

Pittsburg State University

Pittsburg State University Digital Commons

Workshop Handouts

Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg Collection

March 2023

The Unfolding Path: Crafting a Living Through What You Love

Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.pittstate.edu/cm_g_handouts

Recommended Citation

Mirriam-Goldberg, Caryn, "The Unfolding Path: Crafting a Living Through What You Love" (2023).

Workshop Handouts. 11.

https://digitalcommons.pittstate.edu/cm_g_handouts/11

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg Collection at Pittsburg State University Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Workshop Handouts by an authorized administrator of Pittsburg State University Digital Commons. For more information, please contact lfthompson@pittstate.edu.

The Unfolding Path

Crafting a Living Through What You Love

with Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg

Ground Rules

1. Don't worry about spelling, grammar, and most of all, making sense.
2. Write what you know as well as what you don't know.
3. Follow your writing, not the suggested exercise, the facilitator or what you think you should write. Write what wakes you up the most.
4. Feel free to experiment with poems, stories, dialogues, essays, letters, and whatever other form the writing wants to be.
5. Practice trust. Trust yourself to write what you need to write, how you need to write it.
6. Remember that all revealed in this workshop is confidential.
7. Treat all newborn writing with great respect and tenderness so that it can grow.
8. Reading your writing aloud is always optional.
9. No self-deprecating remarks allowed (especially when preparing to read your work).
10. Strive, as much as possible, not to compare your writing with the writing of others, and not to critique, interpret or analyze away what your writing is trying to show you.
11. Witness others. Listen carefully with your full attention. It will enhance your ability to listen to your own words.
12. Please share your responses to one another's work — what moves you, what stands out for you — but please refrain from critiquing or analyzing the work.
13. Treat all you do as a delicious and invigorating experiment. Play. Take chances. See what way leads to way, and what words lead to words.

Call & Response: Conversing With Your Calling

The thing is to stalk your calling in a certain skilled and supple way, to locate the most tender and live spot and plug into the pulse. – Annie Dillard

A “calling” is a term often used to connote spiritual/religious vocations, one focused on serving God and/or a community through one’s work. Yet this term also speaks to what work, study, deeds and tasks we feel compelled to do in everyday life and for our livelihood. As Gregg Levoy writes in his fine book, *Callings: Finding and Following an Authentic Life*:

In many traditions, calls – in the forms of sounds – precede prayer, rites of initiation, spiritual healings, and major life events. The purpose of calls is to summon adherents away from their daily grinds to a new level of awareness, into a sacred frame of mind, into communion with that which is bigger than themselves. The calls may come from bull-roarers, trumpets, rattles, wooden clackers, songs, bells, or the chanting of muezzins atop minarets.

In the primary creation myth of Western cosmology, the very first call came through the voice that said, “Let there be light,” and there was light, the words then becoming flesh. Every call since then has also been a call to form, a call to each of us to materialize ourselves.

Calls, of course, beg the question “Who, or what, is calling?” But in attempting to answer this question even an exhaustive list of every name for Soul or Destiny or God would be beside the point. It simply doesn’t matter whether we call it God, the Patterning Intelligence, the Design Mind, the Unconscious, the Soul, the Force of Completion, the Center Court, so simply “life’s longing for itself,” as Kahlil Gibran envisioned. It is clear, however, that “living means being addressed,” as the theologian Martin Buber once said, and whatever or whoever is addressing us is a power like wind or fusion or faith: We can’t see the force, but we can see what it does.

Primarily this force announces the need for change, and the response for which it calls is an awakening of some kind. A call is only a monologue. A return call, a response, creates a dialogue. Our own unfolding requires that we be in constant dialogue with whatever is calling us. The call and one’s response to it are also a central metaphor for the spiritual life, and in Latin there is even a correspondence between the words for *listening* and *following*.

Calls can come in many forms, and not just from rattles or from atop minarets. Some possible ways we realize we are being called can include (and I bring in examples from Levoy’s list and my own examples here):

- ❖ Recurrent dreams or nightmares.
- ❖ A recurring physical symptom, such as a sore throat when being afraid to speak, or feeling suddenly nauseas whenever you walk in the door to work.
- ❖ A conversation overhead, or song glanced, or billboard seen that seems like it’s speaking directly to us (such as “Go down the road,” a song lyric my friend Kris and I heard a few weeks ago on an artist road trip).
- ❖ An ultimatum in your life, such as an employer demanding you go through some additional education, or a spouse saying it’s marriage counseling or else.
- ❖ A scene from a movie you can’t shake thinking about.
- ❖ Words that come to you while meditating or exercising or walking.
- ❖ A fortune from a fortune cookie that you keep getting.
- ❖ Several friends in a day noticing something about you that no one has mentioned

before.

- ❖ Where there's friction in your life, such as moments your words don't match your thoughts that keep recurring.
- ❖ A particularly annoying person who keeps turning up in your life, or a pattern of similar issues you notice among your friends and acquaintances.

To even hear your calls takes effort and deep listening (which, according to theologian Paul Tillich, is the first duty of love). Often, we need to start small, observing first without judging, analyzing or categorizing too quickly. By engaging in what Levoy calls "power lounging," we can see more clearly what's around us, and also bring our discernment ability (which is all around clear seeing and critical thinking) to what's coming toward us or sounding around us. We can also engage in arts and practices that help us test pilot, play act or further dwell within the energy of the call to see what it means for us. For most of us, discerning a call means embracing paradox, too: Sitting with seemingly opposing forces to see what there is to learn here.

This kind of clear-seeing and paradox-dwelling is also related to what Buddhist nun Pema Chodron calls dwelling in groundlessness. The old ground from which we formed our identity doesn't hold us up anymore; the new ground may still be too much in formation to give us much support, and anyway, according to Chodron:

That nothing is static or fixed, that all is fleeting and impermanent, is the first mark of existence. It is the ordinary state of affairs. Everything is in process. Everything—every tree, every blade of grass, all the animals, insects, human beings, buildings, the animate and the inanimate—is always changing, moment to moment.

Cleaning House: Examining Messages & Myths On Who You Should Be

We all have messages and myths from ourselves, our families and friends, our communities, and the culture at large about our identity, and along with that, our life's work. Messages can be short sayings ("An inch in time saves nine" or "Boy's don't cry") as well as more complex, less-clichéd messages (such as believing if you don't take care of everyone in the family, the family will collapse, or being told you have to function as the caregiver or black sheep of the family).

Myths, according to Roland Barthes, are dominant cultural narratives, or big, over-stories that tell us of our identity, how to live accordingly, etc. On the cultural level, there are plenty of myths to go around, such as the myth of not being able to make a living unless you do something you don't love (often captured in phrases like, "Well, that's nice, but in the real world, you have to..."). Yet there are also very dominant over-stories that come from our families (such as being labeled "the wild one" or "the loser"), and even from our friends (such as being often seen as "the crazy one" or "the one who keeps holding it together) and lovers/spouses/significant others (such as the myth of one partner always being in a crisis while the other one always holds steady). Finally, there are the myths we prescribe for ourselves and buy into whole-heartedly (even if we didn't consciously sit down and

say, “Yes, this will be the dominant story of my life”). These could include believing you will also persevere through adversity, and there will always be great adversity, or always telling yourself you can’t do what you love because you’re not worthy.

It’s very difficult to hear a calling with excessive noise around from myths and messages, and very often, we can find – through looking at our messages and myths – the roots of what we most desire, fear, need, grief over, or love. Taking the space to examine what messages and myths are velcroed to us is a long-term project. It can take weeks, months, and years to unearth what words and stories imprinted themselves on our psyches, and then to discern what messages and myths bring us closer to our true selves, and which take us further away. So while I have some exercises below to assist in seeing the layers of words and stories that inform us, please take your time and also feel free to create your own tools to find greater freedom from the messages and myths that limit, damage or oppress, and greater energy from the messages and myths that honor who you are and what you’re doing here.

Cultivating Spaciousness: Making Room for Your Deepest Work

Without cultivating spaciousness – making room in your life for your calling – your calling will find no room or safe perch on which to set itself. Think about spaciousness, and how you can create more, in your schedule, in your home (and in particular rooms), in your interactions with friends and family and others, and in your heart. You may also find it helpful to think about the opposite of spaciousness, and what that quality feels like to you.

There are also many spiritual practices that support you in cultivating spaciousness. The Quaker tradition of the clearing committee and sitting together in silence and discernment is a marvelous model of bringing questions about our next life steps to the community, and asking for the space to listen deeply to what emerges. Traditions of prayer – which include an awe for the mystery of life – invite in open space to feel what it means to dwell in not-knowing-ness. In the Buddhist tradition, and in many other meditation-type practices, you often engage in silence while letting go of judgment (including the judgment that compels us to name what we see as we see it). Shaikh Kabir Helminski, a Sufi scholar, writes of the need to cultivate inner spaciousness and purify the heart. In the Jewish tradition, the hundreds of names for God suggest the impossibility of pinning down and naming the holy. Yoga practices focus on making space in the body through breath and movement.

Life itself has a habit of breaking our hearts to let in the light. Our hearts break open, and then, despite the pain we feel, there is also more room for the light to get in and out. The state of Maitri, a Buddhist term that Pema Chodron explains can be understood as “unconditional friendliness to oneself,” which also means learning to stay with the big, open spaces (and gaps) that spring open in us from loneliness, loss or other pain, and especially, our own vulnerability. She writes: “When you begin to touch your heart or let your heart be touched, you begin to discover that it’s bottomless, that it doesn’t have any resolution, that this heart is huge, vast, and limitless. You begin to discover how much warmth and gentleness is there, as well as how much space.”

Hunting & Gathering: Inviting In Sources & Resources

Hunting and Gathering speaks to several aspects of our calling: How we invite in the calling itself, and use our lives to hunt and gather more information about it; how we develop this calling into our life's work, and hunt and gather support, tools and approaches for this work. In many ways, all of this is about waking up enough to see what life is giving us, and within that giving, to see the patterns, the stories, the symbols, the leads, and the open windows or doors.

Yet this is also about both looking at what comes, and going out to find what we need, whether that is emotional support to break through our own blocks, financial backing to start a venture, or even a new skill, approach, or educational experience (formal or informal). We need to continually weigh what to hunt and gather with how we live, who we live with, what responsibilities we carry, what challenges we face, and what gifts we need to cultivate.

The answers are absolutely individual, and impossible for anyone but us to truly know, and so part of this process is also learning to listen more fully to ourselves. This entails getting under the layers of what we think we should do, be and know to what we truly are born to do, be and know. This process of constant discernment entails listening to ourselves and what's around us, balancing options, sleeping on it, waking up to new worlds, and remembering who we are. As we find new sources and resources for our work, we have to measure and weigh them in balance with this constant discernment (e.g. Am I taking this job because people say I should? Is this bringing me closer to myself or further away? What compromise is necessary here and now?).

And where do we hunt and gather? Everywhere! The weather, the glimpse of birds in flight, the phone message machine, people around us who do work they love or hate, children who listen to and ignore their parents, dogs running down the street, emails from old friends, dreams, urges to make certain kinds of art, the local paper, and whatever else crosses our path each hour. Remember that each day is a kind of treasure hunt, and the treasure you are gathering is yourself.

Visioning & Revisioning: Making the Work You Love Come True

Summoning the courage to put our work out there and also face the work that thrills (and sometimes scares) us the most, we can make livings that also help us draw on our gifts, face our challenges, and contribute to our communities. The most important quality to cultivate in this regard is our own courage, and that's the courage to both fail and success, to experiment and learn, and the courage to reach out, even if you don't completely believe yet in yourself and your work. The old adage to act as if you have the confidence you seek applies here.

Once we know more about we want to do in making a living, we need to figure out how to make it happen. This means planning and designing what we do to make it marketable enough to reach our audience and sustainable enough to balance with our overall life. Inherent in putting our work out there in the community are the following:

- ❖ Determining the “What”: Identifying Audience/Population and Developing Service/Product.
- ❖ Making Connections: Community groups, businesses and institutions
- ❖ Finding Support: Fundraising, Grant-Writing and Collaboration
- ❖ Planting Seeds: Free Samples & Other Enticements
- ❖ Putting It Out There: Marketing on a Dime
- ❖ Developing Your Work: Continual Education and Assessment
- ❖ Walking Your Talk: Sustainable and Ethical Business Practices
- ❖ Keep On Keeping On: The Art of Self-Care

One more part of doing the work you love in concert with your calling and community will be address in the next class; it concerns how you’ll transform obstacles into opportunities, and above all, to stay true to our path, even when the path is hard to see.

Determining the “What”: Identifying Audience/Population & Developing Service/Product:

- ❖ Do your research: If you want to work with people living with serious illness and storytelling, research how storytelling can be of benefit; if you wish to consult with underserved teens in your community, research the benefits of your potential work (by looking at programs in other communities). Research the literature behind your work as well as parallel programs you can learn from in other communities.
- ❖ Be very clear as to your intentions for wanting to work with a specific populations. Make sure your motives are clean, and that you’re not using your work too therapeutically (e.g. that you feel you truly have something to offer rather than you want to prove to yourself that you’re worthy).
- ❖ Look at the work of others that most inspires you: What qualities and values do you admire most in this work, and how can you create work that also mirrors these qualities and values?
- ❖ Try out your work with various populations to see where you feel the most resonance. Learn from everything that comes your way.
- ❖ Experiment, take risks (yet thoughtful risks that don’t cause harm to others), and listen to your intuition.
- ❖ Start with at least some notion of what you feel called to do – enough of an idea that you can craft it as you learn, and yet not such a firm idea of each detail that you can’t incorporate what you learn as you go along. It’s like holding sand: Hold it too tightly, or too loosely, and you’ll drop a lot of it.

Making Connections: Community Groups, Businesses and Institutions: Above all, foster an atmosphere of cooperation, collaboration, and community-building. Be a part of your community.

- ❖ Go to events, openings, gatherings, and whatever else puts you in touch with people you want to network with, and then use these opportunities to introduce yourself and learn more about the needs of your community. Attend programs at any specific facility where you want to present, consult, or intern to get to know people and what the place and people are about.

- ❖ Set up meetings, lunch dates, coffee chats with people you want to inform about your services.
- ❖ Put your work forth without apology or hesitation. You're simply saying, "Here I am, and this is what I have to offer." If they accept, great. If not, don't take it personally, and move on.
- ❖ Look at where others get contracts who do work that's similar to what you wish to do. Meet with them to ask their advice.

Finding Support: Fundraising, Grant-writing and Collaboration:

- ❖ Team up with a not-for-profit in your community, or look into becoming a traveling artist or scholar with your state's art commission or humanities council. It's very difficult to get a grant just for an individual, so look for ways to collaborate. Most states offer free grant-writing workshops with arts commissions and other agencies, and most states also have grant-writing resources at one or more libraries.
- ❖ Learn about your community foundation (if there is one), and what kinds of programs it funds, and look into collaborating with a local group to write an appropriate grant.
- ❖ Consult with schools, hospitals, clinics, housing authorities, prisons, and other institutions to see what kinds of funding might be possible for your services. In some cases, there are funds (such as drug and alcohol prevention dollars) which can be funneled toward arts programs. Be innovative and open, and follow up on leads.
- ❖ When collaborating with an organization, be very clear about the budget. Most organizations take at least 10% of the grant for administration, and some (especially colleges and universities) take up to 40% of the grant for administration. Make sure you talk through all angles of the budget so that there are no surprises.
- ❖ Look at how to leverage grants with other fundraising. Most funders prefer to give matching grants, and even if they don't, your application looks better with a diversity of funding sources.
- ❖ Develop an overall template of your project, expected outcomes, assessment plans, outreach plans, blurbs on each partner, etc. and use this as the basis to extract from for various grants and proposals.
- ❖ When making in-person presentations, leave people with a packet that's interesting, full, and not too overwhelming. Bring in a strong combination of the practical and the theory behind it, and angle your presentation toward your population. Remember that you're presenting to people.
- ❖ Look at alternative fundraising, such as running a campaign to get people to give a certain amount each month or quarter, or holding a non-event event.

Free Samples & Other Enticements:

- ❖ Be generous, especially when starting out, so that people get a sense of what you do. Give a free session to your community, or an in-service at a school or hospital.
- ❖ Say yes to any benefits that help get the word out on what you do, and then write up what you did to list in your local paper.
- ❖ When starting out, you can call your work a pilot project, charge a bit less, and draw people in on the basis of helping you see if this is what the community needs and how you need to develop this.
- ❖ Be consistent with any incentives (don't offer a discounted rate to fill up a workshop after several people already paid full rate).

- ❖ Consider such things as “two for one” and other enticements when starting up.

Putting It Out There: Marketing on a Dime:

- ❖ Word of mouth, word of mouth, word of mouth.
- ❖ Inexpensive flyers can be posted anywhere people are hanging out (coffee houses, bookstores, community centers, doctor offices, laundry mats, etc.), but geared to be distributed where your population goes.
- ❖ Send blurbs (one paragraph summaries) to local newsletters, newspaper arts calendars, websites, etc. Don't be shy.
- ❖ Call the arts editor of your local paper and ask him/her to write about this.
- ❖ You can produce quality brochures, postcards and business cards at www.vistaprint.com and other similar sites for a very reasonable amount, and you can use the site's templates to make your work really shine.
- ❖ Trade graphic design, website design and maintenance and other marketing products with people for workshops, consultations, etc.
- ❖ Take special care of emails and develop a blind copy (bcc) email list you can send announcements to on a regular basis.

Developing Your Work: Continuing Education & Assessment:

- ❖ Get to know what kind of minimal education and training you need to do what you want, and then get that education and training, and go beyond the minimum to give yourself the very best foundation for building your livelihood.
- ❖ Continue to learn: read, attend conferences and gatherings, exchange knowledge and resources with colleagues, and most of all, continue to put your ear to your work to see what it's showing you and telling you.
- ❖ Put energy into creating and sustaining a community that will help, in turn, sustain you. Find colleagues and fellow transformative language artists, activists, facilitators, performers, etc. around the world you can keep in touch with enough to understand how this kind of work is evolving, trouble-shoot difficult moments, and learn from one another.
- ❖ Use evaluation forms that allow people to write comments and also/instead rate aspects of the work (so that you meet people where they are).
- ❖ Write your own reflections down and consider them (including straining out what's your stuff to see more clearly what's really happening).
- ❖ Have outside observers or mentors consult with you on occasion.

Walking Your Talk: Sustainable and Ethical Business Practices:

- ❖ Explore how to do every part of your work in a way that's ethical and true to your own values, including planning, facilitation, assessment, continual education, assessment, marketing, etc.
- ❖ Ask yourself throughout each phase of your work, and in relation to others you encounter, how to be true to your deepest values and act in a way that's conscious, creative and connected.
- ❖ Be considerate of those with whom you work in all capacities, and yet also believe in yourself and treat yourself with great consideration.
- ❖ Consider the impact – both positive and negative – of your work on your community and eco-community, and then develop ways to go the most good and the least damage.

- ❖ Look continually at how to transform moments of competition into opportunities of collaboration and cooperation. If it seems your slice of the pie is too thin, bake more pies.
- ❖ Think through, ahead of time, how you'll handle issues regarding payment, turnout (who comes and who doesn't), follow-up, etc. in ways that are clean ethically and reflect your deepest values.
- ❖ Keep yourself open and vulnerable artistically, and at the same time, keep your business self separate (be thin-skinned enough to be creative and innovative; be thick-skinned enough to keep business as business).
- ❖ Consider the Buddhist concept of "Right Speech," which is considered abstaining from lying, from divisive speech, from abusive speech, and from idle chatter. Use this as a starting point to develop your own idea of right speech.
- ❖ Remember that ethics is always a part of any work that involves the public; learning about and cultivating ethical responses is a life-long practice.

Keep On Keeping On: The Art of Self Care: How can you sustain yourself as you create this livelihood? Pay attention to health and well-being, family and friends, community and eco-community; see what issues or signs keep appearing, and learn from them. Listen to your body.

There are also many things you can cultivate as a self-care practice, such as:

- ❖ Regular exercise (Pilates, yoga, biking, walking, aerobics, dance, etc.).
- ❖ Regular meditation or prayer or whatever maintains your spiritual health.
- ❖ Healthy and balanced diet.
- ❖ Enough sleep (including getting into a good rhythm with your sleep cycle), and creating regular rituals to help you sleep easily and dream clear (such as hot non-caffeinated tea before bed, reading quietly, lighting a candle for a few minutes and staring at the flame, etc.).
- ❖ Regular retreats and getaways. Even without much time or a budget, you can create your own retreat, such as making a day at home "spa day" (complete with hot bath, giving yourself a facial, doing some yoga, eating something good, and relaxing). You can also enjoy great getaways, such as "artist roadtrip day," when you simply go with a friend or alone on an aimless roadtrip, driving whatever direction calls you and getting new perspective on where you are.
- ❖ Community support, such as starting a group that meets every so often to share self-care strategies and practices.
- ❖ Creating spaces of beauty within your home, even if it's just a shelf of special objects you seasonally re-arrange and add to, or a drawer you clean out.

Staying Awake: Embracing the Challenges & the Gifts That Come

Anyone who is following a calling will face unimagined blessings, but also unimagined obstacles (which are sometimes blessings in disguise). Many Buddhist teachers encourage the "Not always so" philosophy of judging situations: It's not always so that what appears like good news, or bad news, is either; it's not always so that pitfalls aren't opportunities either. Being in dialogue with a calling means that we have some sense of what we need to do and where we need to go, but we're in

dialogue with it, and what happens to us along the way is part of that conversation. Embracing the challenges also means grappling with what it means to choose and be chosen, and along with that, how to negotiate our psychological needs for external approval without compromising our work, demeaning our spirit, or denying our heart.

At the same time, we need to embrace and learn from our gifts. Annie Dillard, in her book, *The Writing Life*, tells us that it's the blank page itself that teaches a writer to write. Likewise, whatever our gifts, they will unfold in all their fullness as we practice the work of our calling. Along the way, there will undoubtedly be moments of doubt and certainty, terror and ecstasy, boredom and engagement, and yet, to paraphrase Rainer Maria Rilke, we can find answers by living the questions that come (and they will come!).

In looking at long-term support, we can consider friends, community, the work itself, family, and our relationships with more-than-humans to help us. We can also articulate, as clearly as possible, what we need, and what our motives are – to ourselves and to others – so that we can stay awake enough in the present to learn from the opportunities that come (or, as a bumper sticker says, “Oh, no! Not another learning opportunity!”). We can reach out to people further on the path, and those just starting; we can continually cultivate a wider vision to see the signs and wonders in the ordinary life around us.

Writing & Art Prompts

1. Starting with the line, “You do not have to be good” (or “You do not have to be.....”), start writing a love poem to yourself.

Wild Geese

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting----

over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.
-- Mary Oliver

2. Write about one of the hundreds of ways for you "...to kneel and kiss the ground."

Today, like every other day

Today, like every other day, we wake up empty
and frightened. Don't open the door to the study
and begin reading. Take down the dulcimer.

Let the beauty we love be what we do.
There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground.
-- Rumi

3. Write about what your live circles about, and/or make a mandala of what colors and textures and/or images are in each circle.

I live my life

I live my life in growing orbits
which move out over the things of the world.
Perhaps I can never achieve the last,
but that will be my attempt.

I am circling around God, around the ancient tower,
and I have been circling for a thousand years,
and I still don't know if I am a falcon, or a storm,
or a great song.
-- Rainer Maria Rilke

4. Write of a moment when something ignited in your soul, or ignited your soul – whether a small something or a momentous one.

and something ignited in my soul

and something ignited in my soul
fever or forgotten wings
and I went my own way
deciphering that burning fire
and I wrote the first bare line,
pure foolishness
pure wisdom,
of one who knows nothing
and suddenly I saw the heavens

unfasten and open
-- Pablo Neruda

5. Make a collage out of anything and everything that centers on one or more of these topics:

- ❖ What is beauty to you?
- ❖ What matters most to you?
- ❖ How do you like to spend your days and nights?
- ❖ What kinds of activities have been the most meaningful to you?
- ❖ What does love look like to you?
- ❖ A topic or question of your own choosing.

6. After relaxing and making contact with your body, start writing with the phrase, "This is my...." and put in any part of you – physical or otherwise (your lungs, your stamina, your heart, your feet), and see what it has to say.

This is My Heart

This is my heart. It is a good heart.
Bones and membrane of mist and fire
are the woven cover.
When we make love in the flower world
my heart is close enough to sing
to yours in a language that has no use
for clumsy human words.

My head is a good head, but it is a hard head
and it whirrs inside a swarm of worries.
What is the source of this singing, it asks
and if there is a source why can't I see it
right here, right now
as real as these hands hammering
the world together
with nails and sinew?

This is my soul. It is a good soul.
It tells me, "Come here forgetful one."
And we sit together with lilt of small winds
who rattle the scrub oak.
We cook a little something
to eat, then a sip of something
sweet, for memory.

This is my song. It is a good song.
It walked forever the border of fire and water
climbed ribs of desire to my lips to sing to you.

Its new wings quiver with vulnerability.
Come lie next to me, says my heart.
Put your head here.
It is a good thing, says my soul.
-- Joy Harjo

7. Dialogue with your calling, write letters back and forth, or just write on any of these questions (adapted from Gregg Levoy's book, *Callings*).

- ❖ Does this calling light up our passion? Is it what we hunger for beyond our surface needs?
- ❖ Does this calling scare you, and if so, why and how?
- ❖ How much do you want to do this? Are you willing to go through delays and frustrations, climb over walls, disassemble road blocks and persist even when this calling takes you to difficult places?
- ❖ Is this truly your calling or an echo from what your parents, spouse, children, community, culture, friends want for you to do?
- ❖ When you think of this calling, how do you feel physically? What symptoms or sensations come?
- ❖ What messages, hints, clues and ideas do you see from the world around you in your everyday life?
- ❖ How will you handle it if someone you love is threatened by you pursuing this call?
- ❖ What kind of support do you have and can you additionally cultivate to help you dialogue with this call?
- ❖ What resources do you need to follow this call? What education, supports, networking, experience and skills do you need?
- ❖ What would be most difficult about this call for you, and how would you sit with, learn from and move through the difficulty?
- ❖ Knowing there is never a perfect time to follow a call, when is the right time for you to take the first step? Would a time line be helpful for you to follow?

8. Finding the Myth and Freeing Yourself from It

- ❖ **Brainstorm myths:** Make a list someplace where you can continue to add to it (such as the first page in a notebook or pad, or on a giant piece of paper with lots of room), and over several weeks (or months even) write down any messages or myths that you realize are at play in your everyday life in your family, workplace, home, with your friends, sweethearts, kids, parents, etc.
- ❖ **Trace the myth in your life:** After you feel you have a list of what you're ready to examine, pause and look at the list. Maybe circle the most charged of these myths and messages. Then free-write, collage, sing or use other art to show yourself the source of these words and stories in your life. Enter into this in the spirit of curiosity (and not looking to blame or criticize yourself or others).
- ❖ **Examine one myth deeply:** Take one particular message or myth that feels damaging or unhealthy to you, and write out how you came to believe this; how this belief manifests in how you live and treat yourself, others, your work, etc.; and how this story or message has served you (because all the ones that stay for a reason!).
- ❖ **Create a ritual:** Honor what this message or story has done for you as a way of seeing it clearly

and beginning to let it go. For example, if you realize that all the breadwinners in your family for several generations were workaholics who rarely had time for family or taking care of themselves, you might create a collage with images of these family members juxtaposed with images of connecting with family, health and vitality, post this on a wall in your workspace, and look at it for more information and guidance over time. Or you might write an, "I give you back" manifesto, listing all that you're giving back of damaging family myths, and what you're cultivating instead; find a place that feels strong and alive (inside or outside) to read this (with or without witnesses), and then put this manifesto in a place where you can remind yourself of what you're letting go of and what you're inviting into your life.

- ❖ **Rescript a myth:** Take a story that's been damaging to you, and rescript it to be a story of love and liberation – all as a way to show yourself the possibilities. For example, if you've grown up in an alcoholic family, you could write about the possibilities that would have been present in your life had your parents not been drinking to extreme. Then you can focus on what qualities in you may have flourished with such possibilities, do ritual or art project to mourn what was lost, and then focus extensively on how to invite in these qualities to your life now.

9. Map out or write the story of a 24-hour period of what your life would look like if this message or myth wasn't so pervasive. Take any pervasive myth, such as "If people knew me, they would never let me do the work I love," and map out (with cartoon-like pictures and arrows going from one event to the next) a 24-hour period in which this wasn't true, and instead, what you wish for were true. See what comes.

10. Jubilee can be a musical gathering, but its roots are from the Jewish agrarian tradition of letting fields lie fallow every seven years, and also giving away all you own every 49 years (7 x 7). In our own time, we can see Jubilee as a time to release previously held notions of who you are and what's doing, rest deeply (and/or go on/create your own retreats), and start anew. Write about something you're ready to lay down and release in your life. Or take a line from this and use it as a diving board into your own writing.

Jubilee by Mary Chapin Carpenter (Stones in the Road, 1994 Sony Music)

I can tell by the way you're walking, you don't want company
I'll let you alone and I'll let you walk on and in your own good time you'll be
Back where the sun can find you, under the wise wishing tree
And with all of them made we'll lie under the shade and call it a jubilee

And I can tell by the way you're talking, that the past isn't letting you go
There's only so long you can take it all on, and then the wrongs gotta be on its own
And when you're ready to leave it behind you, you'll look back and all that you'll see
Is the wreckage and rust you left in the dust on your way to the jubilee

And I can tell by the way you're listening, that you'll still expecting to hear
Your name being called like a summons to all who have failed to account
For their doubts and their fears, they can't add up to much without you

And so if it were just up to me I'd take hold of your hand
Saying come hear the band play your song at the jubilee

And I can tell by the way you're searching, for something you can't even name
That you haven't been able to come to the table, simply glad that you came
When you feel like this try to imagine that we're all like frail boats on the sea
Just scanning the night for that great guiding light announcing the jubilee

And I can tell by the way you're standing with your eyes filling with tears
That it's habit alone that keeps you turning for home, even though your home is right here
Where the people who love you are gathered under the wise wishing tree
May we all be considered then straight on delivered down to the jubilee

Because the people who love you are waiting, and they'll wait just as long as need be
When we look back and say those were halcyon days
We're talking about jubilee

11. Write about spaciousness, and also write about the opposite of spaciousness, as real, living beings. Personify away! For example, Ruth Gendler, in *The Book of Qualities*, personifies dozens of human emotions as characters. She writes of beauty, "Beauty doesn't mind questions and she is fond of riddles. Beauty will dance with anyone who is brave enough to ask her."

12. Clean out a drawer, a box in storage, a closet or some other small part of your home or car (even a glove box) to see what you're ready to release.

13. Make a list, adding to it over a week or two, of what kinds of things you enjoy doing (what you really enjoy, not what you think you should do), and then step back and look at what kinds of work this might add up to for yourself.

14. Greg Greenway says of this song that when he found ways to see what he previously felt blinded to, he began to wonder about all the other ways he was blind. Write about the road worth walking down that your blinded feet, eyes, mind or heart seeks, focusing especially on what shows you that you're on the right path.

A Road Worth Walking Down by Greg Greenway (A Road Worth Walking Down, Sheen of Heat Music)

I have seen my brother stumble
I have seen my father fall
Like shadows from behind me
Reaching out so far that I always have wondered
My feet are so blinded
If ever they'll find their ground
On a road worth walking down

I have walked these empty sidewalks
Without a trace, without a sign
Past windows with shadows drawn tight
Over thousands of lives
I wonder, my eyes are so blinded
If ever they'll see somehow
A road worth walking down

Sometimes it rises up inside you
Sometimes I feel that I may drown
Vanish without ever saying
This is my life, this is my ground
And I wonder, my mind is so blinded
I won't know it when I've found
A road worth walking down

Down in Virginia 'neath a holly tree
By the river that gave him his youth
My father lies saying
What he always said, "please yourself."
I feel my mother's courage
You give them life, you let them go
I have chosen my own direction
So far away, so far away from it all
And I wonder, my heart is so blinded
I won't know it when I've found
A road worth walking down.

15. Write about meeting your muse, and how you will keep him/her close at home, well-fed and taken care of, and engaged in your life.

When I met My Muse

I glanced at her and took my glasses
off – they were still singing. They buzzed
like a locust at the coffee table and then
ceased. Her voice belled forth, and the
sunlight bent. I felt the ceiling arch, and
knew that nails up there took a new grip
on whatever they touched. "I am your own
way of looking at things," she said. "When
you allow me to live with you, every
glance at the world around you will be
a sort of salvation." And I took her hand.

-- William Stafford

16. Make a map of where you are now, where you want to go, and where you need to stop for fuel and food along the way as well as where it would be good to stop for rest, inspiration and other essential things.

17. Write a business plan (in-process so you can keep adding to it). Here's some websites with more information:

* <http://articles.bplans.com/index.php/business-articles/category/writing-a-business-plan>

* <http://www.sba.gov/smallbusinessplanner/index.html>

* <http://www.myownbusiness.org/s2/>

* <http://www.soyouwanna.com/site/syws/bizplan/bizplan.html>

* <http://www.entrepenuer.com>

18. Find a person, or several, who do the kind of work you want to do, and see if you can shadow them for an afternoon or day or hour. Offer them some help, compensation, or a gift to thank them for their time.

19. Write about whatever blocks you have regarding marketing, asking for support, the art of self-care, grant-writing, fundraising, asking for support, etc. Then write about dissolving a specific block, and what you would need to dissolve this block.

20. What would success look like to you? Write this, collage it, make an altar of it, etc. \

21. Write a manifesto of your deepest values, what you most believe in, and what you most want your work to help manifest in the world for yourself and others. Then look at how to do your work in such a way.

Resources

Christina Baldwin, *Calling the Circle*, and *Life's Companion: Journal Writing as a Spiritual Quest*.

Martha Beck, *Finding Your Own North Star: Claiming the Life You Were Meant to Live*, www.MarthaBeck.com

David Brooks, *Right Livelihood*.

Continental Bioregional Congress: Offers continental-wide congress every two-three years on Right Livelihood, ecologically-based living, and other values of sustainability in community and eco communities.

www.bioregionalcongress.org

Conscious Choice: Midwestern magazine on crafting a life that includes right livelihood.

<http://www.consciouschoice.com>

Crossroads Center – www.crossroads-center.org

Annie Dillard, *The Writing Life*.

Loren Eiseley, *The Immense Journey*

Paul Ekins, *A New World Order: Grassroots Movements for Social Change*.

Melissa Everett, *Making a Living While Making a Difference*.

Paul Ferrini, *The Economy of Love: Creativity, Right Livelihood and Abundance*.

Matthew Fox, *The Reinvention of Work: A New Vision of Livelihood for Our Time*.

Martha Finney, *Find your Calling, Love your Life*. www.heartlandatwork.com

Ariel Gore, *How to Become a Famous Writer Before You're Dead*, www.ArielGore.com

Green Businesses: <http://www.greenbiz.com/>, <http://www.sustainablebusiness.com/>,
<http://www.coopamerica.org/>, <http://www.sijournal.com/>

Heartland Institute – www.heartlandinstitute.com

Paul Hawkins, *Growing a Business*.

Claudia Horwitz, *The Spiritual Activist: Practices to Transform Your Life, Your Work and Your World*.

James Hillman, *The Soul's Code: In Search of Character and Calling*.

Catherin Ingram, for. by Ramchandra Gandhi, *In the Footsteps of Gandhi: Conversations with Spiritual Social Activists*.

Rick Jarow, *Creating the Work You Love*, www.anticareer.com

Robert Keegan, *How the Way We Talk can Change the Way We Work: Seven Languages for Transformation*.

J. Krishnamurti, *On Right Livelihood*.

Stephen Levine, *A Year to Live*, www.warmrocktapes.com

Nicholas Lore, *The Pathfinder: How to Choose or Change a Career for a Lifetime of Satisfaction and Success*.

Gregg Levoy, *Callings*, www.gregglevoy.com

Susan Meeker Lowry, *Economics as if the Earth Mattered*

Deena Metzger, *Writing for Your Life*.

Thomas Moore, *Care of the Soul: A Guide for Cultivating Depth and Sacredness in Everyday Life Mindfulness and Meaningful Work: Explorations in Right Livelihood*, ed. by Claude Whitmeyer and Ernest Callenbach

Jerrold Mundis, *Earn What You Deserve*.

The New Careers Center: Resources for Career Direction: Site provides a variety of career development

resources, including *The Whole Work Catalog*, plus career planning and development; resume writing, job hunting and interviewing; colleges and alternatives; as well as a variety of videos. www.wholework.com

Planet and Peace: The Right Livelihood Award Speeches, ed. by Tom Woodhouse.

Psyche at Work, ed. by Murray Stein and John Hollwitz.

The Power of Words: A Transformative Language Arts Reader, edited by Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg & Janet Tallman. www.TLANetwork.org

Lewis Richmond, *Work as a Spiritual Practice*.

Right Livelihood Awards – www.rightlivelihood.org

Barbara Sher, *I Could Do Anything If I Only Knew What It Was* and *Wishcraft*. www.BarbaraSher.com. Also see www.SherSuccessTeams.com on how to create success teams to help you achieve your goal.

EF Schumacher Society: Applies values of human-scale communities and respect for the natural environment to economic issues. Organization has a wealth of information on local money systems, community land trusts, and other sustainable local economic innovations. www.schumachersociety.org

Seeds of Simplicity: Provides diverse educational materials on free- thinking for children and adults and coordinates the services of the Simplicity Circles Project. www.seedsofsimplicity.org

Pat Schnieder, *Writing Alone and With Others*.

The Simple Living Network: Provides tools and examples for those who are serious about learning to live a more conscious, simple, healthy, and restorative lifestyle. www.simpleliving.net/

Marsha Sinetar. *Do What You Love, the Money Will Follow*. www.MarshaSinetar.com

Soulful Living – www.Soulfulliving.com

Spirit at Work – www.spiritatwork.com

Transformative Language Arts Network, www.TLANetwork.org, and One City One Prompt, www.OneCityOnePrompt.org

Michael and Justine Toms, *True Work: Doing What You Love and Loving What You Do*: Site www.newdimensions.org/NEW/support-nd/twguidelines.html

David Whyte. *Crossing the Unknown Sea: Work as a Pilgrimage of Identity*

Yes Magazine – www.yesmagazine.org, and the magazine's great resources on right livelihood: <http://www.yesmagazine.org/article.asp?ID=420>