

Finding Your Personal Path in this Precious Life

Russell Delman May 2022

What does it mean to see your life as a Path?
Are you on a Path?
How do you define it?

Knowing that you are on a meaning-filled, personal and freely chosen Path makes a huge difference in navigating your unique life. Defining daily life from a meta-perspective of Path, in which daily ups and downs exist within a larger framework, influences every experience. Meaning and purpose unfold from dedication to Path. Without a larger sense of purpose, our daily life revolves around our ever-changing feeling states. While these are important and listening to them skillfully is essential, a life based on feelings of "happy/sad, good/bad" is a trap.

Perhaps you are on a Path but have not truly defined it for yourself.
Perhaps the idea of Path is alien to you.
Perhaps you are defining your Path from someone else's ideas - inherited, familial or cultural - and these might feel not right anymore, like an ill-fitting shoe.

Having a conscious, personal, self-defined sense of Path transforms daily life in unanticipated ways.

For much of human history, the community has defined the context of life: the tribe, family or religious group. In these contexts, concern for others in the group was implicit while individualized self-expression was usually discouraged. Recently, in many parts of the world, the primacy of community has been replaced by valuing of the individual. This creates great challenges and pitfalls as well as possibilities. More autonomy to choose one's life direction makes new personally defined contexts possible and liberates enormous creativity. We each have a different gift to bring into the collective field that we share.

On the negative side more people can get lost in a narrow self-limiting life, choosing material wealth, sexual prominence, pleasure or power seeking, as their essential purpose. Self-orientation as the focus of life inevitably leads to suffering. This is the narcissistic vein so prominent today. Unless one

finds a Path that is defined as larger than self, both dissatisfaction and increased alienation is inevitable.

Two aspects of a genuine 21st century Path seem essential: 1) that it is **chosen in freedom** and 2) that it **connects to something larger than self**.

"Chosen in freedom" invites the creative potential that can come from honoring selfhood – one's True "I".

"Something larger" reminds us that true satisfaction and meaning requires living from a larger purpose.

For some, this might include a deep dedication to: serving others, creating beauty, closeness to God, cultivating wisdom, discerning truth or enlightenment. The Platonic ideals of Truth, Beauty and Goodness (love) offer a template for many potential, individually defined life paths. Uncovering this Path and committing to that as one's North Star, invites a meaning-filled life.

On a more everyday level, one might be truly satisfied with devotion to parenting, grand parenting, intimate relationship and/or work that benefits others. We each need to listen for our "enough-ness". A Path does not always sound big or transcendent – the key is that one is letting go of the primacy of self-image and self-gratification as one's cornerstone.

Warm-Hearted Awareness

My personal Path can be defined as *seeking to live in the light of awareness, warmed by the care of love*. By love, I mean a basic caring for life in all its forms. Love does not mean "like", it means finding a way to take care of life, even in the most horrendous moments. For example, right now some people, who are hearing bombs exploding, while huddled in basements in Ukraine, are doing their best to take care of others. This is caring for life, the actualizing of love.

Everything I have learned can be summed up in the expression: *living in the light of awareness and love*. Light has two qualities: clarity (awareness) and warmth (love). This is a pathless path, there are no rules other than the intention to be present, with care, for the living moment - easy to say and hard to accomplish.

My main learning comes through failure. Everyday I fall down in my intention. Anticipating failure is very helpful as an antidote to perfectionism and as a support for self-honesty. It is easy to fall into the habit of viewing life exclusively through the lens of self-interest or, on the other hand, to ignore one's genuine needs, thus impeding positive life energy. The criterion that I try to use is taking care of the moment as best as I can, which includes all the needs inherent in the situation. A caring heart is not necessarily soft and sweet, it can include a firm, clear "no". Taking care of life requires great strength and courage.

What happens when awareness reveals my closed heart? This is a learning moment. Two responses arise when awareness dawns: care for the pain inside of me that is creating the closure and genuine forgiveness for my limitation in that moment. Forgiveness includes both acceptance of my limitations and an inner resolve to do better when I am more able. If my closed heart has hurt others, it also includes apologizing as soon as I authentically can.

One final word – when on a Path, everyday life is the teacher, everything that occurs can be a source of learning. In addition to the expectation of failure and willingness to forgive, cultivating an **attitude of gratitude** for the gift of life is the perfect practice for growing a warm heart. Looking consistently for the gifts inherent in any moment is heart opening. Even on the most difficult of days, if one listens/looks freshly – a small blessings is never far away. This practice is fortifying in remarkable ways. As Zen master Shunryu Suzuki, Roshi said, "**The world is its own magic.**"

I wonder if you have a freely chosen, self-defined Path.
Can you see the value of clarifying this question for yourself?
Defining Your Path might be extraordinarily helpful for your unfolding,
precious and unique life.

Thank you for the gift of your attention...
Russell

"Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild & precious life"?
Mary Oliver, from "The Summer Day"

