

16. Purpose

Life seldom presents you with only one possible choice for your next step. Even the most seasoned adventurer has to choose, all the time. You need a reason for picking one direction over another, moment by moment, or you begin to resemble a headless chicken!

This introduces a deeper question than we have tackled up to now: what is your purpose in life?

To begin with, it is not a fixture. I recall meeting an elderly but spry lady who declared as her chief object in life, to attend the great Millenium party. This was probably around 1997, and I hope she made it. Once that box was ticked, however, what came next? Is she still with us, and towards what end is she living now?

Moving Target

One of the cardinal signs of growing up is how your sense of purpose expands. A baby cares about little else but food and the nearness of mother. In a few months objects and other people become fascinating. The desire to reach, fetch and carry prompts grasping, crawling and walking. Being a person in the family seem to preoccupy toddlerhood. Adolescence begins, earlier in your head than in your body, as you realise the world is bigger than your home and yourself, and you begin to relate to the wider world.

Up to this point you were content to accept your parents' ideas and objects in life. From adolescence onward you have to find your own motives. At first these are likely to be the exact opposite of your parents', because that's easiest. With luck some teacher or event will inspire you, and you begin to seek positive goals of your own. Education and training begin to mean something and you set about them with much more drive.

I won't labour every stage of this unfolding life. Home-building usually acquires priority at some stage, and perhaps settling down with a partner. Some build up a business, some develop athletic prowess, some build a career in a profession. Breeding roses or bees, sailing, railway conservation, antique collecting, music or bell-ringing figure larger than job or career for some people.

After mastering a career, building a home and livelihood, people move on variously to politics, travel or grand children.

Self-Respect

Beyond and behind each of these stages, I suggest we are always in search of our real Selves. Because of the way that health works, we discover ourselves through relating to others and to circumstances. In everything, we are learning to create, more and more beautifully as we practice.

Why should we? Because we get great pleasure and intense well-being from it. I called it Ease in Chapter Four. Ease comes from living well, and is a very strong motive to live as well as we can. It urges us to act, to relate, to explore. In its most general sense it makes us want to love and be loved.

Being continually engrossed in loving and living, at every level as we grow up, is the origin of Order in our lives (Chapter Four). The result of much loving is Self-respect, a particular aspect or property of the Order we possess.

Self-respect is the sign of mutual love (usually not erotic) and automatically includes respect for others. They contribute equally to the living you enjoy so much, and you wish the to continue doing so.

Self-respect is the beginning of wisdom, and ultimately becomes Self-awareness.

Self-Awareness

Life teaches many lessons, and as you grow older these begin to settle into a fairly consistent pattern. What lessons you learn depend on the path you have taken, of course. I know nothing of skiing, because I have never done it - I rather wish I had. But I know a little of mountains and of snow, because I have walked in them and flown over them. My perspective and that of a skier will differ, but we will find much to agree about. We also have much we can learn from each other.

It is natural and healthy to reflect on what you experience, and to relate one experience to another. You never stop learning about the world, and about your Self.

Here I can only speak with confidence for myself; your experience will differ. But I have found that the more I am able to reflect, the better I get to know mySelf. But here's the thing. I sense a convergence between my separate Self, which has been growing since my personal conception, and other separate Selves - all living Selves, in fact.

This is one aspect and consequence of the widening of the world I inhabit. The more Wholes I am part of, and the broader they are, the more obvious it becomes how every Being is connected, and a part of Universal Nature. Ultimately we are all one Great Being. Or so it seems to me.

Which leads us into my next chapter.