

**PERSPECTIVE
WITH THE END IN MIND
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There are many possible ways of living, but among them, none is more powerful and courageous than one motivated by a deep sense of mission. Mission is not something others can give you. You must awaken to it yourself. Those who decide their own mission by themselves and pursue it bravely live the most profound and rewarding life.

—Daisaku Ikeda, *Buddhism In Action*, vol. 1, p. 192

Imagine your funeral. Envision the end of your life. What would your partner, your children, your friends, your co-workers say about you if you died tomorrow? Would their comments reflect the best of you? What would you want them to say were your greatest accomplishments?

In *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, author Stephen Covey encourages his readers to develop a mission statement for living—a sort of personal “constitution” by which to live. He emphasizes the need to begin “with the end in mind,” and trace back to today’s actions, today’s purpose. He asks, “Are you living today for a great purpose or are you just drifting through the years, very busily accomplishing nothing of lasting significance?” Covey emphasizes the need to establish deep within our hearts what it is that is truly important to us. And, not surprisingly, the answer is rarely about fame, money, status or material wealth. It is usually reflective of developing a compass for our lives that is based in love, integrity, spirituality and communion. It centers around becoming compassionate and kind and reverent. All things that we can freely become without seeing anything that our society typically labels as success.

Fifteen years ago when I first encountered Buddhism, I had a trunk full of wild dreams. They pulled me first to London, then Seattle, and later to New York City as I chased after what I thought was missing from my life: fame, fortune, recognition as a performing artist. I had no sense of purpose or identity other than the ethereal aspiration of writing and playing music, of being loved, of being seen in a world where I felt invisible. Buddhism made these impossible things seem possible. I started my Buddhist practice because I had so many dreams and I was terrified of ending up broken, lost and bitter if I was unable to see them manifested. This philosophy gave me the dream of “every day start fresh, every day a new beginning.” With that spirit, I ran toward the future.

After many false starts and wrong turns, I have finally realized that my mission is to be a writer: to record my sense of the truth, to tell stories that reveal the interior of my heart and mind. I have always loved words, loved finding the exact bits of language that would create a mosaic to help someone understand me or feel that I understood them. When a friend of mine committed suicide in 1996, I realized with sudden clarity that I had a story to tell. Her death sent me on a journey into the wilderness of my life. I reassessed everything. I realized who I truly was. I saw how interconnected we all are. I wanted to make sense of her death, to share my understanding as a gift, as possible solace to someone who might be suffering in the same way. My spiritual awakening about my mission has shown me what is really important, what is absolutely crucial for me. And that

is the only thing that each of us can do. Find our path, light our own way—and possibly share our wisdom with the others we find on the road with us.

Recently at our group meeting in West Hollywood, Calif., we discussed this idea of a personal mission statement. Each person spoke of childhood dreams, of things they had forgotten, of values and principals that make our lives meaningful. Our discussion illustrated the power inherent in living a life that is awakened. To me, one of the most impressive things about SGI President Ikeda is his joyous, burning sense of mission. He is irrepressible, undefeated and completely passionate about the life he is leading. He plans for the future of the SGI. He sees his life in terms of thousands of years, hundreds of lifetimes. He is bold and knows what he wants to leave as his life's work. He is an extraordinary example of how a human life could be lived. He has accomplished phenomenal things not because he is more capable than other human beings but because he is acutely aware of his greatness—the Buddha within. He lives this way to show us what is possible for us, too.

I have realized the important thing is to know how you want your story to end, to know what your gift to the world is. We each have a mission. Unearthing it is sometimes agonizing work—yet it is also magic, wondrous. I am no longer lost. Writing is my compass, my voice, my true north now.

What is your true north? Having a sense of purpose, understanding your mission—is the ground beneath your feet. All manner of doors open to a traveler who knows where he is headed. So, ask yourself the question: Where do I want to end up? What will I leave behind? Start making causes today so that when you come to the end of your life, you will find that you've left no stone unturned, you've loved, and laughed, and lived well, and can say with absolute conviction: I have no regrets.