

EXPERIENTIAL ACTIVITIES FOR STAGE 3, THE THESPIAN AT THE OASIS

Please read chapter 6 (on stage 3) before launching into these activities.

More-than-human Nature:

Time: 1 hour or more, Materials: Outdoor clothing

Go for a walk in a park, forest, along a river, or in some other mostly-wild place. Offer your attention to the undomesticated animals (mammals, birds, fishes, reptiles, and insects) and the trees, bushes, flowers, grasses, mushrooms, etc. Simply notice their natural authenticity. They are purely and fully what they are without self-consciousness, without any apparent wish to be otherwise, without even a glimmer of identity crisis. Look at them carefully, listen to them, and touch them (if possible and not harmful to them). Praise their authentic ways of being, whether or not you're personally comfortable with those ways. After a while, let yourself be drawn to one particular living being, something that has an especially intriguing (to you) way of being itself. Settle in with that being and look, listen, touch, and smell — as appropriate. Let yourself wonder about its unique and astonishing ways and about how it manages to be itself so fully and genuinely. Simply wonder — no need to be analytical, no need to try to explain it to yourself or any imagined others. After a while, turn your attention 180°, and observe *yourself* (lovingly) and become aware of the ways that you, too, live authentically. For example: Speak out loud (about anything) until your voice feels most genuinely like you (as opposed to someone trying to be nice, sweet, strong, bold, etc.). Feel into the way you're sitting, and shift your position until you feel "this is me" (as opposed to "this is how someone told me I ought to sit"). Walk for a few minutes, trying out different strides (slow, small steps, bold, loud, etc.). What way of walking in this moment most authentically expresses your current way of being?

Applying your experience to everyday life: During the next three weeks: Make a point of noticing when you live, talk, walk, dispute, love, listen, sing, laugh, cry (etc) authentically ... and when you do not. Love yourself in both circumstances — this is important — and congratulate yourself for noticing in both cases. Then ask yourself what wants to be lived at this time in your life in order to become even more authentic. Try it, right in the moment, and give yourself total permission to fail. After all, if you could do it the first time flawlessly, there'd be no point in practicing and probably not so much value in it. Grant yourself plenty of time to get better at it — probably a whole lifetime.

Consider what skills or resources might support you to live more authentically. You might determine this by recalling a particular event in your life when you did not feel authentic — perhaps during a conversation with a friend, at work, or when beginning a new relationship. Feel the way this event now sits in your body. How does your body react? Then imagine how it might be if you were to respond in an authentically open and relational manner. Finally, consider what skills, qualities, or resources might be missing and that would allow you to respond authentically.

Writing:

Time: 10 minutes or more, Materials: Journal or paper and pen

Reflect on your life since puberty, and reflect in your journal about the ways you have succeeded (or not) in living in a way that's authentic and socially successful. Include your ways of living at home, at work, with friends, on a date, in wild or semi-wild places, when alone, with

your sexuality, in conflict situations, in relating to the complementary sex, in romance, with other beloveds (whether human, pet, untamed creatures, a higher power, etc.).

Applying your experience to everyday life: Choose a few qualities you want to live more in your life and tell a friend about these qualities. Ask your friend to help you explore your relationship to these qualities and to stay on task. Perhaps your friend also wants to choose a few qualities to embrace in his/her own life.

Art:

Time: 30 minutes or more, Materials: magazines, tape or glue stick, large-sized paper, personal journal

Collect some magazines, especially those created for youth (you might end up noticing that, in our egocentric society, *most* magazines are youth-centered or youth-obsessed). Cut out the images that resonate with your own sense of teenage adolescence. Divide the paper into two sections. On one half of the page, glue the images that resonate with how you actually lived your teen years. Use the other half of the page to glue images that represent qualities of a soulcentric Oasis that you did not live. When you're finished, sit in front of your collage, and let all the images work on you. Take your time. Let it sink in. What feelings, words, or memories arise? Record your experience in your journal.

Applying your experience to everyday life: Place your collage where you'll see it often during the day. On each of the next seven days, spend 15 minutes or so with the collage, adding additional images you've found, and reflecting on the Oasis qualities you want to live more, and also the egocentric stage-3 qualities (Imposter attributes) you desire to move beyond. Choose five Thespian qualities to embrace, write each on a sticky note, and place them on your collage. At the beginning of each week, choose one sticky note and put it into your planner (or on your dashboard, bathroom mirror, or somewhere else you'll repeatedly see it throughout the day) so that you can practice it during this week.

Revisiting Your Teen Years:

More-than-human Nature:

Time: 1 hour or more, Materials: Outdoor clothing and teenage clothing and accessories

- Rebel/Conformist/Princess/Victim
 - Which of these were you most like as a teenager? Go out to a more-or-less private spot in the natural world, and let yourself *be* that for an hour or so. Dress, talk, walk like him/her for at least 20 minutes. Dress up as a contemporary teenager, if you'd like. Wear your iPod, use the looks, gestures, walks, words and thoughts of a teenager.
 - Then, back as your "current self," interact with a natural being that strikes you as being somewhat early-adolescent in a way similar to how you were acting in the first part of this exercise. (It might take a while, as you wander and explore, before you find such a being.) Tell it all about its "adolescence-ness." Then tell it about *your* early adolescence. Allow emotions to flow fully at every opportunity, or feel where they are blocked in you, and find a way to feel them more in the moment.

- Next, take on the complementary style to how you were as a teenager. If you were more of a Rebel, be the Conformist. If you had been more of a Victim, be the Prince/ss. Or vice versa.
- Let yourself be drawn to a particular spot in nature. Sit or lay on the ground like a teenager and feel into your teenage early adolescence. What was important to you? What did you like/dislike? Who were you hanging out with? What was your first love affair like? Your first sexual experiences? How did you speak? What kind of music did you listen to? What could you not stand, not be without? How did you dress? Pay special attention to your feelings, let them arise; give them permission to become stronger so that you can experience them fully. Now imagine a big circle in front of you (or draw one, if the ground is sandy, or create one with sticks or rocks). For each quality or facet that you remember about your teenage early adolescence, place a symbolically shaped, colored, textured, or otherwise meaningful object (a stick, acorn, flower, etc.) into the circle. When you're done, look at the composite image you've created. What does the image say about your teenage early adolescence?

Applying your experience to everyday life: Let yourself fully feel, in your body and psyche, the residue of the above experiences. What aspects of your adolescence do you sense you must relive or recreate in some way in order to become more fully authentic and socially successful? Write about this. Choose one aspect per week to further develop (even though this might take years to complete). For example: Write about that particular aspect or dimension of adolescence, try it out with friends or solo in a private, natural place outdoors, take up a related hobby, read a book about it, enrol in a class that evokes that quality, or seek out a therapist with a relevant specialty. Keep the Thespian and the creative fire of your adolescence alive in your current life. Give your "inner healthy adolescent" a name, if that works for you. Get involved in new projects that stimulate your fire and use the gifts of the Thespian.

Whatever stage you're currently in, the goal is for the gifts of earlier stages and the resources developed through the tasks of earlier stages to be integrated and available to you now. A complementary goal is for your defensive, reflexive, maladaptive behaviors to be surrendered for more open, authentic, and effective ways of participating in the world. Imagine life as if this were true. Notice where in your life this is already true. Where could this become more true? It might help to explore these things with a close friend, therapist, coach, or a journal.

Writing:

Time: 10 minutes or more, Materials: Journal or paper and pen

Use a writing utensil and color that fits well with your early adolescence. Remember how you wrote as a teenager. Write in that style. What were your favorite phrases, words, and slang expressions? Fill your page with words written every which way in all directions. Include the names of your favorite music groups, actors, mentors, and friends from that time in your life.

Applying your experience to everyday life: In your journal, reflect upon and then answer the following questions. What qualities of your actual teen years do you want — or feel you need — to live *less* in your life? What qualities of the Thespian at the Oasis do you want — or feel you need — to live more in your current life? At the beginning of each week, pick one quality you want to live more and one you want to live less, and practice it for the week. At the

end of your seven days, reflect upon the impact this had on your life, and determine what other two qualities (one you want to live more and one you want to live less) you'll explore the following week.

Questions to enjoy or ponder (to help you live more fully the qualities of a soulcentric Oasis):

- How/where/when do you choose authenticity over acceptance? What enables you to do this? Do you ever over do it? In what way?
- How/where/when do you choose acceptance over authenticity? Why? What are your fears? If these fears were realized, would they destroy you? Do you have the skills and resources to address things differently now?
- How polished are your skills with emotions, conflict resolution, status assigning, romance, sex, and communication? (See pp. 188- 193.)
- Have you adequately studied and understood human-nature reciprocity and ecological responsibility? (See pp. 194 – 197.)
- Are you living your inner fire? In what ways? What enables you to do this?
- What stands do you take on the big topics and concerns in our society? Do you need to learn more about local and world events? Are you afraid to learn more? If so, why? Is your life adequately aligned with your positions on the big issues? In what ways? In what ways not?
- Who are your friends? What roles do you take with them? Are the relationships satisfying? Do they stretch and grow you? Or do they keep you in stuck in old, unsatisfying patterns?
- In which circumstances are you self-confident? Which not? Why?
- What have your addictions been (then and now)? Why?

Applying your experience to everyday life: What do you most like and dislike about the stage of the Oasis? What aspects of the Thespian do you already live most fully? Which ones do you feel it would be good to further cultivate, to include more in your everyday life? How? At what times during the day and the week will you make room for this cultivation practice? Make a clear and firm commitment to yourself — one that will work. What are the action steps you can and will take this week?

More-than-human Nature:

Time: 1 hour or more, Material; Journal and pen

Go out onto the land and find a place that feels like and/or looks like your Loyal Soldier. Keep wandering and searching till you find a place or thing that really does feel that way. Once you do, sit down. Tell that place or thing (your Loyal Soldier) about your experience of him in your life, now and in the past. Tell him stories about times he was very active in your life. All the while, do your very best to love him, But also tell him the truth of your (probably varied) feelings about him, And be sure to thank him profusely and as genuinely as you can for all his years of faithful service on your behalf. He kept you a lot safer than you would have been otherwise. Safe but small. Take out your journal and write down his favorite phrases that kept you safe/small, and his favorite strategies. This alone might take hours. Now, go a step deeper.

Ask both him and yourself (and the Mystery): What has he been protecting you from? What does he now want to keep you from feeling, seeing, being, acting, living, expressing? Thank him for wanting to protect you from these things. What resources do you have now — that you didn't as a child — that enable you to no longer be limited by all these things, if indeed they should come up? Inner resources such as self-nurturing, emotional access and expression, courage, faith, self-esteem, capacity to laugh at yourself and lighten up, etc., and outer resources like friends, guides, communication skills, mentors, loved ones, a support group, a community, etc. Tell your Loyal Soldier about these resources — out-loud and/or with gestures. Record in your journal your list of resources and skills. (If you feel you do not have enough inner or outer resources, it's best to first seek help — from a skilled therapist or mentor — in developing these resources.)

Create an altar (outside or inside) to honor the extraordinary work your Loyal Soldier has done for you all these years. Find or fashion objects to place on the altar, ideally one for each protective strategy or slogan he's used in his attempts to protect you (attempts that were most often successful when you were a child). You might want to fashion actual medals of valor and honor to award to him.

Applying your experience to everyday life: Take a moment to record your insights in your journal. Visit your Loyal Soldier (place or thing) every day for the next seven days, thank him each day for a different selection of his protective strategies, and remind him about the skills and resources you now have to respond effectively and healthfully to the emotions and life challenges s/he has wanted to protect you from.

For other activities to help you deepen into stage 3 — or attend to unfinished business there — please see chapter 6 of Nature and the Human Soul.