

Finding Your Bliss



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In order to feel productive and purposeful in our lives, each of us must have a personal vision. If you close your eyes and imagine the good life (where you want to be, doing what, and with whom), you are contemplating your vision. You should be able to walk around in it. In your mind's eye, notice the landscape, the weather, the time of day, how you are spending your working hours and your leisure time, and other details.

For planning purposes, your personal vision needs to be accompanied by a map with way stations, resting places that let you look forward and backward. Otherwise you have no way of knowing where you are headed or of being sure that your life is reaching toward your goals and fulfilling your values.

Some times of the year seem tailor made for taking stock. Birthdays are one. Thanksgiving and Christmas are others. Like the cycling seasons of the year, endings and beginnings help give us a sense of order and predictability.

The way stations, moments of retrospection and introspection, let us pause to appreciate what we have done and where we have been and to make adjustments to the course we have charted for the future. Wouldn't it be terrible if we just kept plodding onward without ever feeling that we had completed anything?

And yet sometimes we lose sight of our objectives. We feel that we have lost direction, gotten off course. Something seems to be missing from our daily life and work. If this problem sounds familiar, try these tricks.

Cast back in memory and recall things that you have loved doing. Maybe you were a champion archer, or you loved playing the flute, or you spent countless hours hiking the woods behind your home in Vermont. Wrack your brains for moments when you loved what you were doing so much that you forgot who you were, where you were, and what time it was. Each of us has perhaps four or five such activities at a minimum. These are your passions.

When you indulge your passions, your mind and your senses are fully deployed. You are totally absorbed, at one with the activity in which you are engaged. For some number of minutes or hours, you lose track of yourself as separate from your environment. At the end, when you emerge, you feel deeply relaxed and refreshed, like a diver surfacing for air after a plunge.

Consider such episodes your meditations. Look for ways to add them to your life. The joy that they bring comes not from accomplishing or acquiring but from thrilling to the moment at hand.

As you look back through the years, pick out the highlights and the challenges. Ask yourself what else you might want for your future. In five years, where would you like to be? Close your eyes. See yourself in that geographical place, and look around. Who is with you? Where are you living and working? What are you doing? What is the weather like? How do you spend each day? Open your eyes and try charting a course, month by month, year by year, to make this vision a reality.

If you still have trouble figuring out what is missing from your life, do these exercises. Fast-forward in time until you are perhaps eighty (or the age of your choice). Now look back. What would you want to have accomplished or experienced in your life that you have not yet done?

Alternatively, imagine that you have died. You are writing your own obituary. What would you like to be remembered for? Have you given yourself fully to this work? What more would you want to do in the time that remains to you?

You are the architect of your life. Its shape and course reflect your character and values like nothing else. When you devote yourself completely to work that excites you, you are most fully alive, making your own unique contribution to history.