirational moment, some spark, abruptly occurs; the mind is unexpectedly stimulated by a thought or thing that moves, touches, and inspires us.

The second principal quality according to Thrash and Elliot is that inspiration is *uplifting and transcendent* surpassing our normal mindfulness, interests, and concerns, in the moment, going beyond the limitations of our thoughts, feelings, and beliefs. Such transcendence, they suggest, frequently involves moments of freshness and brightness, clearness and awareness for new possibilities and opportunities in life. As such, inspiration stimulates and awakens

us. We are inspired by thoughts and things, by people and places, by our world and even by our self.

The third principal quality, according to Thrash and Elliot, is that *inspiration is motivating*. “The heights of human motivation,” say Thrash and Elliot, “spring from the beauty and goodness [of inspiration] that precede us and awaken us to better possibilities.” In-

spiration motivates us to make choices and take actions for the possibilities and opportunities that present themselves from our inspiring moments.

Thrash and Elliot assert that “the core component characteristics of inspiration reflect the combination of two component processes” of, one, being *inspired by* and, two, being *inspired to*.¹⁰ Whereas *being inspired by* describes being stimulated by some thought or thing, *being inspired to* describes being motivated; that is, being moved to take an action by some thought or thing. Thrash and Elliot suggest, however, that “it is possible of *being inspired by* without *being inspired to*” when there are no “obvious implications for action.” On the one hand, there is value in simply *being inspired by* some thought or thing in life without acting on that which inspired us other than relishing the moment in our consideration and contemplation. On the other hand, in *being inspired to*, inspiration calls us into action; it moves, touches, and inspires us to act on

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and engaged.”*

that which inspired us. It inspires us to perform, produce, or procure something; it inspires us to imagine, create, or achieve something.

Besides *being inspired by*, in theory we are also *being inspired to* with everything that inspires us because we cannot be inspired by some thought or thing unless we are inspired to think first about it. That is to say, in our awareness and attention, in our response to some inspiring thought or thing, we initially sense and perceive it and then we sequentially interpret and understand it. When we are inspired, we are cognitively inspired to give thought to that which inspired us and, in our interpretation and understanding of it, we are inspired by that thought or thing. As such we are stimulated. Later, in our evaluation of that which inspired us and perhaps our decision to act on it, we are inspired to take an action. We are motivated.

In all our moments of inspiration, we are always inspired by and inspired to; we are stimulated and we are motivated to some extent. When we are motivated, we act on that which stimulated us often imagining new possibilities in our imagination, often creating original ideas in our creativity, and often putting our ideas into practice and reality.⁴ Furnishing us with our *nextness* in life, our moments of inspiration stimulate our imagination, ignite our creativity, and motivate us in the choices we make and the actions we take in life.

A SOURCE OF INSPIRATION

In addition to being at the effect of the “core component characteristics of inspiration,” that is, *being inspired by* and *being inspired to* as defined by Thrash and Elliot, we also create another component characteristic which we identify it as *being inspiring for*. At times, we are a source of inspiration to others as well as our self when we create inspiring moments, when we create experiences that move, touch, and inspire our self and others.

Inspiration comes from every imaginable source, from people and places, thoughts and things, from our occurring world, and even from our self. What makes some thought or thing inspiring to one and not to another is a matter of

Three Principal Qualities of Inspiration

SOURCE: Thrash, T.M. and Elliot, A. J. (2003).
Inspiration as a Psychological Construct.⁹

[1] STIMULATION

Inspiration is stirred up naturally and spontaneously in the mind without intention in the moment

[2] TRANSCENDENCE

Inspiration is uplifting and transcendent surpassing our normal mindfulness interests, and concerns

[3] MOTIVATION

Inspiration is engaging, exciting, enthusing, and energizing; it is being inspired by and being inspired to

individual interpretation and understanding, a matter of individual meaning, relevance, and value. What makes someone inspiring, like our self, is how we are being in the moment. As discussed previously, there are some common ways of being inspired that when we are excited, enthused, and engaged, for example, these ways of being can also inspire others. These common ways of being, which we experience in the resonance of inspiration, universally stimulate and motivate most people. We are *being inspiring for* others and our self when we are stimulating and motivating.

Inspiration is stimulating. In view of that, we are inspirational and inspiring when we are stimulating and exciting; when we are animated and energetic, active and lively, passionate and enthusiastic. What’s more, we are inspirational and inspiring when we connect with and engage others, when we are encouraging and motivating. Besides these ways of being, there are, of course, others that contribute to *being inspiring for*. Ultimately, when we are inspired; we are inspiring; stimulated, we are stimulating; motivated, we are motivating.

We are also a source of inspiration to others and our self when we intentionally create ways of being as possibilities into which we live. Stated differently, we get to choose our conduct, our ways of being inspirational by what we

intentionally think, declare, and do as *our possibility*; for example, intentionally being enthusiastic or intentionally being engaging, exciting, encouraging, and so forth. Victor Shamas suggests, from several years of his study focused on creative inspiration, that we can intentionally enhance our receptivity to being inspired and enhance our being inspirational in our openness to the experience by creating, causing, and living into a *space of inspiration*.^{8,12} Simply stated, this created space of inspiration as a possibility is intentional when we invite inspiration into our life, when we are inspired to inspire others.

THE ESSENCE OF EXISTENCE

Victor Shamas asserts, “There is nothing more contagious than inspiration; inspiration is to imagine and create.” Ken Robinson reminds us that from our inspiration, “We have the power of imagination and what flows from it, the power of creativity.” Although imagination and creativity are the engine of invention and innovation, inspiration is the fuel that drives it.

Consider, for a moment, the nature of inspiration and how it is the breath, the spirit, the soul of life. Consider how inspiration is the essence of our existence, development, and growth. Can you imagine a world without inspiration? Without inspiration, there would be no imagination. How then could you possibly imagine a “world without inspiration” if indeed inspiration fuels our imagination? Without inspiration, there is no imagination; and, without imagination, there is no creativity. There would be neither invention nor innovation. Without the imagination and without creativity, there is nothing. Inspiration is the life source of all creativity originating with the imagination and resulting in the invention or innovation of thoughts and things in our existence, development, and growth. From and in the beginning, inspiration arouses us and calls us into action. As our breath, spirit, and soul, inspiration provides us the spark for what we can imagine and what we can create.

According to psychologist Peter L. Benson, inspiration is the “human spark” that is essential to human thriving. He says, “Life feels the richest and fullest”⁵ when we are inspired. Transcending our ordinary experiences and limitations, inspiration not only transforms the way we perceive our abilities, but it also nourishes our passions and enhances our talents and skills. Psychologist and author Scott B. Kaufman writes, “In a culture obsessed with measuring talent and ability, we often overlook the important role of inspiration. Inspiration awakens us to new possibilities by allowing us to transcend our ordinary experiences and limitations. Inspiration propels a person from apathy to possibility and transforms the way we perceive our own capabilities.”¹¹

*“Inspiration is the source
of all creativity.*

*Without inspiration,
there is no imagination;
without imagination,
there is no creativity;
and without creativity
there is nothing.”*

Like a spark, we experience a moment of inspiration when it happens and in another moment it evaporates. Inspiration materializes and vanishes leaving a resonance of this wonderful, uplifting, and transcendent experience. And although inspiration can be a somewhat brief or lingering moment, the effect of the experience lasts longer than the experience and, in many instances, it can even last a lifetime. The spark is something special giving us new meaning, hope,

purpose, and direction in life. What’s more, from new meaning, the spark can also provide us a new source of inspiration by creating additional sparks opening us to new, unimagined possibilities and opportunities in life that we may have never previously envisioned.

But what is it exactly that inspires us? What is this thing that, when we experience it, we are inspired? Clearly, there are no answers to these questions because we are all inherently unique in our individuality, inquisitiveness, and inventiveness. Different experiences inspire and influence people differently. As such, what is inspiring to one is not always inspiring to another. However, if and when people are inspired by the same experiences, they are usually inspired for different reasons since we sense and

perceive, interpret and understand thoughts and things in our own way. What's more, when each of us are personally inspired, when each of us are individually stimulated and uniquely motivated, we are inspired because of our distinctive perspectives, perceptions, and preferences for thoughts and things in life.

PERSPECTIVES, PERCEPTIONS, AND PREFERENCES

When we speak about perspectives, perceptions, and preferences, we are referring to a blend of thoughts and feelings, attitudes and values, opinions, judgements, and beliefs that we develop over time from being individual, inquisitive, and inventive.

Taking a closer look at the nature of perspectives, perceptions, and preferences, perspectives consist of our thoughts and feelings for how we view our self; that is, how we see our self physically, intellectually, emotionally, spiritually, and ethically and for what we believe, regarding our self, others, and our world, established as opinions and judgements for what is good or bad, right or wrong, true or false, like or dislike, safe or unsafe, trust or distrust, imaginative or unimaginative, and more. These are the kind of assessments we make all the time in our navigation of life. As filters for how we think and feel and behave and how we communicate and create and relate, perspectives are our assessments of thoughts and things, people and places in our occurring world. We see our self, others, and our world from our perspectives; they are, of course, our opinions, judgements, and beliefs about everything.

Evolving from our perspectives and typically established in our background, knowledge, and wisdom, perceptions are our epistemic beliefs or personal certainties and convictions, confidences and faiths which we develop from life experiences, from our instincts and intuitions, discernments and insights, and thus our opinions and judgements. Our like, trust, and belief for thoughts and things in our occurring world as well as our deep-seated fear and love for thoughts and things give rise to our perceptions which are more prominent and persuasive, more influential and realistic than our perspectives. As a result, perceptions are

resolute in that they represent our reality; they are truth as we see it. Because we deal with our occurring world as reality in how we sense and perceive it, we interpret and understand our occurring world as the truth. And because we "already know and believe our perceptions are real," our perceptions are, *de facto*, our truth, reason, and reality. Consequently, our perceptions hold greater influence over our perspectives in how we think, behave, communicate, and act.

Surfacing in our perspectives and perceptions, preferences are personal inclinations, predilections, and proclivities for thoughts and things in life although our preferences are also aversions, oppositions, and dislikes as well. Like perspectives and perceptions, preferences occur as thoughts and feelings and beliefs; they are created in what we agree and disagree with, approve and disapprove of, accept and reject, like and dislike, and so forth. And like perspectives and preferences, we form our preferences in our opinions and judgements from which we make choices and take actions. While many choices might require some deliberation based on our perspectives, other choices are often instinctive, routine, and automatic based on our perceptions. Whether we choose from instinct, intuition,

Perspectives, Perceptions, and Preferences and Their Influence on Inspiration

PERSPECTIVES

As filters for how we think, feel, and behave and how we communicate, create, and relate, perspectives are our assessments (opinions and judgements and beliefs) of thoughts and things, people and places in our occurring world; we make assessments all the time navigating life.

PERCEPTIONS

Evolving from our perspectives, perceptions are our assessments established in our instincts, intuitions, insights, and intelligence, in what we like, trust, and belief, and in our deep-seated fear and love for thoughts and things; they are our truth, reason, and reality.

PREFERENCES

Evolving from our perspectives and perceptions, preferences are our personal inclinations, predilections, and proclivities and our aversions, oppositions, and dislikes for thoughts and things for all the choices we make and the actions we take in life.

or insight, we determine that which inspires us in our perspectives, perceptions, and preferences. Accordingly, our decisions determine our inspiring experiences and the effect of our experiences. We see and hear something that we never saw or heard before and it moves, touches, and inspires us because it resonates with our perspectives, perceptions, and preferences. Obviously, inspirational moments do not choose us, rather we choose them.

INSPIRATION AND CREATIVITY

Even though we can be inspired by the same types of experiences with the same levels of interest and intensity for the same periods of duration, we can experience, as we know, a completely different effect and outcome apart from others. And although some inspirational moments and the effects of those moments are inspiring to some, those same experiences and their effects can also end up being commonplace for others. Stemming from our inventiveness, inquisitiveness, and individuality and established in our perspectives, perceptions, and preferences, we determine which experiences are inspiring to us; we determine those things that, when we experience them in our attention and awareness, we are inspired.

From our consideration for different types of experiences that might potentially initiate inspirational moments, we discover some basic suppositions that stimulate and motivate us. For example, we are inspired by people and places, thoughts and things that are considered beautiful, gratifying, and loving; pleasant and agreeable; virtuous, excellent, and good. We are also inspired by thoughts and things that contribute to our personal development and growth that we, in our self-interest, want or need in our life for their meaning, relevance, and value. Moreover, we are also inspired by thoughts and things that are imaginative, inventive, and ingenious; thoughts and things that are original and creative.

Clearly, we are inspired by creativity and various forms of

originality. We are inspired by creativity that occurs in the moment of originality and we are also inspired by creativity that originated in the past whether it involves thoughts or things that we discover and learn for the first time or it involves people or places we meet and see for the first time. We see and hear something we never saw or heard before and it takes hold of us.

Regardless of its origin, creativity and originality resonate differently with all of us in the same way that inspiration resonates differently with us. As such, we might be inspired by

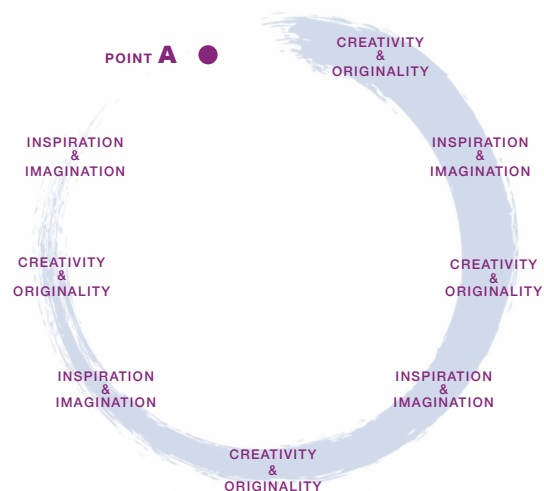
the creativity of people, places, thoughts, and things, whatever their sources, or we might not be inspired and, in the same manner, we might be inspired by our own creativity, or we might not.

All of this indicates that creativity and originality source our inspiration. This also indicates that inspiration and

*“Creativity and originality
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*Inspiration and imagination
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and originality.”*

The Relationship of Inspiration and Imagination to Originality and Creativity



imagination source our creativity and originality. While we are imaginative and inspired by creativity and originality, we are creative and original in our inspiration and imagination. As such, there is a reciprocal pattern of exchange revealed in a cycle of creation and inspiration whereas creation is related to inspiration and inspiration is related to creation and that the product of this exchange contributes to our overall existence, development, and growth. In other words, creativity and inspiration are cyclic from point A to point A.

According to Victor Shamas, creativity emerges and merges and emerges and merges from “formlessness to form to formlessness to form” and so forth.⁸ Within this cycle, creativity is the source of our inspiration and inspiration is the source of our creativity inspiring and creating *nextness* in our life.

Because different experiences resonate differently with people for different reasons, what sparks one does not always spark another. In the final analysis, what is original and creative for one is not original and creative for another and the same is true for what is inspirational, beautiful, good, or meaningful to one is likewise not inspirational, beautiful, good, or meaningful to another. What exactly is it then that inspires us? That question is answered individually in different ways each time we are personally stimulated and motivated.

THE SCIENCE OF HUMAN THRIVING

Inspiration and imagination awaken us to who we are and what we can become. Ophelia said it best in Shakespeare’s Hamlet, “We know what we are, but not what we may be.” It’s exciting, energizing, enlivening, engaging, encouraging, and enthusing to discover what we may become in the DNA of our inspiration.

Peter L. Benson contends the *science of human thriving* is to identify our human spark and how we awake to it, how we develop and grow creatively in our inspiration and imagination, and how we are known by our spark.⁸

In a series of studies conducted by Benson and the Search

The Science of Human Thriving

SOURCE: Benson, P.L. (2011). Sparks: How Youth Thrive Construct and Search Institute Studies.⁵

In a series of studies with more than 6,000 middle-school students conducted by the Search Institute more than 220 types of individual interests, passions, pursuits, attractions, fascinations, connections, and commitments were identified that excited, energized, enthused, enlivened, encouraged, and engaged students giving them happiness, joy, and satisfaction as well as hope, purpose, and direction in life. From these types of connections, three principal categories of sparks were determined and identified as sources of their inspiration and imagination, originality and creativity.

COMMITMENT AND PURPOSE

We are inspired by our commitment and purpose to thoughts or things, people or places, that have meaning, relevance, and value in our life and others

SKILLS, TALENT, AND APTITUDE

We are inspired by our skills, talent, and aptitude and the ability to create and share thoughts and things that have meaning, relevance, and value in our life and others

QUALITIES AND CHARACTER

We are inspired by our qualities and character as gifts of compassion, care, generosity, empathy, and more that have meaning, relevance, and value in our life and others

Institute, youth were asked, “What is it about your life that gives you joy and energy.”⁸ They were also asked, “What is it about you that gives your life a sense of purpose and what is it that is good, beautiful, and useful about you?” According to Benson, all study participants were able to ultimately report one if not two or more sparks that inspire them, that excite, energize, enthuse, and even encourage them in their life. From the study, more than 220 kinds of sparks were identified and categorized into three principal categories established along the sources of the participants’ inspiration whether their sparks originate, first, in their commitment and purpose to something in life; or their sparks originate, second, in their talents, skills, and aptitude; or their sparks originate, third, in their character, qualities, or way of being; for example, if their spark originates in being empathetic, generous, caring, or compassionate. From these studies, Benson reminds us, “All youth want people to know them through the lens of their spark.”¹³

WHY INSPIRATION MATTERS

Being inspired by, being inspired to, and being inspiring for others, there is something vital about inspiration especially in fulfilling our needs, wants, and desires in life and those of others; for being extraordinary and unstoppable, for being creative and fully self-expressed; for being empowered, satisfied, and happy. Creating our *nextness* in life, inspiration matters because it is the source of our imagination and thus the lifeblood of our passions, talents, and skills for all our creativity, originality, productivity, and achievement we want for our self.

*“Creating
nextness in life,
inspiration gives each
of us our own
hope and meaning,
purpose and direction.”*

All we do and all we create in life arises in our inspiration to some extent or other. Think about it. At one time or another we were inspired to make friends and create social and personal relationships, to connect and share our lives with others, to get married and to create a family. At one time or another we were inspired to produce, perform, and procure things, for example, we were inspired to buy a home, a car, and other things that have meaning, relevance, and value in our lives.

What’s more, we were inspired to experiment, explore, examine, and discover new things; we were inspired to

understand and learn things of personal interest. As such, we were and continue to be inspired for our development and growth, our intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and physical health and wellbeing. Also, we were inspired to visit people and places, to take vacations, to work and create a career, to rest and relax, and more. We were inspired by others’ thoughts, feelings, spirituality; by others’ perspective, perceptions, and preferences; by others’ imaginations, inventions, and innovations.

Of course, many of our choices to take actions may not have been necessarily inspired or prompted by an inspirational moment although, we can certainly appreciate that most of the development and growth that we create in our lives begins with *being inspired by* and *being inspired to*.

Why does inspiration matter? It matters because we matter. Inspiration gives each of us our own hope and meaning in life, our own purpose and direction, so that we can live a life we love and love the life we live. Benson challenges us by asking, “What is your spark, your spirit, your breath?” What is your inspiration; what can you imagine and what will you create with your one precious, extraordinary life?

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