

Let passion lead you to dharma

By Ruth Ostrow

SEEMS that so many people I've been talking to lately are having an identity crisis, unsure of what they are doing on the planet and smitten by an ominous sense of time running out or jealousy towards those who are blissfully in love with their vocation.

I've been telling them about a lecture I recently attended on the eastern philosophy of dharma. Dharma, according to the lecturer, is what we are supposed to be doing this lifetime around.

The concept is explored in Buddhism and touched upon at length in the Hindu text the Bhagavad-gita (The Song of God), in the epic poem Mahabharata. In it, Krishna explains that everyone has a path they must follow to uphold righteousness and lead to their individual salvation.

My teacher's translation of the concept was that we all have a life purpose and it's our duty to discover what that is, and our highest spiritual practice is to do what we are supposed to be doing -- whether it be restoring antique dolls to their former glory, running empires, operating the local coffee shop, having seven children, writing books or being Mother Teresa. We affect others deeply when we fulfil our dharma and influence those around us in unseen ways.

The belief is that when we are in flow with our dharma, Existence, God, Fate, Source -- call it what you may -- doors will open and things will go smoothly. When we follow our hearts and our correct path, we are not only happier inside but somehow manage to find enough money to achieve our goals and all things become easy and possible.

Most of us have experienced the frustration of banging against a door that won't open, no matter how desperately we will it to. If it does open, everything seems to conspire to thwart us and it all becomes too hard. Then suddenly another door opens easily to a different job, relationship or way of doing things, as if an unseen force is at work. This is dharma.

My teacher says: "Even at a molecular level, there's a magical structure within us that aligns with the universe. We must dance into our destiny." Which all sounds very esoteric and mystical to us Westerners, but I was speaking to a Sydney-based facilitator and corporate coach the other day, himself a student of eastern philosophy and Buddhism, who said that such thinking was actually permeating the corporate world through the buzz word "passion". Motivators and business self-help books increasingly refer to finding one's passion and essence as a tool to success.

The facilitator, Peter Wallman -- who has developed a system called Passion Maps and is presently promoting his book *The Wisdom of Passion*, co-written with Rachel Flower -- says dharma and passion are linked. "When you follow your passion and unlock your own deepest, inner knowing, you find your path.

"So many of us have trouble finding our life purpose. I take people through various processes to help them discover what's in their hearts at an intuitive level -- away from conditioning and societal demands. And suddenly they're filled with renewed energy and joy." He describes himself as a perfect example of dharma:

"I was a stockbroker and an investment banker for years, doing all sorts of things. But it wasn't really working for me.

"Then, later in life, I started developing Passion Maps, which I loved and felt was something important. I'd been helping lots of friends, then thought of turning it into a business. You can't believe it, every door has opened -- even small things like the fact that there are always parking spots, magically, in the centre of town for my clients. My first corporate client was IBM. It's astounding how quickly this took off." He says finding one's passion can be a lifetime quest. "People shouldn't despair. Most of us get closer and closer over a long period. It's iterative -- not immediate. There's a lot of finetuning involved." I shared with him my journey of finding my dharma. It wasn't just writing, which has always been my passion, rather writing at a deeper level, exploring things that were meaningful to myself and others. When I found my voice, it gave me a warm sense of carrying my home within me.

"It isn't enough to have a talent," Wallman agrees. "What are you going to do with it? What are you supposed to be using this gift for? Every cell in your body vibrates when you are on track." When you find your dharma, you can reframe the work you're doing. You can stay where you are to get money to help you on your path or you may incorporate your passion back into your job, with astounding results. Same in your marriage, the city you live in or relationships. When you know where you're heading, everything has a sense of context and everything is filled with purpose and peace.

This I have discovered: finding dharma is like putting your hand in the right glove.

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