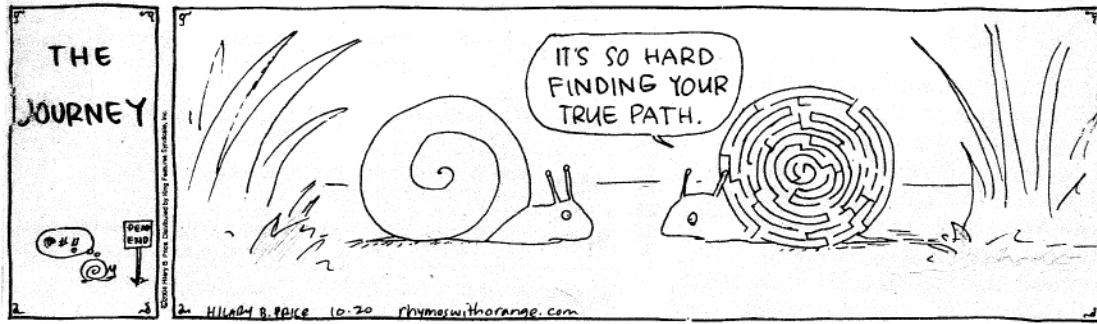


RHYMES WITH ORANGE by Hilary Price



This I Believe: The Journey

A Sermon About Finding One's True Path

by Mary Landry

Goals can be tricky things. Our culture places a high value on setting goals and achieving them. It's a simple concept: Define the goal, create a plan, then execute. Stay focused, take baby steps and before you know it, a successful outcome is yours. But if your goals aren't in alignment with your true purpose, they can lead you astray. Such is my story. Going astray isn't a bad thing. There is no judgement involved, nothing is good or bad because no matter the circumstances, you can always learn from them. The choices I've made along the way have resulted in a journey that has helped to shape my beliefs.

Many of the values instilled upon us by our families, friends and culture while growing up easily pale when viewed in a universal context, and yet, they can be hardest to shed. These are the ones that are ever present on a daily basis. They're continually reinforced by phone calls from well-intended family members about obligations and expectations, triggered by office politics and bombarded upon us by the mass media. While the core beliefs, the ones at the level of the Soul, take the most effort to identify and keep alive.

Common beliefs that are the bedrock of the American Dream such as: being the best at whatever you chose to do; working really hard; putting heart and soul into every effort; and doing what you love and the rest will follow, have all been put to the test during my

journey. These were all part of my can-do attitude as I embarked on my chosen career as a graphic designer. I worked really hard and by the time I was 27, I had reached all of my life goals at the time. I was happily married, had a house, a baby and a lifetime of responsibilities.

Though I was successful at reaching those goals, I was burning out and questioning my abilities due to the constant compromises needed to satisfy clients. A friend from art school had luck starting his own business in the craft industry when he was dissatisfied with his career choice of architecture. So, following his model, I doubled my efforts, and Leo and I developed our own product line. We would each put in a full day's work at our jobs, come home, spend time with Sophie, put her to bed around 8pm, turn the baby monitor on and go to work in the basement until midnight.

Before long, we were getting accepted into juried craft shows and taking orders from stores and galleries all over the country. The money wasn't pouring in but it was evident that more time needed to be devoted to the effort in order to make it work. Add to that the bonus of spending more time with Sophie and I happily left my job in graphics with the thought of never returning.

Well...the small business thing didn't quite work out as planned. We struggled for a long time to make ends meet but the promise of the American Dream kept us going. In our fifth year, just as our sales were picking up, a major supplier went out of business leaving us unable to fill orders in a timely manner. Our friend was on a Fortune 500 list but we were in serious debt and I was *really* exhausted. The can-do attitude faded and I was coming apart. If not for Leo, the support of my father, and the tai chi classes I took to relieve stress, I never would have made it through this incredibly difficult period. I don't give up easily but it was time to pull the plug. After having been in charge of sales, development, marketing, manufacturing, distribution and bookkeeping, a job in graphics started to sound quite appealing.

This time around, having a graphics job was like being on vacation. I was a temporary contractor with little responsibility and bored out of my mind. However, it enabled me to pay off the debt and provided the means for me to continue to study Tai Chi. I was able to balance work, family and practice.

Tai Chi captivated me from day one. We all have the capacity to heal ourselves with the energy that flows through our bodies. Tai Chi, and related exercises called Chi Gung, increased my awareness of that energy flow. It didn't require much time at first. You can notice benefits by practicing just a little each day. As I became a more serious student though, the practice time increased. Any private time I could find became an opportunity to practice. Because of the demands of life with a job and family, sometimes this meant waking up in the middle of the night when I knew I wouldn't be interrupted. It's actually a very good time to practice because that's when the vibrational din of modern life was quiet enough to explore rhythms as they exist naturally.

While studying this material, my spirit had a very blissful awakening. Anyone who experiences this attributes what they were doing at the time to be part of the ultimate truth. Taoist philosophy calls it finding your path and once you are on it, you will eventually become one with the Tao, or the Universe, regardless of any detours along the way or number of lifetimes. To me, it wasn't a religious experience but a natural result of my studies and becoming a teacher to assist others in their healing process seemed to be my true purpose. I had found my passion. All I needed now was a plan to transition from sustaining my family through graphics to making a living through teaching.

With renewed energy and enthusiasm, I doubled my efforts. I invested in month long teacher trainings in California and went on to study Chinese medicine nights and weekends for a couple of years. Though these practices sustained my energy level to accomplish as much as I did, I was getting weary of juggling everything. I was working in a company that had been through a couple of layoffs, thereby increasing the workload of the survivors. Things were out of balance again. I decided to ask to be laid off during the next round because I was getting further from my life goals and they complied. I was

thrilled. The severance gave me the window of opportunity I needed to get my teaching efforts underway. Relatives tried to talk me out of it. But this time I was sure of myself and had faith that it was the right thing to do. I finally had a single focus. No longer would I have to be divided by 2 distinctly different paths. Much of what I was studying dealt with how stress affects the body and what could be done about it. I had a sincere desire to share this knowledge with others. Surely the Universe would help provide for such a noble cause.

Well...the teaching thing didn't quite turn out as planned. Now I was just plain confused. I'm a really good teacher, I work hard, and I was doing what felt like my life's purpose. Why wasn't this working out? Now what?

During my last teacher training in California I took my teacher's advice to practice among the trees. If you can tap into it, you can learn a lot about energy flow from trees. They are an excellent example of how to connect with the earth. Other students who had done this raved about their experiences. I spent a day among the California Redwoods practicing and expecting to have similar experience. It wasn't happening. In total frustration, I gave up and took a nap on the forest floor. When I woke up, I decided to ask the trees how they managed to live such a beautiful existence. They've been around for 2,500 years. Certainly they were doing something right. The answer that came back to me was that they "just are". "Let go." "Allow."

That message guides me to this day, but not how it thought it would. I did a lot of meditating and tried to just be. I let go of the need to feel a rush of adrenaline in order to get something done and for a while nothing got done. I let go of worrying about my responsibilities. I let go of my attachment to outcomes and the need to control the situation. My personal infrastructure was gone. This approach didn't work either. With all due respect to those trees, they don't have a family to support, a mortgage to pay, or a college tuition on the horizon.

I have to stop here for a moment to add a side note. If I'm giving the impression that my family's welfare was solely on my shoulders, it's not the case. Leo and Sophie have been amazingly supportive and patient with me through this process and I am truly grateful. While I was working hard at being the best I could be, Leo was doing exactly what the Redwoods were doing. He just was. After working in a children's bookshop for 20 years and making efforts to get his own books published, it was time to give him all the support necessary to devote himself full time to writing and illustrating. Children and parents will benefit greatly from his gentle reassuring voice. And Sophie needs all opportunities to find her place in this world. It was time for me to go back to work in an office.

The prospect of returning to a graphics job in a corporation where you're expected to control the outcomes in a timely manner seemed like I was making backward strides. It meant that I would no longer be able to keep up with my training and all but nearly eliminated my hopes to make a living through teaching. I was heart broken. Reminding myself that one can learn from any situation, I put my trust in the Universe and cooperated.

On the morning of the first day of my new job, the comic by Hillary Price shown in today's Order of Service appeared in the newspaper. I was the snail with the maze on its shell. It's difficult to see, but the sign in the first frame says "Dead End" and the snail's speech bubble has cartoon expletives. I couldn't have expressed my feelings any clearer. It hangs on the wall in my office to remind me how tricky goals can be and if I just allow, my path will unfold naturally. This shift in my perception has resulted in a great deal of personal growth and a clarification in what I believe.

Instead of keeping my tai chi and professional worlds separate, I decided to employ some of the meditative principles I had learned to my daily routines at the office. Namely, observe thoughts running through my mind and take full responsibility for all my thoughts and actions. When I realized that I was responding to various situations in an emotional manner, I made the effort to change.

All things, including emotions, have distinct frequencies or vibrations. Recurring emotional behaviors create patterns over time that habituate how you will respond to triggers. However, these patterns can be adjusted. For example, everyone knows that if you are feeling down or sorry for yourself, doing something for others will lift your spirits. But if the pattern behind the blue mood isn't addressed specifically, it's likely to recur. It is much more effective to work with the vibration as it occurs in order to transform it. A simple illustration can be described this way: The next time you are angry, instead of getting caught up in what you are feeling emotionally, observe the physical agitation inside your body. This is a vibration associated with anger. Then unconditionally forgive whatever triggered that anger, including yourself, and notice the physical vibration associated with forgiveness. Whether or not you're able to actually feel it, you will have directly changed the energetic pattern of your anger because that is what was intended. With continual practice of this technique, you are less likely to react to familiar triggers and will no longer be affected by them. You are not only benefiting yourself but many, many others in the process.

In a book entitled Power vs. Force - The Hidden Determinants of Human Behavior by Dr. David R. Hawkins, there is a map of consciousness. After years of testing, he calibrated levels of emotions as well as other human conditions and correlated them with specific processes of consciousness. The result is a scale with lower and higher emotions. The lower emotions in ascending order are listed as Shame, Guilt, Apathy, Grief, Fear, Desire, Anger, and Pride. These are the emotions involved with personal survival and is where 85% of the world's population calibrates. The upper emotions are listed as Courage, Neutrality, Willingness, Acceptance (or Forgiveness), Reason, Love, Joy, Peace, and Enlightenment. These emotions indicate an awareness and concern for the well-being of others and their positive effect increases exponentially as you ascend up the scale.

Because we are all connected, one individual calibrating at the level of enlightenment counterbalances the negativity of 70 million individuals in the lower emotional range. By shifting Anger to Forgiveness, you are jumping from a lower emotion to one midway up

the upper emotional scale and positively affecting more than 90,000 individuals. Please remember there is no judgement, no good or bad. The lower emotions can have a constructive, motivating role to raise one's level of consciousness and a few loving thoughts over the course of a day can counterbalance all of the negative ones.

I approach each day with this in mind. I used to fantasize about leaving all behind to live in a cave and meditate. Now I see that I'm fortunate to be exactly where I am because it's where the valuable lessons are and much of what used to upset me, no longer does. Now there are moments when a co-worker or family member talks to me about things they are struggling with, and I feel like the snail with the simple spiral. And just as the snail with the simple spiral illustrates, there isn't much to say, for answers to such questions are only found within ourselves.

My experiences have prompted me to question and examine my beliefs at various stages of my life to decide which ones remain meaningful and which ones I've outgrown. And, still further exploration is needed to reconcile inner conflicts that are the result of these inquiries. As for those cultural beliefs I started out with, they have shifted. Instead of working hard to achieve defined goals, I now state my intentions and allow the universe to provide the details. It's no longer about doing what I love, but loving what I do. I am a teacher whether or not I am able to support my family doing so. I no longer attempt to define my true purpose because doing so limits my potential. I don't know where my journey is headed, but I do know the direction is inward and just maybe I will benefit a few people along the way.