

What is Your Calling?

by Bob Cergol

The following thoughts were written in response to an inquiry regarding content and activities for the "Youth and Spirituality Conference 2002" organized by the Raleigh Self Knowledge Symposium.

The theme, "What is my calling?" is so very germane to individuals at this stage in their lives where they are faced with, and perhaps for the first time seriously attempting to deal with, the future course of their lives. For myself, when I was at that age, this was a fundamental problem that weighed heavily on me. In your letter you mention, "opportunities that provide an outlet for exploring the values underlying their decisions are scarce." This was likewise true for me nearly 30 years ago. But when an opportunity did arise for me it was an enormously life-changing event.

I would say people fall into two camps on this issue. Those who have no idea and those who have decided, albeit with varying degrees of specificity and certainty. I would suggest different workshops be targeted to these distinct groups. The main reason for doing so is that the values and motivations for each group are likely to be quite different—and equally unconscious. Also the fears and desires which interfere with clear thinking on the subject are likely different for the "undecided/indecisive" and the "decided" groups.

In view of this I think it would be useful if the participants were asked to submit in advance, or bring with them, a written statement about what they think their calling might be. If they have no idea, then a written description of what they think would constitute a meaningful or fulfilling calling. It might also be very interesting to solicit the same written statements post conference. (Maybe that's a closing workshop in itself.) Perhaps adult participants can write to describe what their calling has been or become.

Workshops should promote direct looking at both the values and the fears and desires underlying individuals' thinking on this issue. The conference should challenge conventional thinking and promote introspection free of preconceptions. (This may require exposing some of those preconceptions, and workshops could be designed around that.)

One specific idea for a workshop early in the program would be "How did you get to where you find yourself right now?" The format would involve questions put to the group, writing and discussion. This would be an exercise in "seeing" *not* "thinking." The same series of questions would be asked for different eras in the participants' lives: infant/earliest childhood, child, adolescent, "you last year," and "you now." (Maybe even "you in the future.") The questions are:

- 1) Without thinking about it, what memory occurs to you now of you as [each item above]?
- 2) What is the circumstance?
- 3) What is the feeling?
- 4) Can you see what thought was prominent then?

In fact, the whole idea of such conscious, deliberate self-inquiry was unknown to me as a college student prior to my encounter with Richard Rose. As an "undecided" my "calling" at that time was, in essence, to find out who I was, what the purpose for life was and what my role in it was supposed to be. But I didn't see that, and I was in mental "gridlock" because I knew that all the while I was worrying about the question, my life was moving on—down some path which led I knew not where. My "opportunity to explore the values" underlying my situation opened me up.

Of course there are two levels here. One is outer directed—which is where everyone is focused, even when they think they're looking inward—and one is inner directed.

There is a fundamental contradiction in the conventional way of answering this question, "What is my calling?" The contradiction is that the question implies that we were put here for a purpose—that we as individuals have some unique, specific purpose. If that is true, then that purpose supersedes the individual, and it is a contradiction to simultaneously believe that such purpose is defined by the individual. This "purpose" would be defined by "that which put us here" in the first place. Therefore, it seems to me, the only defensible answer to the question is "to discover that which put us here." (This is in fact our true calling.) All other answers are to a different question...

Having said that—neither the individual nor anyone else can predict just what life circumstances will be helpful or harmful to the unfolding of that purpose. The problem is that in our culture there is intense pressure to declare an external purpose that translates to career and accomplishment. This is a fatal mistake. You cannot invent purpose or "calling." There is but one real purpose and one real calling. *And it is not making a "splash" in the world. It is not leaving your footprint on the world.*

People don't know why they are here. But death is calling. Therefore, out of fear, a purpose must be invented. To insist on this external, self-invented purpose is to deny this calling—and to miss the opportunity for our real purpose to be revealed. It is the equivalent to denying their Source and its purpose for the universe. It betrays a lack of faith in life. If you didn't create yourself, then you must already be fulfilling your purpose. How could that which is responsible for you and the universe be in need of a purpose—which you would supply? *It's all too egocentric.* The task then, has to be discovering that purpose of which you are already a part. This is synonymous with discovering your true nature or defining yourself. Nothing else can possibly matter. Nothing else is valid. Therefore your external circumstances do not matter, and finding "purpose" in your outer life is to bait yourself and draw the attention away from looking at the looker and to instead project a dream.

The popular notion of "calling" and "purpose" is nothing more than inventing a story to be inserted between point A (birth) and point B (death). The infinite variety of stories expressed is of no consequence, and the stories themselves ultimately don't matter. All that matters is that the individuals discover what their true purpose and true calling are. This becomes a spiritual path—and one on which you cannot invent the answers to please the pressures of culture or satisfy individual fears about living and about dying. *It is not about career or satisfying self-identity!*

So I think there is great power in accepting one's circumstances and responsibilities—and therein also finding the opportunities to keep asking the questions "Who am I?" and "What am I?" Perhaps "success" is what one person requires in order to reach the condition of asking this question totally in the present. For another it might be what the world considers as failure that is required. So one should, as Lao Tsu puts it, "Have faith in the way things are."

One's life is not defined by any of the external things: education, career, even family. One's life is defined by one's inner life, in which all the externals are contained. I would consider this conference a success for the participants if it simply gave them serious pause about the heretofore unconscious process by which they were embarking upon their futures. But the best success would be if they left with the conviction that what we "do" in the world should not be confused with that which is our true calling.