

Dreams Do Come True: Now what?

By Alena Gerst, LCSW, RYT

When I moved to The Big Apple in 1998 to pursue my dream of dancing professionally, I was singlemindedly focused on one thing and one thing only: To "Make It."

I kept an inspiring quote by Henry David Thoreau scribbled on a piece of paper in my pocket and glanced at it for continued motivation while riding the subway, just before an audition, or any time I felt discouraged. The quote reads in part, "Go confidently in the direction of your dreams! Live the life you have imagined!"

Over the course of a decade, I honed my skills and networked my way into a solid career of steady work. But I couldn't help noticing that I often felt lonely and had a hard time holding down a relationship. Fast and intense friendships came and went with each job. Sometimes I felt desperately homesick, I fought chronic sinus infections, and found myself wondering, "Is this it?"

While exploring other career interests, I would inevitably complain in my weekly psychotherapy appointments, "But I'm a dancer. It's who I am!"

To which my therapist would reply patiently, "That is not **who you are**. It is **what you do**."

Of course it took quite a while, and a serious illness which threatened my future as a performer, for those words to sink in. But once they did, I was on to a new reality. I couldn't sing and dance for a long time...so was I no longer me?

Today as a psychotherapist, I often hear my clients talking about coming from an unlikely background with impressive dreams, and how hard they worked to follow those dreams. But once reaching their own personal brass rings, wondering to themselves, "What now?"

For many of us, **our dreams are inextricably linked to our feelings of identity, wholeness, and who we are as people**. And the truth is, how we choose to spend our time and make our livings is indeed some part of who we are, and most definitely has a lot to do with how we're perceived by others.

So how can we parse out the essential "me" from the identity we create that comes from our truest and deepest dreams and desires?

One of the principles I've gleaned from practicing Yoga comes from the idea of *Vairagya*, non-attachment. If you are motivated by a long-sighted goal, if you are burning with a passion to accomplish a task, achieve a dream, or reach a milestone, it is essential that you follow your instincts and pursue that dream.

But if you feel like you are lacking somewhere, you don't feel well, or like an essential part of you is missing, it may be helpful to consider applying the idea of non-attachment to your life. There are many ways to interpret the concept, but one thing we know is that **when we grasp onto one idea of how things ought to be, we're limiting other possible outcomes from which many of the happy surprises of life spring**, including friendships, love, and possibly even evolving passions.

In my case, once I let go of my attachment to the idea of myself as a performer, other interests came to the forefront, especially nutrition, fitness, and moving beyond a "healthy lifestyle" to truly being well; and to take it a step further, whole.

By attaching myself to one dream, I accomplished a great deal. But I was essentially avoiding the many shades of interests and desires that make up "who I am."

So if you are standing at the peak of your personal mountain (congratulations by the way!), and wondering if this is all there is, I can assure you it is not. **There are more dreams to be had.** It is true that allowing yourself to be open to whatever comes next rather than ardently pursuing the obvious can be uncomfortable. Can you detach from that need, and just let yourself be for a while?

The Broader Perspective

The thought of non-attachment to a single idea of who we are reminds me of the next phrase from the Thoreau quote, which I find myself contemplating often: "As you simplify your life, the laws of the universe will be simpler."

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