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A Long Obedience

My wife and I are both personal coaches. We are blessed with the opportunity to hear people's stories and personal challenges – tales of courage and celebrations of the human spirit – as well as their visions and dreams.

For example, one woman recently phoned Heidi with a story of both heartbreak and hope. “Our life was a love affair,” the woman said. “We had fun; we ate well and exercised regularly. Then my husband was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer,” she continued, “and he died six months later, at the age of 45. He had been unhappy working in the corporate world, but he had an exciting idea and a business plan to carry out that idea. However, he didn't take the steps he needed to, to follow through on it. Something awakened in me in the precious days we shared before he died. I decided that my dream was not going to die inside me. That's why I'm calling you.”

Keeping dreams alive is challenging. Personal visions that have heart are often the ones we follow. They arise out of being inspired – animated with an idea or purpose. The word vision comes from the Latin *visio*, the “act of seeing, sight, thing seen.” The Sanskrit origin is “to know, to see.” The wisdom in the birthing of a personal vision is the soul's journey being revealed so that a person *knows* what she wants to do for the rest of her life. It is an honor, an interior victory of some kind that is earned.

Many of us are asking, or being asked, thought-provoking questions. What do I love? How can I pursue that love and really do something in my life? What am I willing to risk in the process? How do I align my personal vision for fulfilling, meaningful work and take care of my family in a responsible, satisfying way?

Even the most exciting goals and dreams can get derailed if we don't know how to focus our energy. Remember Jerry Maguire, the classic “show me the money” man of the moment played by Tom Cruise in 1996? Jerry's career is hijacked, his marriage unravels – and so he has to undergo a major realignment, to become a better friend, husband, agent, and man. His inner condition was out of alignment with his quest for fulfillment. He believes that decency, wealth, and love are not contradictory but possible. His conflict resonates so strongly because he risks everything for his personal vision.

Happiness, that illusive state of grace, is a result of making dreams happen. Many of us have worked hard to be successful, and along the way have become dispirited or uninspired. At the extremes, not living our dreams can lead to a state of dis-ease: a loss of passion, a constricting and resigned way of being. According to many modern thinkers, we have it all wrong thinking that success has to come first. By being happy, inspired, and grateful, we invite success to come to us. By following our soul's desires, inspiration finds us.

In *The Energy of Money*, author Maria Nemeth writes that many people give up on an a dream or an idea altogether when they realize how much energy it's going to take. But as our interest in an idea grows, she says, we might begin to see that it is fueled by an intention. Nemeth describes how intentions inform dreams and ideas, and bring them into reality. An intention is a desire “to be” something, for example: a creator of beauty, a well-respected professional, a successful author, a contributor to my community. At this stage intention becomes goal and turns into a project. Lift off begins, Nemeth says, when the goal is specific and step by step actions are planned. Stage two is about focus, taking small steps and not getting distracted by other ideas.

People who are successful enlist the support of friends, coaches and consultants. They move forward regardless of the amount of energy required. A good example of this is Thomas Edison, who carried out thousands of tests to find the right material for his light bulb. It was he who said, “Genius is 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration.”

Our dreams don't have to die but they do take focused energy to realize. There is a wonderful quote by Nietzsche. “For anything great to happen, there has to be a long obedience in that direction.” For most of us it is “a long obedience,” a growing into purpose, and the more our true colors emerge, the more fulfilling life becomes.