

Wisdom Circles October 2012

What is My Calling in Life Now?

The transformational theme for October is Vocation. The word vocation comes from the Latin word *vocare*, meaning to call. In common usage today the word has two meanings. One is simply a word for one's work or profession. The other older, deeper meaning has to do with what one's life purpose might be.

There are theological assumptions behind this second meaning. It assumes that we do each have a life's purpose. And that is something that I believe. We each have come into this world with a set of talents and gifts that are unlike those of any other person that has ever existed or will exist. If we do not identify these capacities, claim them, develop them and offer them up to others and the world, they are lost forever.

So how then does one know one's vocation? That is not always clear, nor is it easy, but the effort to clarify it is of great importance. Hints are what we love doing, what we are good at and what other people appreciate us for. Theologian Fredrick Buechner writes that your vocation is where your greatest happiness meets the world's greatest need.

It seems clear to me that for some people, maybe even most people, one's vocation will change over a lifetime, due to circumstance and conditions, but perhaps most often when one enters different stages of life. There is a Hindu teaching that identifies four life stages or *ashramas*. The first *ashrama* is that of the student and last roughly 25 years. During this stage, the child learns the basics of not only literacy and arithmetic, but also about morality, social duties and attains a basic religious education. This is the time when a person prepares for the rest of his (it's a male dominated religion) life.

The second stage is one of social duty. Here the person establishes a family and attains a profession or livelihood. This is the stage of life where the pleasures of life are to be sought and enjoyed, the two principle ones being *artha* (wealth) and *kama* (sex, as in *Kama Sutra*). It is a stage of life which consist not only of getting but of giving – taking care of one’s spouse, children and parents and giving to religious organizations and charities.

The third stage properly begins when one’s children are well established on their own and one’s hair turns grey and wrinkles appear. This is the stage of retirement, when one gradually steps back from the heavy responsibilities suitable for the second stage and concentrates on sharing one’s wisdom with others and preparing for the final stage.

The final stage, (in an ideal life from the ages of 82-108!) is spent in meditation and spiritual practice as one withdraws from the outer world and prepares for the final awakening or liberation of the soul.

This ancient teaching is not directly applicable to our time and culture, but I believe that there is much wisdom in it. There are seasons in a person’s life and there are tasks appropriate to each season. There is wisdom in letting go of pursuits and concerns of a stage of life one has passed and hope and meaning in finding the tasks of the new phase.

Love,

Rev. Arvid

Spiritual Exercise

Theologian Fredrick Buechner wrote that our vocation is where our greatest joy and the world's greatest need come together.

Make two columns on a piece of paper (or computer screen). On the left hand column list the activities in your life that bring you the greatest joy, fulfillment and satisfaction, such as being with your children or grandchildren or perhaps some aspects of your job, or a hobby, or a talent. List as many of these as you can think of.

On the right hand column, list what you think are the world's greatest needs. You may find that you can list only those that you think are the most important, because of course, there are many. So list them until you run out of paper.

Now, look over both lists and draw a line connecting any of the joys on the list to any of the needs on the other list. Draw a solid line between where your joy is now meeting the world's needs in some way. Draw a dotted line where you think that your joy could possibly address one of the world's needs.

Now put the list aside and reflect on this experience in whatever way works best for you, to access intuitive awareness or insight. Perhaps you could meditate on the list by asking yourself "What is the most important insight I should take by doing this exercise?" Or you could journal around the same question. But be receptive and open to what the answer might be. Then, if you wish, you can share with your group what this experience has meant to you.

Questions for Reflection

1. What is your most important calling in life now? Do you feel as though you are following your call? In what ways?
2. How has your calling changed during different periods in your life?

Words of Wisdom

Each man has his own **vocation**; his talent is his call. There is one direction in which all space is open to him.

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

It is a pity, as my husband says, that more politicians are not bastards by birth instead of **vocation**.

- Katherine Whitehorn

When you have once seen the glow of happiness on the face of a beloved person, you know that a man can have no **vocation** but to awaken that light on the faces surrounding him; and you are torn by the thought of the unhappiness and night you cast, by the mere fact of living, in the hearts you encounter.

- Albert Camus

Everyone has his own specific **vocation** or mission in life; everyone must carry out a concrete assignment that demands fulfillment. Therein he cannot be replaced, nor can his life be repeated, thus, everyone's task is unique as his specific opportunity.

- Viktor Frankl

There is no easy formula for determining right and wrong livelihood, but it is essential to keep the question alive. To return the sense of dignity and honor to manhood, we have to stop pretending that we can make a living at something that is trivial or destructive and still have sense of

legitimate self-worth. A society in which vocation and job are separated for most people gradually creates an economy that is often devoid of spirit, one that frequently fills our pocketbooks at the cost of emptying our souls.

- Sam Keen

When I was a little kid I thought I would grow up to be black and sing jazz in nightclubs.

- Molly Ringwald

Don't worry if your job is small and your rewards few. Remember that the mighty oak was once a nut like you.

- Author Unknown

Recommended Resources

Books:

A great workbook for discovering your vocation is **What Color Is Your Parachute? 2013: A Practical Manual for Job-Hunters and Career-Changers** by Richard N. Bolles

Members of the congregation have recommended the book **Zen and the Art Of Making A Living** by Lawrence G. Boldt

And a classic in the field is **Do What You Love, The Money Will Follow** by Marsha Senitar

Web Resources:

Here is a good description of the Buddhist concept of right livelihood

www.buddhism.about.com/od/theeightfoldpath/a/rightlivelihood.htm

And here's an interesting take on Buddhism and wealth:

www.huffingtonpost.com/lewis-richmond/right-livelihood