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JIM NATICHIONI, PATH GUIDE



I am Jim Natichioni of RightLivelihood.com and I have written the inspirational book: **Finding Your Path, Tales of Right Livelihood**. This excerpt is from Chapter One: “Finding Your Path” and relates to the divergent paths that can lead to ‘right livelihood’. To read more please visit RightLivelihood.com.

Finding your path and right livelihood: In the Dead Sea scrolls it is written “the man of god who has found his task shall ask no other blessing.” These incomparable words reflect my passion for finding ‘right livelihood’. How rare and precious a gift this task is, and as the saying implies, how hard-won a buried treasure it can be to reveal. Everyone has this treasure, each of us only needs to have the right map, or insight, or the right karma, to find it. To many of the people in this book I have proposed a question about finding his or her ‘right livelihood’. Their responses confirm what I have believed all along: no one magic formula will cause you to discover your right-work, if indeed any process can be devised to *discover* something as soulful as your destiny.

The (spiritual and practical) symmetry of right livelihood:

Fortunately, a new paradigm with its own plethora of new age careers approaches the job market. These new models do not require taking tests or filling out forms and questionnaires. Dozens of books like (Laurence) Boldt’s and mine have examples that hold keys to finding your new career; some as old as the hills and others still relatively fresh. Of course, you do not necessarily need a book to look inside your own heart and observe your own guiding thoughts and actions. ‘Right livelihood’ consists of the art of mixing spirituality with work. It is difficult to find the spiritual or intuitive by using a scientific or didactic approach. So method here attempts to serve as an inner guide to finding the heart in any occupation.

Take a regular job and add purpose, creative self-expression and an environmental or metaphysical ethic, and call it ‘right livelihood’. Yoga teachers call it ‘sadhana’ or a *spiritual path*, because it elicits a positive influence on the greater good, enhances our own awareness, and serves as a vehicle for the exchange of love. Albert Schweitzer said, “I do my work well; I am a good father and church-goer. That’s all very well, but you must do something more.” You do not have to venture into the wilds of Africa as a missionary surgeon and win the Nobel Peace Prize for lifelong ‘reverence for life’ to have a righteous path. But having a reverence for life is a necessary component. The more love you bring to your cause or work, the more power you give it.

Excluding the likes of the hard working seamstress and the factory worker amounts to the exclusion of the bulk of humanity from the realm of possibilities of achieving oneness through the labor of love. When considering an occupation keep in mind that work is called an occupation for a reason, that reason being it occupies the majority of our time. Knowing this, it would be wise to choose an occupation that enriches lives, including yours.

Gramp's work gives meaning to his life:

My grandfather did not ride a bicycle, but he did own an Indian Motorcycle. He also owned a wine barrel instead of a juicer to triturate the grapes from his backyard vineyard into wine. He had the highest quality carpentry and gardening tools I have ever seen, and took care of them as if they were his children and every morsel of food that went into his mouth was carefully prepared, every gadget in his basement carefully preserved for conservation.

Honest Abe: If I had eight hours to chop down a tree, I'd spend six sharpening my ax.

Work was something that made my grandfather Luigi tick like a grandfather clock; without it his time here on earth would have been meaningless. In order to survive in America as a twelve year old sent here to fend for himself, he learned how to work like a man, and a handy man at that. Because of his innate ability to fix almost anything, when the depression hit, Luigi did not go without work. As he grew into a young man, he knew enough people to get jobs on his own. He became primarily a carpenter then bought an oil truck and delivered home heating oil.

While on the job, Luigi would cuss about this and that but he could no longer survive without work than he could without oxygen or water. He understood work, but didn't comprehend societies pre-occupation with hobbies or TV or games. In his own old school, gruff way, he loved his customers as much as he loved the labor. He would get calls to fix the oil burners at the most inconvenient times, and having never met with one he could not get running, he thrived on the challenge. Gramps had never been sick a day in his life, except on this one fateful day in his 79th year. At about midnight on a below-zero evening, he got the call that was like so many other calls he had received in the past sixty years. Despite having a bad cold, he put on his oil-stained overalls but left his scarf behind. He worked until near dawn in the dimly lit cold and damp basement to get that old burner humming for his cherished customer. The next day Gramps caught pneumonia and passed on shortly thereafter. The owner of Boyle's funeral home said Grampy's was the largest funeral he'd ever seen in Framingham.

Gramps' legacy epitomizes the profound truth uttered by British author Dorothy Sayers: "Business shouldn't be something you do to live, but something you live to do." Gramps was a devout Catholic who believed sloth to be the greatest vice; you might say that he believed in Jesus, but idolized industriousness. His intent may not have been to become a high soul or a Santa Claus. But no one performed his duty more ethically, passionately and genuinely, in essence more spiritually, than he.

Chong Yam Trungpa: to be a warrior is to learn to be genuine in every moment of your life.

George Bernard Shaw, who died the same year I was born, said the key to happiness is to stay busy doing what you like most. "Is that not the noblest part of being, labors of love not the loftiest of prayers?" So let us not get hung up in values and distinctions: a janitor sweeping the floor clean can be as lofty a profession as a priest sweeping souls clean. Or as Abraham Maslow put it: "A first rate soup is better than a

second rate painting.” The spirit is in the work itself not in the title. The reason it is called right livelihood is that it provides sustenance to the worker and value to the world.

The ancestor of Zen who sold his wares at market:

Chuang-tzu, like Lao-tzu, taught The Way. D.T. Suzuki, the most articulate exponent of Zen Buddhism sees Chuang-tzu as the greatest of all Asian philosophers, and the ancestor of Zen. Chuang-tzu did not choose the life of a recluse. A sage and a writer “who abounded in wit, paradox, and satire,” Chuang-tzu actually worked for a living. He married, raised a family, and practiced a trade, selling his own hand-made wares in the marketplace. This was his way of following his nature, as opposed to following what another sage or relative thought he should do. The difference between him and others was that Chuang-tzu left behind the attachments of ego. He believed that the way to satisfaction was letting everyone do what he or she naturally does well, so that his or her nature will be satisfied.

Look for the middle path:

‘Right livelihood’, or Sama Ajiva, is the fifth of the eight path factors in the Noble Eightfold Path, and belongs to the virtue division of the path. The Buddhist definition is “work that is ethical and helps ones spiritual development.” “Knowing his income and expenses he leads a balanced life, neither extravagant nor miserly... knowing that his income exceeds his expenses.” This is called the middle path or the middle way between indulgence and asceticism. The middle way is a spiritual path based neither on aversion, nor on attachment, to worldliness. It rests at the center of all things.

Mr. Lai: I have pine breeze for sale. Have you bought some yet? For thirty thousand taels of gold, I shall give you one gourd full.

The following story depicts a composite of real men who recognized at a mature age that they still had time to quit their sales and business careers for a lifestyle that reflects the kind of reality the Taoist poet Mr. Lai alludes to above.

The Banker Recluse:

My favorite English author, John Blofield, met a group of Taoists during his travels in Asia who exemplify the middle path. He traveled, with the aid of a useless guide, for several days and through inclement weather in order to find this small group of recluses. He had heard marvelous stories about them.

Blofield did not wish to bring the outside in before entering the hermitage thus the practicing Buddhist left his shoes and his ego on the doorstep. Blofield had not come empty-handed; he brought a schilling and a reverent bow in payment to the tolerant, jolly group of monks for their hospitality. He took note that the courtly manners of the recluses never wavered--whether their manner reflected the Taoist trait of modest expectation or something else he could not tell.

Cloud Ocean Recluse was a retired banker who had once wore expensive suits but now donned homemade garments woven from flax. He related to Blofield that his group was well fed and well funded because many of them, like himself, had been officials or

merchants who became disgusted with the world of greed and came searching for tranquility at this high altitude. Searching is not the right word, they came to *live* in a peaceful manner not previously possible for city dwellers bound by family responsibilities.

The Banker turned recluse said that in his former lifestyle, he had been “constantly plotting to pile silver upon silver,” constantly setting the bar higher and higher. His job became a kind of slavery, one not forced but willingly embraced. His home life was much the same. Trying to win his favor, his family stayed at odds with each other until the disharmony became so unbearable that he packed up his duffle bag and *left the world behind*. Gone was his striving and ambition, his need to create value every day. He saw what happened to his family and wanted no part of it. By striving for the ‘finer’ things in life his wife and children had forsaken things like leisure and serenity, things that really were worth having.

Unlike people that interact with society, Taoists did not worship at the altar of Ts’ai Shen, the God of Wealth. One can attain wealth, but money cannot buy the ‘finest’ things in life. Now, instead of gathering material treasures, he gathers chi or life energy. His life has become an example of the saying “a mystic guards his energy the same way a banker guards his money.” Not that these recluses saw virtue in poverty.

They believed the secret to happiness lies in having few wants and enjoying good health. Though his journey had been full of gain and loss, Cloud Ocean Recluse now kept to the middle path where “neither Puritan drabness nor luxury is in accord.” He treasured the few expensive writing implements that he *did* keep, justifying them by saying “there is no attachment; if it were stolen today there would be no repining tomorrow.”

On a daily basis, the recluses practiced their cultivations, such as tai chi chuan and various breathing and meditation exercises. They drank mulled wine “against the autumn chill” and dined on simple rice and vegetable meals. They practiced calligraphy, gardening, gathering of herbs, and a unique form of landscape design. When The Limpid Pool Immortal was asked by Blofield what he did for a living, he quipped: “Asking a Taoist what he does is like asking a Confucian how he sins.... Let’s just say I’m nourished on wind and dew, ramble among the clouds, ride upon dragons.” Then: “Oh yes, I occasionally save people from disease...others here in the monastery get rent from endowments, but our chief source of revenues come from pilgrim’s offerings, guest donations, and for the services we render (spiritual, medical, etc.)” Any excess money that they earned was filtered back into the hermitage and the community.

The fifth path of the Noble Eightfold Path holds that profits do not act as detriments so long as they do not exceed your needs, so that to donate excess profits for needy causes is meritorious. Wrong livelihood includes actions like scheming, belittling, and pursuing gain after gain. Avoid products and services that cause harm to people and the environment. As Buddhists say, “to do harm to other people or things is to do harm to ourselves.”

Quotes and Works Cited; Chapter One: Albert Schweitzer said, “I do my work well; I am a good father and church-goer. That’s all very well, but you must do something more” (Boldt: Zen and The Art of Making a Living; A sage and a writer “who abounded in wit, paradox, and satire,” (Boldt: The Tao of Abundance)