

THE LIFE JOURNEY – FINDING OUR VOCATION

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By Michael Lewin

“ To find in ourselves what makes life worth living is risky business, for it means that once we know we must seek it. It also means that without it life will be valueless.”

Marsha Sinetar

In his fine book, *Finding Happiness*, Abbot Christopher Jamison writes about his time as a Headmaster in England. Prospective parents, he said would regularly tell him that all they wanted for their children, was for them to be happy. He then goes on to say that while this aspiration seemed reasonable, in itself, it leaves out of account other aspects, dimensions of character such as being: “ decent, just and honest.” His point is that happiness needn't imply virtue; it's possible, he says to be happy and “vicious.” After reading this book many thoughts started to surface within me and I thought I would try to explore a few of them with you here....

Sometime after reflecting on this rather elusive phenomenon of happiness, I came to the view that it could be seen as operating on at least two distinct levels: One, the everyday happiness that can visit us, often in surprising ways, which seems to uplift our spirits. Frequently unpredictable and short-lived this ‘ routine ‘ happiness is all about the receipt of good news – about family, friends, work, money matters, the weather, catching the train on time, etc., the normal, commonplace, events that effect our lives and make them feel better. Additionally, however, it could be argued that there exists another deeper level of happiness one that

is more enduring and dependent on the course of our life's direction. If an individual has made the right choices in life, found their true path, their real vocation, then happiness, I would argue, appears without them ever directly seeking it. It is an epiphenomenon (a by-product) of their decision making and consequently follows them like a shadow. This happiness I'm speaking about is that sense of fulfilment and contentment that surfaces from leading a meaningful and purposeful life that was uniquely intended for them. I suspect that Abbot Jamison knows all about this experience, a feeling that he had found and pursued his life's vocation – that he had discarded all other possible options to tread his own distinctive path – that of the monk.

Perhaps the recent plethora of books and blogs on the theme of Happiness (and how to secure it as if it was a product to purchase rather than a by-product of leading a good life) reflects the nature of our ' go, get ' society. But this fast paced, consumerist culture can mislead us, at times, about the true value of our lives because it leaves us little time for deeper reflection on what life really has got to offer us in terms of real significance and meaning.

Life is a unique gift, given to us to explore and develop – a journey to find out who we are and what our role in life is. It could be argued that distractions, in all their manifest forms, are part of the path and I do accept this, but to dwell constantly on them at the cost of pursuing the bigger picture is just too limiting. We must never waste our precious time because the imperative is always in place, despite our age, to find our true vocation, the mission we are here to accomplish. And only one person knows what this is, its distinctive trajectory – and that is uniquely you.

“Despite the blandishments of popular culture, the goal of life is not happiness but meaning. Those who seek happiness by trying to avoid suffering will find life more and more superficial. As we have seen in every swampland there is a

task, the addressing of which will enlarge one's life not diminish it.... In fleeing this fullness of life, we violate our very purpose."

James Hollis

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