

Chapter 13

Finding the Deep Calling of Your Soul

Topics in this Chapter:

- * Living a creative, fulfilling life
- * Finding and empowering your vision
- * Sharing what you know

Some spiritual traditions suggest that even before you were born on this earth, the divine creator put deep into your heart the knowledge of what you're supposed to do in your life, including what you're meant to give and receive from this world.

From a spiritual perspective, it doesn't matter if your deep calling is to be big or small, famous or publicly unknown, loved or feared, a leader or a follower, or any combination of these and more. What matters most is to find the avenues of experience and expression that are right for your soul's journey in this world at this time. The challenge is to find your soul's deep calling beneath all the layers of outer experiences and expectations that have been piled upon you throughout your life — from friends, family, schools, television, music, writings, movies, and more.

Consider

Spiritual wisdom and practices help you clear away the cobwebs of mediocre, unenthusiastic living so that you can experience joyful, passionate inspiration and discover and fulfill why you are here. Taking time to pay attention to your soul's deep calling is a good use of that time!

Discovering Your Dharma

What are you here to do? What is your job in life? The Sanskrit word *dharma* can be helpful in contemplating the deep calling of your soul.

Dharma doesn't have an exact English translation, but it can be paraphrased as "righteous living". Dharma is the way you are meant to live — in general as a human being, and also as an individual with a unique set of lessons to learn, experiences to have, and gifts to give. In a way, your dharma is also your mission in life.

When you have a sense of what your mission is, you make better choices about what to do and not do during your time in this world as you. When you live in accordance with your greater destiny, you are naturally guided to do what is right in both large and small situations.

All human beings share certain big-picture dharmas, such as to take care of this planet and one another, while discovering, expressing, and honoring the divine nature of life. Some spiritual sages say that the ultimate dharma is to live so that you go to Heaven or to follow practices that will bring spiritual enlightenment or liberation from this illusory world of limited experience (see Chapters 14 and 17).

Along with common group dharmas that should be followed by all human beings, each person also has his or her own individual set of dharmas. For example, someone may have the personal dharma of always being as honest as possible, regardless of the possible repercussions. Another person may feel deep inside that it is her responsibility to help when she sees someone who is in need, regardless of whether others would expect her to take responsibility in those circumstances.

Consider

Sometimes people find their dharma through challenges or tragedies. For example, many celebrities and others who have experienced certain illnesses come to sense that helping to find cures for these illnesses would fulfill their mission by helping to heal their loved ones, themselves, and the greater good of humankind. Their dedication to a good cause gives meaning to their suffering and helps remove the suffering of others, which is a great dharma for anyone to follow.

Discovering your righteous path of living

Spiritual Wisdom

A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write, if he is to be ultimately at peace with himself. What one can be, one must be.

-- Abraham Maslow

Your dharma is what fulfils you. It's what floats your boat, buoys your spirit, and opens your heart. Following your dharma may not always be comfortable or easy, but it brings a sense of underlying serenity and rightness that stays strong behind even difficult or challenging times.

When you're following your dharma:

- Even if obstacles arise, they don't overwhelm you.
- You feel yourself flowing with time rather than resisting its flow. You are neither pining for the past nor waiting anxiously for the future.
- You have a sense of fitting comfortably into yourself and your life as if you are sitting in a seat that fits perfectly.

- You trust that the challenges and temptations that come your way are helping you grow and giving you an opportunity to strengthen your commitment to following your dharma.

Spirituality in Action

Leaving a footprint

Take a moment to contemplate your life and your eventual death. Think of what it will be like to leave this place called earth and these life circumstances called you and your life. What meaning has your life held? What have you received and given to this world during your stay? Others may have their own views about who you are and what you've done, but what are *your* views about yourself and your own life?

Think of all the lessons you've learned, all the people you've known, and all the outer objects and expressions you'll have to leave behind when your time here is through. Think of all your personal qualities that will be silenced from this world when you are gone.

Now imagine that you want to leave a footprint behind in this world — something that expresses who you are and where you've been. Maybe you'd like to leave a letter behind to your children or loved ones, or maybe a statement to the whole world. Some choose to leave a creative legacy through scrapbooking, painting, or writing poems.

The truth is that you are inevitably leaving a footprint behind on this world. The key here is to choose some of what it will be. Parents automatically leave a legacy to the world through the children they've raised. Just in living a good life, you may be leaving legacies through all the people you touch with kindness and wisdom. If you're a comedian, you may leave a legacy in all the audiences who find laughter in the future while remembering your humorous observations. Those in service professions, such as nurses, teachers, and police officers, also leave their legacy through all the people they've helped.

Finding your calling

A sense of deep fulfillment arises within you when you're following your calling and giving to this world in a way that is in harmony with your nature and destiny. Once you stop resisting what comes to you, you'll be a smoother canvas upon which the divine creative spirit can paint a new and beautiful landscape — the landscape of your great, fulfilled life.

Here are some more tips for finding the deep calling of your soul:

- **Pay attention to your thoughts and feelings about what you should be doing above the opinions and expectations of others.** Do listen to positive suggestions from trusted friends and family with an open mind and heart, but remember that your life is *your* life and *your* responsibility!

- **Make friends with your inner knower.** Some call this inner knower the subconscious mind or the superconscious mind, while others call it the inner Self, or the divine seat within a human being. As you go through your day making decisions about what to do, where to go, what to buy, and how to respond to immediate situations, feel the presence of your inner knower. Understand that this inner knower is your friend and give it your friendship in return.
- **Do what your love.** Let go of your focus on the worldly benefits you may be receiving from a particular job or career and contemplate whether you'd still want to do that thing. Sometimes you can't really change jobs on a whim, but at least you can put your mental energy and intention into doing work that fulfills your calling as much as possible. One way I measure this quality in my own works is to strive to do for pay only what I would gladly do for free. (Of course, with my background of monastic service, working for free is not as shocking an idea as it may be for many people.) Even when projects come up that don't seem to fit my personal bill but are necessary for *paying* bills, I do my best to approach the unavoidable work with a positive feeling, trusting that there is some reason for me to be in that job that may contribute to fulfilling my calling now or in the future. With this faith, I do whatever I can to harmonize with the situation and make the work interesting or fun.
- **Remember death.** When people forget death, they don't feel pressured to seek and follow their dharma. They don't treasure each moment or feel the need to find out how to make the very best use of the time they have in their life. They sell out today thinking there will always be tomorrow. Then in their last moments, these forgetful folks often have regrets over what they could or should have done — and it isn't usually a regret that they didn't accumulate more stuff!

Being guided from within

Once you sense your heart's calling, that connection becomes a guiding light for everything you do:

- With an awareness of your heart's calling, you can measure actions and decisions by the yardstick of your life's mission and eliminate as many incongruous efforts and experiences as possible. For example, you may be a member of certain groups and clubs, but find that these memberships are taking your time and energy away from things that really tug at your heartstrings. Once you sense and understand your heart's calling, you're better able to rearrange your commitments to focus on what is most in harmony with your greater destiny.

- Focusing on your heart's calling will also help you experience and approach life with a greater spiritual respect and vision. When you have the confidence of knowing your heart's calling, you're able to give yourself fully to whatever you do. If your heart's calling is to pick up trash in a community park, you do it cheerfully instead of grumbling about all the inconsiderate schlubs who left their garbage on the ground.
- Focusing on your heart's calling reflects in the world around you and brings more opportunities for you to live in harmony with your great intention. (You can find out more about how your thoughts affect the world in Chapter 15) When your intentions are clear, the world naturally brings what will help you to act and live in harmony with those intentions. When you're focused on your heart's calling, you may find that the right things, people, pets, homes, and jobs come into your life quite spontaneously.

Seek and find your heart's calling, whether it is to bring a beautiful child into the world, to help create better social systems, to give people joy through your cooking, singing, dancing, loving, speaking, praying, or to follow any one of countless possible avenues of expression. If your heart's calling leads you to several different avenues or to one and then another, stay open and trusting, while also using common sense to make good decisions that are both intelligent and inspired.

Following your bliss

Bliss is different from usual sense-based pleasures. With bliss, you feel a sense of perfection exactly as you are and where you are. With bliss, you are not anxious to change or fix things. Even if you do make changes from the state of bliss, you do so joyfully, enjoying the perfection of what was and what will be as you act with blissful inner freedom.

My personal calling

I've clarified a number of heart's callings during my life. One of my most significant guiding principles came to me at a time when I was physically ill in the mid-1990s and was preparing for the possibility of leaving this world. I'd quit both of my jobs as associate producer and editor of the childrens' television shows *X-Men* and the *Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers* while experiencing several challenging physical ailments all at once.

I was actually feeling at peace with the possibility of leaving this world, having already lived a life filled with many unexpected blessings. But then a surprisingly clear inner message came booming into my meditation like the voice of God in the Ten Commandments movie when He told Moses to take off his shoes because he was on hallowed ground. It seems that the vulnerable surrender I'd been experiencing may have opened me up to receive a clear message of guidance.

The booming voice of God said, "First you have to share what you've learned." With this dictate, I moved into a birds-eye view of my life and saw the eclectic nature of my journey — from exploring psychology intensely as a child, to studying neuroscience and film-video in university, to spending a decade of deep spiritual immersion while researching, producing, and editing hundreds of powerful videos about spirituality and meditation, and then to my years of Hollywood work, editing and producing entertaining television shows with many talented and colorful folks.

"First you have to share what you've learned." That is exactly what I've been doing since receiving this guidance and vision of my calling. As I've learned more, I've shared more. Did the message come from God Himself, or was it a subconscious expression of a hidden aspiration? Ultimately, this question didn't matter, because once the instruction and vision of my life came before me, I recognized that sharing what I've learned is indeed part of my calling, my dharma, and my mission in life.

Look for touches of bliss in your life. Discover what supports your experience of bliss and see how you can increase those elements. If playing with animals gives you that special bliss, then consider how you can increase your interaction with more animals. Consider studying to enter the veterinary profession, adopt some homeless pets, or volunteer at an animal rescue house. Learn how to train animals, set up a bird feeder, or bring peanuts along when you walk in nature so that you can feed the squirrels. The light of bliss helps to guide you in choosing how to spend the precious wealth of your time here on earth as you.

Being an Artist of Life

Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once we grow up.

— Pablo Picasso

Being an artist of life means to express with your full palette of colors and your vibrant creative spark in even the small moments of life. Sometimes you may be painting a happy face, and sometimes you'll be expressing sad tears. Sometimes you are dancing a joyful dance, and sometimes you may be singing a song of loss.

Being an artist of life doesn't mean that you have to become big and famous. Creativity comes in many forms, and from a spiritual perspective, small creative expressions can be as meaningful and valuable as larger ones.

Some express their creativity in cooking, gardening, music, dance, event planning, home design, crafts, business decisions, or journal writing. One of the most creative "jobs" is to be a good parent who comes up with educational and fun projects for your children.

Creativity and spirituality are great friends. Both require qualities such as self-respect, one-pointed focus, openness to inner guidance, and a willingness to express your truth.

Sharing your abundance

One beautiful form of creativity comes when you feel that you've received so much in life — so many experiences, so much wisdom, and so many blessings — that you must express and share what you've received and learned with others.

When creative expression, gratitude, and service-mindedness come together, your joyful inspiration can overflow the boundaries of ordinary life. Maybe you offer creative service to your place of worship, or you start a blog to share some aspect of your life with the world, or maybe you're a great cook and you offer your skills to a service-oriented volunteer group that brings food to those in need.

When you share the abundance that the universe has given to you, your act of giving back helps to create a beautiful dance of giving, receiving, expressing, and sharing of the abundance of life with the delicious energy of creative service.

Finding your own style

Finding, accepting, and enjoying your own personal style is a great achievement and a wonderful blessing. Spiritual wisdom allows you to step into a higher vision of your life as an expression of divine universal creative spirit.

From this higher viewpoint, you can look at yourself with a bit more objectivity. You can even look at your faults and mistakes without feeling too much ego discomfort. You can be like a comedian who appreciates and uses even his faults to get big laughs.

Knowing your inherent greatness increases your self-respect and also sets a foundation for exploring, refining, and weeding out any aspects of your expression that are not in harmony with your greater self.

Spirituality in Action

See how it feels for you to say and think these words: “I am great just as I am.” Say the phrase aloud and then repeat the words mentally as you breathe in, and again as you breathe out. Here are some possible reasons why you may not be fully appreciating and expressing your own style:

- **You may think that your style is boring.** However, thinking that you’re boring doesn’t mean you really are boring. I used to think I was totally boring during my years of monastic life, where the people around me seemed to have a lot more dramas and opinions than I did. Even now, on a day-to-day level, my life is generally quiet and not so outwardly exciting. But looking from a larger perspective, my life has been pretty creative and interesting. Sometimes you may think you are boring when you’re really percolating into a more fragrant cup of you. Your creative spark may be growing silently under a simple surface just as colorful flower seeds germinate quietly under a blanket of white snow.
- **You may think that your style isn’t good enough.** Maybe you don’t think you’re clever enough or considerate enough. Maybe you’re not a good listener or a caring son, daughter, mother, father, sister, brother, worker, or friend. Even if you find these kinds of shortcomings in yourself, you can still accept and love yourself while also taking steps to improve your personal style. Take a respectful inventory of your style. See which of your personality traits are natural, which have been created by imitating other people, which have come from the environments and cultures around you, and which aspects of your style and personality are serving you well versus creating obstacles to your greater good.

You are the artist of your life. Choose your colors. Choose your topics. Choose your modes of expression. If you don’t want to have so many dark colors in your life-painting, then stop mixing so many dark colors and start opening up tubes of brighter yellows, oranges, and reds.

Spirituality in Action

Words from some who found their style

Here are some quotes by free-spirited creative folks who understood the value of following the beat of their own inspired drum:

“When I die and appear before the heavenly court, I will not be asked, ‘Why were you not Moses?’ I will be asked, ‘Why were you not Zusya?’”

—Rabbi Zusya

“The greatest thing in the world is to know how to be oneself.”

—Michel de Montaigne

“Loyalty to petrified opinion never yet broke a chain or freed a human soul.”

—Mark Twain

“Not to be bound by rules, but to be creating one’s own rules—this is the kind of life which Zen is trying to have us live.”

—D. T. Suzuki

“Be who you are and say what you feel, because those who mind don’t matter and those who matter don’t mind.”

—Dr. Seuss

Once you’ve done your best to change unwanted behaviors and personality traits, then make who you are work for you. If you have a cantankerous style and find other people getting offended by your comments, see whether you can add humor to make your expressions less offensive and more entertaining. You could even consider becoming a shock jock, or an opinionated blog writer or news host.

How many people must have said to Picasso, “Why can’t you just paint a face that looks like a damn face?” However, Picasso stayed true to his own style, and that unique style is what has kept his name and works alive, unlike the works of so many other artists that have been covered by the sands of time.

Sharing the treasures of your journey through writing

Spiritual Wisdom

True education begins only when a man turns from all external aids to the Infinity within and becomes as it were a natural source of original knowledge.

— Swami Ramtirtha

The most basic tenet of nearly every great philosophical system is to “know thyself.” Knowing yourself is not a narcissistic luxury, but what life demands from everyone.

Every person reaches from the heavens to earth, and perhaps beyond (see Chapters 3 and 14). However, most people are too busy focusing on their immediate, outer lives to take time to unfold all the wisdom that can be gained by unpacking and seeing more deeply into each event, moment, feeling, and experience.

Don't Forget

Life is truly more wondrous than fiction, which is one reason reality shows have become so popular in modern television.

Appreciating your story

Consider how interested people have been in every detail of the lives of famous and infamous celebrities and this month's scandal or heartwarming tale du jour? Well, that is how interested you should be in your *own* life!

Every life is an amazing story, no matter how boring the outer circumstances may seem compared to others. The processes you've already experienced while growing from childhood on inherently carry countless profound stories and lessons. Your job is to dig for the gems in everything that comes and has previously come your way.

One way to approach your untapped terrain of inner knowledge is to use the process of writing to dive deeply into events that have unfolded and continue to unfold in your own life. Whether outwardly exciting or ordinary, you can discover lessons and insights hidden within each twist and turn on your path, by writing about them with an intention to gain greater insight and appreciation.

Contemplative writing:

- **Teaches you to respect the intricate beauty of your life, while extracting its juicy lessons.** Instead of only living on the surface of daily events, you take time to honor the deeper lessons, patterns, and colors inherent in the details of every moment by giving form to them in words.
- **Opens a way for you to drink deeply from the fresh spring of inner wisdom, insight, and expression.** Taking time to write about past experiences and insights you've had keeps your higher level awareness freshly invoked in your mind as you approach the current events and thoughts of your daily life.

- **Teaches you to give yourself the respect and reverence that every human being deserves.** Contemplative writing is a way of asserting that your inner wisdom is so grand and that your life is so precious and valuable that your thoughts and experiences deserve to be explored and expressed as a novel, poem, journal, or autobiography.
- **Gives you a chance to explore and organize your memories, feelings, and beliefs into a more objective view of everything you encounter.** Contemplative writing shows you how to notice patterns of events and guides you to give structure to your thoughts and experiences so that you can see the world with a bigger-picture view.
- **Enriches your life by helping you pay more attention to life.** When it comes to life, quality is definitely more important than quantity. Paying attention to life gives you a much greater experience of life.

Ultimately, it doesn't matter whether you plan to publish your words, although sharing what you've learned — opening yourself to the extent where you're willing to share personal thoughts with complete strangers — can also be a powerful experience.

In addition, if you have done the inner work to contemplate your experiences, others can also benefit from the fruits of your contemplations. One thing I've learned is that even with very different cultures and upbringings, people share similar ranges of experiences.

If you're able to pierce through to the essence of an experience that you're writing about, others will also be able to relate to your story and apply the healings and understandings you've achieved to their own lives.

Consider

Some people prefer to set strict disciplined schedules for their writing — for example, they plan to write a certain number of pages every morning or evening — while others prefer to write only when they feel moved to express something. As with every practice, you have to know your own nature and decide what approach works best for you.

The purpose of contemplative writing is not only to share your thoughts with others, but also to teach you to look at things with a more conscious eye and to contemplate, clarify, and empower your beliefs using the tool of words.

Regardless of whether it's your calling to make what you write available to others, it is still in your best interest to take advantage of the power of words to explore and heal your body, mind, and spirit.

Don't Forget

Your beliefs create your reality. Uplift your beliefs and you uplift the world!