

Discover your dharma

There are a number of ways you can plug into your soul's passion and purpose, writes DIANA TIMMINS.

If you've ever asked yourself 'What is my life's purpose?', you are no lone traveller in the search for meaning. People have pondered this since time began, particularly in recent years as the rising popularity of holistic therapies and spiritual practices like yoga have enhanced our awareness to explore our soul's higher calling. Absolutely everyone is born with special skills to bring to the table of life. These gifts may be clear to some from an early age, but for most, it takes time and a few twists and turns to piece the puzzle together. But rest assured; as arduous as it may seem, the journey is a profound part of the process toward fulfilling our life purpose, our *dharma*.

The Indian Sanskrit term *dharma* has various meanings among Eastern religions and spiritual movements. While there is no definitive English translation, *dharma* is perhaps most widely understood as our sacred duty, the very purpose of our presence in this lifetime. In *What's Your Dharma?* (Bamboo Entertainment, 2012),

American wellness expert Lissa Coffey identifies three fundamental pillars that occur simultaneously when we are truly in our *dharma*: learning and growing, expressing ourselves and our unique gifts, and helping each other. Truly being in our *dharma*, she says, means these occur simultaneously. Our *dharma* is therefore not what we do, but who we are. When expressed through each thought, word and deed, our *dharma* infiltrates every aspect of our lives and reconnects us with our true nature of love and joy.

The yogic path to self-realisation

To know our purpose, we must know our true self; void of conditioning and limiting beliefs, and beyond the physical body. Ancient yogic wisdom recognises four fundamental paths that can help lead us toward self-realisation: yoga of love and devotion (*bhakti*), knowledge (*jnana*), work and service (*karma*), and meditation (*raja*).

"We follow each path at some point, as if driving down a four-lane highway. We can change lanes whenever we like, but there is mostly one we favour. The road can be bumpy, we may get a flat tyre or take a wrong turn, but all roads lead to the same destination: self-realisation. There is purpose in everything, so there are no wrong ways. No matter what you do, you will eventually get there," says Coffey.

At heart, we all possess qualities of love, kindness and compassion. *Bhakti* yoga explores this through spiritual practices like singing and chanting, and throughout daily life by cherishing relationships over wealth or embarking on care-giving professions. Coffey credits the charitable Mother Teresa as a classic example, inspiring us with her words: "It's not how much we give, but how much love we put into giving."

Co-founder of Melbourne's Yoga Flame studio Gabor Bukovinszky (yogaflame.com.au) echoes these loving sentiments, recognising *dharma* as the

A silhouette of a woman in a meditative pose against a sunset background. She is sitting in a lotus position with her hands in a mudra. The background shows a sunset over water with mountains in the distance.

desire to become who we are meant to be. “Bhakti teaches us to connect or reconnect with our inherent loving nature. Jnana is the path of continuous self-growth through practice and work. Karma yoga is acting in ways that propels our purpose; serving both ourselves and others,” he explains.

“Raja yoga is the royal path, as Patanjali (sage who authored the Yoga Sutras) taught: ‘Yoga is to still the fluctuations of the mind.’ Meditation and contemplation are great tools to enable us to be quiet enough to see and recognise the deeper layers and meaning of our life,” he continues. “All four paths are intertwining. Raja yoga is the necessary practice to still our mind enough to love, grow and serve, allowing us to reveal and live our dharma.”

Ask, meditate, create

Karina Godwin offers these quick tips to connect with your potential and purpose:

- ◆ Ask three friends to jot down three intrinsically good things about you. How others view you will most likely inspire you, and will perhaps clarify what you intuitively already knew.
- ◆ Contemplate these attributes in a quiet place. Breathe deeply and imagine yourself peering into a pool. In the reflection, you begin to see the brilliance of who you are and how your skills may serve your friends, family and community.
- ◆ Create a vision board using images and words that reflect your findings. Keep it in a place where you will see it regularly to remain focussed on fulfilling your life's purpose.

Keep up to date with upcoming courses hosted by Godwin and her Flying Souls team at flyingsouls.com

Past life influences

Would you have renewed faith in finding your purpose by knowing your soul sets the scene before incarnating? Yep – lots to digest, particularly the idea of reincarnation; but 35 years of research by esteemed founder of The Newton Institute for Life Between Lives (LBL) Hypnotherapy Dr Michael Newton indicates this may well be the case. The power of our passions and purpose essentially lies within; although professional facilitation of moving through brainwaves toward deep trance states can profoundly sharpen one's clarity around their dharma.

"We move through life in an unconscious and unaware state, our inner magnificence hidden from us. During LBL, we can open soul memory or 'superconscious' and access the spiritual realm in which we planned this lifetime and its purpose. The soul energy of who we are has intention to evolve and we do that across many lifetimes, often with groups of soul friends," explains leading Australian LBL hypnotherapist Peter Smith.

Ever experienced déjà vu meeting a 'soul mate'? That mentor, mother figure or not-so-newfound friend who manifests seemingly for the first time at precisely the right time. Both life and in-between lives are about learning, with all meetings and events divinely planned for the purpose of evolving.

"There could be up to 20 souls we incarnate with regularly, playing different roles and supporting each other across the myriad of things we learn. Some in-between lives may have a particular intention, like learning about patience

or unconditional love. There will be a number of major events happen throughout life that manifest those intentions, which I believe we set up before we get here," says Smith.

Founder of Melbourne's Flying Souls Institute of Healing and facilitator of inspiring life purpose workshops Karina Godwin considers these pre-planned events as taps on the shoulder – or sometimes bangs on the head, depending on how well we are listening – to get back on track with our true life purpose. So when life throws us lemons, these motivating wake-up calls may actually be both bitter and sweet.

Open your heart

Smith says that when on Earth we are simply souls at play, but what thwarts our playfulness and purpose? You've got it – fear; messing up, making bad choices, not meeting expectations. When we hold back beneath an overwhelming cloud of fear or half-heartedly pursue avenues out of pressure rather than passion, we become disorientated. Doors seem to consistently close on us, but perhaps we miss golden opportunities by fearfully slamming them on ourselves. For this reason, Godwin emphasises energetic healing and 'open-hearted paradigm' in her workshops.

"Many people see themselves as failing and get caught up in the ego of life purpose, thinking it is something they must achieve rather than be. In this self-critical state, their heart is closed to their brilliance. Healing helps open their heart and get out of the ego state to find joy," she says. "I constantly remind my clients that love is vibration. There is no joy in misery, or low vibration. Opening your heart by letting go of emotional blocks allows openness and freedom. The more open you are, the more possibility you see, and opportunities start knocking. With a closed heart, you can't see the door is ajar," she explains.

So how we approach life and the fruits we subsequently harvest is ultimately our choice. Bukovinszky reiterates that we can act from either love or fear; that we are made of love and must embrace fears rather than being frozen by them if we are to share our gifts with others. In this sense, the liberation of wholeheartedly facing our fears is fundamental to Coffey's pillars of purpose – perceived failings that momentarily seem like the end of the world are often the catalyst for profound growth and self-love that enables us to joyfully serve the world in our own unique way.

We often overcomplicate things in our search for meaning; frantically

seeking answers from this source and that, neglecting our inner wisdom that knows how to navigate the path better than any other. As the yogic scriptures of the Bhagavad Gita state: it is better to do our own dharma even imperfectly than someone else's dharma perfectly." Considering our soul may have already plotted the course, we just have to open our hearts to our limitless potential and trust in the process. And when we then inspire other souls to reconnect with their hearts, we know we are undoubtedly living our dharma. ANH



Contemplating 'Who am I?'

Gabor Bukovinszky recommends this breathing awareness exercise for self-realisation:

- ◆ Find a comfortable seated position in a chair or on a cushion with hips higher than knees; spine extended, body relaxed, eyes closed.
- ◆ Relax the mind and body by focusing on your breath for a few minutes; each inhale and exhale being four to five counts.
- ◆ As you settle further into relaxation, your thoughts will start slowing down. When you become consciously aware of your mind wandering, keep returning to the breath.
- ◆ Sit with this for five minutes longer and then ask yourself: 'Who am I?'

"Your mind will search for an answer through movement, like: 'I am this body, I am a mother.' This comes from the ego, which needs to provide rational answers – but if we can observe it, we cannot be it. All answers from the mind must be negated by: I am not this, nor that," explains Bukovinszky.

"Eventually, all answers are exhausted and we are left with silence. Our rational mind relaxes as the heart space opens; allowing us to feel the answer rather than think it. Our heart space tells us who we are if we are able to listen."