

Divine Purpose

Find the Passion Within

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1: *The Unfolding of Purpose*

The path toward understanding purpose is to bring awareness to what makes you feel alive and to share that aliveness with others. You are continually unfolding your purpose as you live. From the moment you were born, you were born *on purpose*. When you bring awareness to this purpose, you can embrace your life in a new way and experience how this purpose has formed your life and continues to form it.

There are fundamental ways to describe purpose, such as "to love," or "to be," or "to become." Yet our personal expression of purpose in the world, through our work and relationships, may require some further soul searching. It is the intention of this book to help give you tools for that search, so that you can live in the unfolding of this purpose with awareness and grace.

I first realized the power of purpose only a few years ago, when I was visiting a dear teacher who was dying of cancer. I had been studying and apprenticing with spiritual teacher David La Chapelle for six years, and it was difficult to see him slipping away. Yet at the foot of such loss, the lens through which one sees life shifts dramatically. As I sat by a mountain stream in his hometown in Colorado, I watched the power of the water as it washed over the rocks in its course down the mountain, noticing how nothing stood in the path of this immense force.

Studying with David and then serving him through his illness created a powerful context for my life that I had never before experienced. In that moment by the stream, I could see that having a context for your life brings guidance to all that you do in the same way that the banks of the river guide a mountain stream. Where rocks and branches may otherwise create several meandering brooks with no direction, when held within banks the river runs powerfully over and around these potential blockages. All of the river's energy is used in carrying out its mission in going down the mountain.

Purpose can provide context for our lives like this, so that all of our choices and aspirations can move in one clear and intentional direction. Purpose can also provide momentum, so that when we experience blockages – the rocks and branches of life—we continue on our course despite these obstacles. We open our hearts to experience the flow of grace in our lives.

Contemplation

Write out your intentions in how you will use this book to explore purpose. Will you journal weekly? Or will you take a few days, weeks or months and work through the contemplations? Create an intentional relationship with the purpose exploration that you are doing. Write down what you would like to get out of working through these pages. Do you want to understand your nature and expression more thoroughly? Do you want to discover what you are here to do? Is it knowing that *and* applying that to a new project or job? Do you want support for a purpose you already know is yours to do? Writing this down is your commitment to yourself to allow yourself to transform through the work and reflection that you do. This kind of commitment will help you deal with resistance if it arises.



2: *Why Purpose Matters*

We come into this life without a map, and yet in the deepest part of our being, there is an unfolding of our purpose that shows us the way.

If not answered satisfactorily, the universal question of "why am I here?" can lead to feelings of hopelessness and despair. In my own journey, I have experienced periods of feeling lost in the dark before understanding my purpose and how to give that purpose expression in the world. My first book, *Crazy Quilt: Pieces of a Mennonite Life*, is a chronicle of seeking this deeper fulfillment and confronting the inner demons that can arise along the way!

Purpose is like an anchor for our awareness. We will still have everyday struggles and challenges and moments of feeling lost. But purpose provides a deeper understanding that can direct and inspire our steps every day.

That doesn't mean that our purpose unfolds all at once. It doesn't. I regularly meet with people who are living out their purpose fully but who want feedback on next steps. Sometimes those next steps aren't clear. But what does remain clear is an understanding or vision that holds the process.

Right now, your purpose may be to discover your purpose! Gautama Buddha said, "Your work is to discover your work and then with all your heart to give yourself to it."

Your purpose is a passionate calling, a drawing outward of who you are so that the world can benefit from this expression. We are bombarded in our culture with messages about how our lives should look on the outside. But often those messages run counter to the deeper promptings of our heart and soul. This conflict makes it very hard to listen to those inner messages.

Knowing that we can attain a deeper vision for our lives can bring the motivation needed to overcome these inner conflicts. When we give attention to something with all of our heart, we can see that our gifts and our values matter, and that they truly can make a difference in the world.

You are living your purpose today, in this very moment. You cannot be alive without living your purpose out. You may not be aware of what it is, but you are living it. Everything you do matters. When you breathe, you participate in the breath of life. When you have lunch with a friend, you increase the expression of love in the world. When you help create

understanding of someone's financial picture, you increase the feeling of being held in the world.

Purpose can be grand and large and visionary, and it can be very small and subtle and simple. Purpose is an anchor for an awareness of the contribution we make every day of our lives.

Contemplation

Reflect on how living with a sense of purpose would affect your life and how this might serve those around you. Contemplate how your living and acting from a place of purpose would impact your relationships, your work, your health and well-being and your greater world.

Write down each area and describe what these areas are like now and how being on purpose will bring positive change to these areas.

Write down your commitment to yourself to bring this positive change into reality.



3: Divine Purpose

In putting language to the mysterious, ineffable Presence that has been described and named throughout history in so many ways, there is a risk in making this Presence feel smaller, more contained. However, for the sake of being able to say anything at all about how this Presence relates to our lives and purpose, I use the words "Divine," "Beloved" and "Presence" interchangeably throughout this book, as well as a few other descriptions. You will have your own words for this Presence!

Our highest purpose is an unfolding of this Divine Presence through us. Though we do the searching, and we carry out the work, we follow the promptings of the heart that are the very voice of the Beloved prompting us to come forward. In this unfolding, we become what St. Francis called "instruments of Thy peace."

Divine Purpose unfolds from activity that takes us to this place of union, this place of becoming a vessel. I'm not talking about prayer or worship here, though they may be your activities! I'm getting at whatever activity leads to this union through *your* actions in the world. For Mother Teresa, it was serving the poor with her own hands. For Harriet Tubman, it was guiding slaves to freedom in the North. For Martin Luther King, it was being a voice of liberation in a time of deep oppression.

As we search to understand our Divine Purpose, we search for guidance from that deepest prompting of the soul. This prompting is often called "intuition," yet there is a place where it becomes quite mystical, when this prompting gives us premonitions or a synchronous awareness of thoughts and events that the rational mind could not have generated.

In the mystical sides of many world religions, this awareness of the greater Presence within is the basis for all correct action. When we go deep into the center of experience, we find God, and God is at the helm of our lives. A Sufi proverb touches on this: "I searched for God and found only myself. I searched for myself and found only God."

Contemplation

Reflect back on your life to find one time in which you felt prompted to do something that felt unified with a greater Presence within. It may be helping out a friend who was in need or following an inner prompt to enter a certain course of study that inspired you. It may be taking on a project at work that was deeply fulfilling to you. See if you recall that experience vividly in your mind. How did you feel? What were you doing that evoked this inner experience? Write down this or any other experiences you had that brought you close to experiencing this union of the personal and transpersonal. This will give you some clues about your Divine Purpose.

