Personal Mastery and Authentic Leadership

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Abstract

This paper links personal mastery and authenticity to effective leadership on the premise that our leadership style is an extension of who we are. The findings of humanistic, existential, and positive psychology are explored to suggest a pathway to the art and science of human flourishing. The paper utilizes a synergistic exploratory research design to understand the relationship between personal mastery, authenticity, and leadership within the overarching concept of human flourishing. It builds on the work of Abraham Maslow, Victor Frankl, Peter Senge, Steven Covey, and Michael Ray in illuminating the concept of personal mastery. It also briefly reviews the recent work of positive psychologists such Martin Seligman, Ed Diener, and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi to explore the emerging field of human flourishing by creating a conscious link between personal mastery, subjective well-being, and authentic happiness. Based on our review of the findings of humanistic, existential, and positive psychology thinkers striking similarities are evident when it comes to the essentials of human flourishing. The use of teaching stories to illuminate learning is noted.

Introduction

A big cat saw a little cat chasing its tail and asked, "Why are you chasing your tail so?" Said the kitten, "I have learned that the best thing for a cat is happiness, and that happiness is my tail. Therefore, I am chasing it: and when I catch it, I shall have happiness." Said the old cat, "My son, I, too, have paid attention to the problems of the universe. I, too, have judged that

happiness is in my tail. But, I have noticed that whenever I chase it, it keeps running away from me, and when I go about my business, it just seems to come after me wherever I go."

~Wayne W. Dyer,
Your Erroneous Zones, 1972, p. 68

This is the true joy in life, the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one; the being thoroughly worn out before you are thrown on the scrap heap; the being a force of Nature instead of a feverish selfish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy.

~George Bernard Shaw, Man and
Superman: a Comedy and a Philosophy

The quest for self-knowledge and self-fulfillment is as old as civilization. In the Western philosophical tradition, Greeks were the first thinkers to pursue these values. Socrates' well-known dictum *Know Thyself* is familiar to all of us and Plato averred that 'an unexamined *life is not worth living*.' In the Eastern tradition, the quest for self-awareness dates back to the writings of Buddha and Lao Tzu. Buddha's teaching of mindfulness and Lao Tzu's exhortation for *living in harmony with the Tao* are examples of humanity's early attempts to live a life of self-awareness, meaningfulness, and mastery. In the 20th century, these questions preoccupied several psychologists and existential philosophers such as Jung, Adler, Frankl, Satre, and Camus.

During last 60 years, thinkers such as Krishnamurti, Ramana Maharshi, and Gurdjieff and Ouspensky have enriched our heritage with their writings and talks. More recently, several psychologists and management thinkers have explored the question of self-actualization and personal meaning, fulfillment, and mastery (Covey, 1989, 1991, 2004; Frankl 1984; Maslow, 1971, 1998; Palmer, 2000. 2004; Ray, 2004; Senge, 1990, 1994, 2004, 2006). This paper draws mainly upon Maslow's, Frankl's, and Ray's work to explore the field of self-actualization, self-meaning, and purpose.

This article builds on the work of Abraham Maslow, Victor Frankl, Peter Senge, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Steven Covey, and Michael Ray in understanding the concept of personal mastery. Personal mastery is approached as a quest for finding authenticity, meaning, and fulfillment in one's life, both in the personal and professional realm. It reviews the practical strategies to harness the creative energies that lie dormant in all of us because of inveterate misconceptions, faulty assumptions, and unwarranted expectations regarding the nature of human nature. Finally, it links personal mastery to effective leadership on the premise that our leadership style is an extension of who we are. This paper invites the reader to live from what has been called "the highest self" and to develop and refine personal vision, values, and meaning. By reflecting upon our true purpose in life, we initiate our journey of self-actualization, transformation and mastery.

Self-Actualization, Peak Experience and B-Values

As a prophet of human potential, Maslow believed the realization of one's total potential variously described as that self-actualization or self-realization to be the ultimate goal of all humankind. In his later research, Maslow (1971, pp. 40-50) enlarged the list of basic needs to include a still higher category of needs, called "metaneeds." He called the ultimate values

sought by self-actualizing people as Being-values or B-values. These values were mentioned again and again by self-actualizing people or by other people to describe their peak experience. These are comprised of the following attributes: wholeness, perfection, completion, justice, aliveness, richness, simplicity, beauty, goodness, uniqueness, effortlessness, playfulness, truth, honesty, self-sufficiency, and meaningfulness.

Later, Maslow (1970, pp. 40-50) reclassified needs into D-Needs and B-Needs, with their correlates as deficiency motivation and growth motivation. The physiological, security, belonging, and esteemed needs may be termed as Deficiency Needs (D-Needs) since they are activated by deficiency. Self-actualization needs and the B-Needs may be called Growth Needs since they represent not so much of a deficiency as an unfolding of all those "wonderful possibilities" that lie deep within each human being, waiting to express themselves. Towards the end of his life, Maslow went beyond even self-actualization. He considered self-transcendence to be our deepest need and highest aspiration.

What holds us back from Achieving True Greatness?

Now, why do these possibilities, present in all, actualize themselves in only a few. Maslow wrestled with the question all his life. One of the reasons that he thought blocks the growth is the *"fear of one's own greatness"* or *"running away from one's own best talents."* Maslow (1971, p. 34) believed that "it is certainly possible for most of us to be greater than we are in actuality. We all have unused potentialities or not fully developed ones."

In order to demonstrate this, Maslow (1971) used to ask his students: "Which of you in this class hopes to write the great American novel, or to be a senator, or Governor, or President? Who wants to be the Secretary General of the United Nations? Or a great composer? Who aspires to be a saint, like Schweitzer, perhaps? Who among you will be a great leader? Generally, everybody starts giggling, blushing, and squirming until I ask, 'If not you, then who else?'"(pp. 34-35) And in the same way, in order to push his students to higher levels of aspiration, Maslow will ask, "What great book are you now secretly planning to write?" (p. 35)

This theme was eloquently presented by Nelson Mandela in his 1994 inaugural speech, as follows:

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.
Our deepest fear is that we are powerful
beyond measure.
It is our light not our darkness that
most frightens us.
We ask ourselves, "Who am I to be brilliant,
gorgeous, talented, and fabulous?"
Actually, who are you not to be?
You are a child of God. Your playing small
doesn't serve the world.
There is nothing enlightened about shrinking
so that other people won't feel insecure
around you.
We were born to make manifest the glory of God
that is within us.
It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone.
And as we let our own light shine,
we unconsciously give
other people permission to do the same.
As we are liberated from our own fear,
our presence automatically liberates others.

(Poem Attributed to Marrianne Williamson, *A Return to Love*)

Maslow (1971) believed that the fulfillment of B-Values is another aspect of self-actualization and a harbinger of personal responsibility and social harmony:

"If we were to accept as a major educational goal the awakening and fulfillment of B-Values, we would have a different flowering of a new kind of civilization. People would be stronger, healthier, and would take their own lives into their hands to a greater extent. With increased personal responsibility for one's personal life, and with a rational set of values to guide one's choosing, people would begin to actively change the society in which they lived. The movement towards psychological health is also the movement toward spiritual peace and social harmony." (p. 188)

Boosting Self-Esteem: Become a part of something important!

The easiest way to feel needed is to become a part of something important, something larger, something greater. Then at once you become responsible: "At once, it matters if you die, or if you are sick, or if you can't work, etc. Then you must take care of yourself, you must respect yourself, you have to get plenty of rest, not smoke or drink too much, etc….This is an important medicine for self-esteem: Become a pat of something important." (Maslow, 1998, pp. 10-11)

According Maslow, all self-actualizing people have a cause they believe in, a vocation they are devoted to. When they say, "*my work*," they mean their mission in life. Self-actualizing people are, without one single exception, involved in a cause outside their own skin, in something outside of themselves. (1971, p. 42) Maslow (1998) further clarifies: "This business of self-actualization via a commitment to an important job and to worthwhile work could also be said, then, to be the path to human happiness…happiness is an epiphenomenon, a by-product, something not to be sought directly but an indirect reward or virtue….*The only happy people I know are the ones who are working well at something they consider important*…this was universal truth for all my self-actualizing subjects. They were metamotivated by metaneeds (B-values) expressed in their devotion to, dedication to, and identification with some great and important job. This was true for every single case." (pp. 8-9)

Just having an important task is not enough: the self-actualizing person must also do it well. Second-rate work is not a good path to self-actualization. Self-actualization means working to do well the thing that one wants to do. One must strive to be the very best in whatever one undertakes. Maslow (1971) considered this striving 'to be the best one is capable of becoming' to be the sine qua non of human happiness: "*If you deliberately plan to be less than you are capable of being, then I warn you that you will be deeply unhappy for the rest of your life. You will be evading your own capacities, your own possibilities*."(p. 35) It is true that cultivation of one's capacities requires hard work, dedication, discipline, training, practice, and often postponement of pleasure.

In Buddhist literature, great emphasis is laid on choosing the right kind of work. One of the eight components of righteous living in Buddhism is called right livelihood—the kind of livelihood that fosters self-fulfillment, inner peace, and contentment. It is difficult to conceive of a feeling of satisfaction or self-pride, says Maslow (1998) if one were "working in some chewing gum factory, or a phony advertising agency, or in some factory that

turned out shoddy furniture. Real achievement means inevitably a worthy and virtuous task. To do some idiotic job very well is certainly not real achievement...*what is not worth doing is not worth doing well*." (p. 16)

Behaviors Leading to Self-Actualization

What does self-actualization mean in terms of actual behavior? Maslow (1971, pp. 43-51) answers this question by describing eight ways in which one self-actualizes:

1. *Going at things "whole hog:"* Self-actualization means experiencing fully, vividly, selflessly, with full concentration and total absorption.
2. *Making growth choices*: To make a growth choice instead of the fear choice a dozen times a day is to move a dozen times a day towards self-actualization.
3. *Letting the self emerge*: By "listening to their impulse voices," self-actualizing people let the self emerge.
4. *Taking responsibility*: Each time one acts honestly or takes responsibility, one is actualizing the self.
5. *Listening to one's own sel*f: One cannot choose wisely for a life unless one dares to listen to oneself, one's own self, at each moment of life. To be courageous rather than afraid is another version of the same thing.
6. *Working to become first-rate:* Self-actualization means going through an arduous and demanding period of preparation in order to realize one's possibilities. To become a second-rate physician is not a good path to self-actualization. One wants to be first rate or as good as one can be.
7. *Creating conditions for peak experiences:* Peak experiences are transient moments of self-actualization. They cannot be bought, nor can they be sought. By making growth choices, by being honest and taking responsibility, by listening to their inner voices, and by selflessly working at a cause greater than themselves, self-actualizing people create conditions so that such experiences are more likely to occur.
8. Having the courage to drop one's defenses: It means identifying defenses and finding the courage to give them up. It is painful because defenses are mechanism against something that is unpleasant. This requires self-knowledge and courage.

It must be noted that self-actualization, according to Maslow, is not a matter of one great moment. Rather, it is a matter of degree, or little victories accumulated one by one over time.

Self-Mastery through Meaning

Self-mastery assumes self-understanding and self-knowledge. It also assumes a certain awareness of our purpose in life. Without formulating our aim, we drift aimlessly amidst the sea of life, like a ship without rudder. A story is told of a rabbi who was trying to get to the synagogue for morning sermon during the pre-revolution Russia. He was stopped by a soldier at gunpoint, who asked the rabbi: "Who are you and what are you doing here? The rabbi inquired the soldier: "How much the government pays you for asking these questions?" "Nineteen kopecks a week," replied the soldier. Said the rabbi, "I will pay you 20 kopecks a week if you stop me here every day and ask me the same two questions!"

Here are then the two most fundamental questions one can ask:
Who am I?
What am I doing here?
These two fundamental questions capture the essence of self-knowledge and personal meaning.

The Significance of Meaning in Life

What sustains us in wake of life's toughest challenges? What keeps us from falling apart emotionally amidst life's most trying situations? What keeps us going in face of the inevitable suffering that life brings us through illness, deprivation, and death? It is the knowledge, says Frankl, that "human life under any circumstances, never ceases to have a meaning and that this infinite meaning of life includes suffering or dying, privation and death." (p. 90) Now, Frankl was no armchair psychologist—he was the survivor of four concentration camps! In his classic work titled, *Man's Search for Meaning*, Frankl (1984) provides the inside story of a concentration camp and presents a concrete guide to support his unshakable view that "life holds a potential meaning under any conditions, even the most miserable ones." (p. 12)

Could these trials and tribunals be seen as opportunities, as occasions, life presents us with to help us discover and realize our true destiny, to fulfill our true purpose in life? Well, it depends upon how we approach them. Seen as occasions for self-growth and fulfillment, these *challenges* (= *opportunities*) provide us the raw material to fashion the garment of our life. Taken with "why me" attitude, they can dampen our spirit and stifle our soul. Says Frankl (1984, p. 75) with a prophetic vision, "Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way." When we cannot change the situation, 'we are challenged to change ourselves!' And "it is this spiritual freedom—which cannot be taken away-- that makes life meaningful and purposeful."(pp. 75-76) Frankl concludes that "there is nothing in the world, I venture to say, that would so effectively help one to survive even the worst conditions as the knowledge that there is a meaning in one's life."(p. 109) He who has a why to live for, said Nietzsche (cited in Frankl, 1984), can bear almost anything.

Search for Meaning in Life

Victor Frankl, in the preface to the 1984 edition of his now classic work, *Man's Search for Meaning*, states that it seemed to be both strange and remarkable that the book he had intended to be published anonymously did in fact become a success. Frankl (1984, pp. 12-13) repeatedly admonishes his students about the circuitous path to happiness and success:

Do not aim at success—the more you aim at it and make it a target, the more you are going to miss it. For success, like happiness, cannot be pursued; it must ensue, and it only does so as the unintended side effect of one's dedication to a cause greater than oneself…. Happiness must happen, and the same holds for success: you have to let it happen by not caring about it. I want you to listen to what your conscience commands you to do and go on to carry it out to the best of your knowledge. Then you will live to see that in the long run—in the long run, I say! —Success will follow you precisely because you had forgotten to think of it.

Victor Frankl considers search for meaning to be the primary motivation in human life. One of the

basic tenets of his philosophy is that our main concern in life is not to gain pleasure or to avoid pain (as Freud thought) or to seek power (as Adler thought) but rather to find meaning in life. This meaning is *unique* and *specific*: Each of us has to fulfill this meaning for ourselves; nobody can discover meaning for us. For Frankl, self-actualization is a process of actualizing the meaning inherent in every situation. This, of course, presupposes that life is potentially meaningful to begin with. This belief—the belief that life has meaning, unconditionally—sustained Victor Frankl during his concentration camp experience. He used to reflect, thus: "Has all this suffering, this dying around us, a meaning? For, if not, then ultimately there is no meaning to survival; for a life whose meaning depends upon such a happenstance—as whether one escapes or not—ultimately would not be worth living at all." (p. 119) Further research (Barker, 2001; Frankl, 1984, pp. 78, 109; Maslow, 1998, p. 11) on the survivors of concentration and prisoners-of-war camps has shown that *people who had something important yet to do in their lives—or who had a task waiting for them to fulfill—were most apt to survive.*

It is important to note that this search for meaning 'may arouse some inner tension' which, according to Frankl, is indispensable to mental health. This creative tension—tension between what one is and what one wants to become—is the existential dynamics to keep our life moving forward. Frankl suggests that 'we should not be afraid to create a sound amount of tension through reorientation towards the meaning in life.' He cites the example of architecture to underscore the importance of such a tension: "If architects want to strengthen a decrepit arch, they increase the load which is laid upon it, for thereby the parts are joined more firmly together." (p. 110)

In the previous paragraphs, we reflected upon the importance of having a meaning in our life and on the beneficial effects of meaning orientation on our lives. What happens when our need to find meaning is not met or is thwarted? It creates a sense of meaningless, a feeling of inner emptiness. Frankl calls this feeling of utter meaninglessness "existential vacuum." It is a mode of existence in which *"people have enough to live by but nothing to live for; they have the means but no meaning*" (Frankl, 1984, p. 142). Frankl finds existential vacuum--this feeling of utter meaninglessness--to be widespread in modern times and considers it to be the root cause of depression, aggression, and addiction in the modern western society. Without work, said Albert Camus, life rottens; but when work is soulless, it stifles and dies!

Three Avenues to finding Meaning in Life

According to Frankl (1984), there are following three ways to discovering meaning in life:

1. By creating a work or doing a deed;
2. By experiencing something or someone; and
3. By the attitude we take towards unavoidable suffering. (p. 115)

The first avenue to finding meaning in life is through work. By devoting ourselves to a task, to a cause bigger than ourselves, we create meaning in our lives. This is the path of achievement and accomplishment and requires hard work, commitment, perseverance, and high sense of responsibility. Frankl considers having a meaningful work or task to be an essential requirement for human happiness.

The second way to discover meaning is "by experiencing something—such as goodness, truth, and beauty--by experiencing nature or culture or, last

but not least, by experiencing another human being in his uniqueness—by loving him." (p. 115) For Frankl, *"Love is the ultimate and the highest goal which man can aspire….The salvation of man is through love and in love.*" (p. 49)

The third avenue to finding meaning in life is by formulating a right attitude towards unavoidable suffering. This method is central to Victor Frankl's thinking since suffering is an inevitable, an undeniable part of our life. By taking right attitude towards unavoidable suffering, we have the capacity to rise above it and to transform our tragedies into triumphs. In some way, says Frank, suffering ceases to be suffering at the moment it finds a meaning! However, suffering is not necessary to find meaning: "Life's meaning is an unconditional one, for it even includes the potential meaning of unavoidable suffering" (p. 118). If suffering is avoidable "then the meaningful thing to do would be to remove its cause, be it psychological, biological or political. To suffer unnecessarily is masochistic rather than heroic." (p. 117)

Here Frankl rightfully speculates on the role of heredity and environment in shaping our lives. He says that we are not totally at the mercy of our heredity and environment. We are not helpless creatures driven by our internal drives and external influences, as psychoanalysts and behaviorist have made us believe. We have freedom to change ourselves despite our biological conditioning and situational limitations. It is 'not freedom from conditions but freedom to take a stand towards conditions.' (We cannot prevent the birds of worry hovering over our heads; but we can prevent them from making nests on our heads). Steven Covey (cited in Pattakos, 2004, pp. viii-ix) has written: *By exercising our unique power of choice, we can become a product of our decisions, not our conditions*. This, says Frankl, is one of the glories of human existence—the human capacity to creatively turn life's negative aspects into something positive or constructive. We are capable of changing the world for better if possible, and of changing ourselves for better if necessary. By bearing suffering with dignity and courage, we can turn suffering into achievement and tragedy into triumph. Herein, then, lies our ultimate freedom: to choose our attitude in every condition, in every situation. And this freedom is forever ours and cannot be taken away from us.

It must be noted that this freedom is only half of the truth and presupposes a high sense of personal responsibility. In fact, Frankl considers freedom to be the 'negative aspect of the phenomenon whose positive aspect is irresponsibleness.' He recommends that "the Statue of Liberty on the East Coast be supplemented by a Statue of Responsibility on the West Coast" (p. 134). For Frankl, every act of responsibility is an act of self-actualization. This emphasis on personal responsibility forms the very essence of Frankl's philosophy, and his ethical imperative: *Live as if you were living for the second time and had acted as wrongly the first time as you are about to act now* (p. 151). Frankl further clarifies: "Ultimately, man should not ask what the meaning of his life is, but rather he must recognize that it is he who is asked. In a word, each man is questioned by life; and he can only answer to life by answering for his won life; to life he can only respond by being responsible." (pp. 113-114) In the final reckoning, *we are not in the pursuit of happiness but rather "in search of a reason to be happy"*—aspiring to be worthy of our happiness.

Victor Frankl concludes his book by advising that we should study the examples of those human

beings who seem to have found meaning in their life through deeds done, loves shared, and suffering borne with courage and dignity. The life examples of Mother Teresa, Mahatma Gandhi, Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Nelson Mandela are testimonies to this discovery of meaning and to rising above life's conditions and making life worthwhile against all odds through dedication to a selfless cause.

Seligman (2002) explores the concept of meaningful life in the context of *authentic happiness.* Greeks defined happiness as the '*exercise of one's faculties along the lines of excellence*.' Building on Aristotle's work, Seligman (2002) describes good life as the exercise of one's "signature strengths." In a meaningful life, we share these strengths with a greater circle of humanity. Seligman believes that *authentic happiness* is experienced when we optimally exercise our signature strengths and share them with others.

Living our Highest Purpose in Life

Your highest purpose is the true embodiment of who you are at the very core. It is the most authentic expression of your innermost nature, your true Self. You are at your most creative best when you are in tune with your highest Self. It represents our inner truth that seeks expression through myriad activities as life is happening to us. In Sanskrit language, this truth of our innermost being is expressed by the word "dharma."

In *Bhagavad Gita*, the most important Hindu scripture, we are told: "Better one's own dharma, however imperfect, than the dharma of another perfectly performed." Ramana Maharishi, an Indian Sage, used to say, "Be as you are." Martin Buber, the great Jewish philosopher, narrates the following story in his book, *Tales of Hasidism*: Before his death, Rabbi Zusya said, "In the coming world, they will not ask me, 'Why were you not Moses?' They will ask me, 'Why were you not Zusya?'" (1947, p. 251).

These texts tell us that only by being true to our real self we can fulfill our destiny, our true reason for existence. We cannot have fulfillment any other way. We may not be always aware of our true purpose, like the 18th horse in the opening story, but it is always there ready to sustain us through the toughest challenges of our life. Nature is not interested in "photocopies"; it loves originals! Only by discovering our unique gifts and talents can we hope to polish them and share them with our fellow beings.

How can we discover our true purpose in life that gives value and meaning to our existence? There is no direct path or ready-made answer to this vital question. There is no sure map or formula that can lead us to our life's true purpose. Nor can it be "given" to us by someone else. Besides, nobody can spare us the journey, the alchemic process of self-discovery and transformation leading to the unfoldment and fulfillment of this purpose. We all of us have to light our own candles.

Nobody can light our candles!

It is said that the last words of Buddha were: "Be light unto yourself!" The following story illustrates the need and importance of Buddha's advice:

Once a blind man went to visit his friend.
After dinner, when he asked to leave, his friend said, "Let me give you a lantern."
"But I can't see! So why would I need a lantern?" asked the blind man.

"Oh, it not for you. It is so that others can see you," explained the host.
"In that case, I will take it," said the blind man.
He had hardly gone 10 feet that someone bumped into him. The blind man exclaimed,
"Can't you see my lantern?"
"Sir, your lantern has gone out!"
replied the stranger.

No one can light our lantern for us. We all of us have to light our own lanterns.

There are, however, some activities, some habits of mind that seem to facilitate the process of finding our true goal in life. In the following pages, we will explore some practical exercises as helpful hints in discovering our highest purpose in life.

Experiencing "Flow"

Csikszentmihalyi (1991) has been studying the psychology of optimal experiences, i.e. *Flow*, in various settings for the past 30 years. According to Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow* refers to a state of total immersion, effortless concentration and rapt enjoyment in an activity in which one loses any sense of space, time and self. According to Wikipedia, "*Flow is the mental state of operation in which the person is fully immersed in what he or she is doing, characterized by a feeling of energized focus, full involvement, and success in the process of the activity.*" According to Csikszentmihalyi (1990), Flow represents a state where skills required to perform a particular task match evenly with the challenges presented by the task.
Csikszentmihalyi (1990, pp. 49-70) identifies the following elements accompanying flow:

1. *Clear goals*
2. *Concentrating and Focusing*
3. A loss of the feeling of *self-consciousness*
4. Transformed sense of *time*
5. Direct and immediate *feedback*
6. *Balance between ability level and challenge*
7. *A sense of personal control over the situation or activity*
8. The activity is *intrinsically rewarding*
9. *Action awareness merging*

Living with the Highest Goal

For the past 29 years, Michael Ray has taught Stanford University's celebrated Personal Creativity in Business course. He soon discovered that his creativity course had a more lasting and profound impact on students than he had ever intended. Professor Ray came to realize that this impact was mainly due to the fact that the creativity course was helping students to discover what he calls their "highest goal"—something that gave a real meaning to their lives, beyond the ordinary definitions of success and achievement. The discovery of and living from highest goal had a salutary effect on the personal and professional lives of the people who took this course.
Professor Ray (2004, pp. xx-xxi) explains: "Students who discovered their essential inner resources and the ultimate purpose of their existence found they could do their work and live their lives in ways that contributed to positive change in the world." Living from our highest goal entails a feeling of excitement and contribution: "You connect with your highest goal when you awaken full of enthusiasm for the day and when you know you are making a contribution" (p. 7).

As a first step toward finding one's highest goal, Michael Ray recommends an exercise called 'The Most Meaningful Thing Exercise.'

The Most Meaningful Thing Exercise

To help discover our highest goal in life, Michael Ray (2004) invites us to recall a situation in which we experienced resonance with the highest goal. He suggest the following preliminary steps to get an idea about the highest goal:

1. Recall the most meaningful thing you did during the last week or so. Whatever it is, re-experience doing that activity. See it in your mind's eye and get the feeling of what made this activity so meaningful.
2. Answer the question, "How come this was so important, so meaningful to me?"
3. Then answer the question, "Why is that (the reason you gave to the previous question) so important to me?"
4. Keep asking the question, "Why is that so important to me?" of every answer you give until you get down to one word. *That word, if you dig below possible negative reasons (such as fear) or external reasons (such as money) that you have for doing something, represents just one quality of your essence, your Self. When you see what that word is—be it Love, Communication, Wisdom, Energy, Tranquility, Fun, Creativity, Service, Silence, Connection, Peace, Joy, or any other qualities that may be a part of who you are at core—acknowledge that quality as being part of who you really are. Remember it. Revel in it. Contemplate it. See how it has been a guiding quality in your life. Notice it coming up as you deal with each new situation. (pp. 8-11)*

Once we commit to living with the highest goal, Professor Ray (2004, pp. 13-15) recommends the following steps to help us on our way:

1. *Go beyond passion and success.* Living for the highest goal is radically different from what is normally considered to the highest: reaching success in external terms and having passion for what you do in life. Most of us "sub-optimize," that is, we go for the short term and transitory. Go beyond these lesser goals to use the gifts of life you have been given.
2. *Travel your own path*. You can create your path by simply paying attention to your own best performance—the critical incidents in your life—when you feel most your Self, I flow and in tune with the highest goal. Remember the experience of these times, apply what works to new situations and keep improving your path to the highest goal.
3. *Live with the highest goal*. Because every thing in the world is a connected system, you can't beat it, you can only join it. And the best way of joining it is to live with heuristics—generalizations or rules of thumb for learning and discovery. Enliven your journey with the "live-withs"—such as Pay Attention, Ask Dumb Questions, See with Your Heart, or Be Ordinary.
4. *Find true prosperity*. The more you express and experience your highest qualities, the more you are filled with a rich feeling of self-worth, and the wealthier you will become in the truest sense. Find the prosperity that will sustain you through the ups and downs of life and keep increasing, even through difficulties.
5. *Turn fears into breakthroughs.* When you have the grounding of the highest goal, you can see your fears for what they are. Learn from them, and turn their energy into breakthroughs and opportunities of the most lasting kind.

6. *Relate from your heart*. I define "compassion" as seeing the highest in your Self first and then seeing the highest in others. If you have a full, rich feeling of self-worth, you have already taken the first step towards having compassion. See others from this perspective, and you begin to change the nature of your relationships for the better and make connections that move you toward the highest goal.
7. *Experience synergy in every moment*. You can achieve synergy—a much more dynamic state than balance—among the parts of your life by developing organizing structures based on your highest goal and by getting into the flow of intuitive decision-making.
8. *Become a generative leader.* Generative leaders pass along their experience of the highest goal and ignite creativity in others. Share the fruits of your quest for the highest goal with others, and spread its effects in a beneficial spiral.

It must be noted that discovering one's highest purpose in life presupposes self-knowledge and self-understanding. Warren Bennis (2003, p. 56), a noted leadership expert, provides the following lessons/ rules for facilitating self-knowledge:

- a.) You are your own best teacher.
- b.) Accept responsibility. Blame no one.
- c.) You can learn anything you want to learn.
- d.) True understanding comes from reflecting on your experiences.

Essence of Personal Mastery and its link to Authentic Leadership

According to Peter Senge (1994, p. 7), "Personal Mastery is the discipline of continually clarifying and deepening our personal vision, of focusing our energies, of developing patience, and of seeing reality objectively." It stands for "*discipline of personal growth and learning*" (Senge, 1994, p. 141).

Senge (1994, p. 141) further clarifies: "Personal mastery goes beyond competence and skills…it means approaching one's life as a creative work, living life from a creative as opposed to a reactive viewpoint." Personal mastery is about creating what one wants in life and in work. Continually expanding personal mastery, according to Senge, is a discipline based on a number of key principles and practices such as personal vision, holding creative tension between vision and current reality, commitment to truth, and understanding the subconscious, compassion, seeing our connectedness to the world.

Scharmer (2007) who has worked with Senge has proposed "Theory U" to connect to our authentic self in the deep realm of "Presencing," a term coined by Scharmer that combines the concept of presence and sensing. By moving through the "U" process, Scharmer believes that we experience a profound opening of our minds, our hearts, and our wills. This opening of our minds, in turn, results in a shift of awareness that allows us to realize our future possibilities (Scharmer, 2007).

Senge (1994) links personal mastery to effective leadership stating, "The core leadership strategy is simple: be a model. Commit yourself to your own personal mastery….There is nothing more

powerful you can do to encourage others in their quest for personal mastery than to be serious inn your own quest" (p. 173).

Another confirmation of the role of self-mastery comes from the pioneers of adaptive leadership. Pointing out a fundamental error of leadership to be misperceiving adaptive challenges--that require behavioral changes—as technical challenges, Heiftz, Linsky, and Grashow (2009) suggest a framework that begins with the diagnosis of the system, diagnosis of self and concludes with mobilizing the system through deploying the self most effectively.

Still another proponent of personal mastery, Steven Covey (1989, 1991), uses the term "private victory" to denote a condition when we begin proactively with an end in mind. He uses the metaphor of "sharpening the saw" to sustain private victory by simultaneously working on four dimensions of our being: physical, mental, social, and spiritual. He calls these as *habits* of highly effective people. In his latest book titled *The 8th Habit*, Steven Covey (2004, pp. 4-5) suggests that in the present Knowledge Worker Age, we need to aspire beyond effectiveness to reach greatness. This is what he calls the 8th Habit: 'to find our voice and to inspire others to find theirs.' (Covey echoes an oft-quoted comment attributed to Jack Welsh: *Before you become a leader, your focus should be on developing yourself; after you become a leader, your focus should be on developing others.*) He identifies three important elements of his view of greatness in principled-centered leadership: *fulfillment*, *passionate execution,* and *significant contribution.*

Recently, Bill George, the exemplary former CEO of Medtronics, has proposed a view that leaders need to follow their internal compass to reach their true purpose. Based on interviews with 125 contemporary leaders of various organizations, George (2007) has identified following five characteristics of what he calls authentic leadership: (1) knowing your authentic self, (2) defining your values, (3) understanding your motivations, (4) building your support team, and (5) staying grounded by integrating all aspects of your life. George (2008, p. xiv) sums up the fundamental message of his concept of *True North*, as follows:

1. You can discover you authentic leadership right now.
2. You do not have to be born with the characteristics or traits of a leader.
3. You do not have to wait for a tap on your shoulder.
4. You do not have to be at the top of your organization.
5. You can step up to lead at any point in your life: you're never too young—or too old.
6. Leadership is your choice, not your title.

Building on the metaphor of compass pointing towards a magnetic pole, George (2007, p. xxiii) equates the search for authentic leadership with a journey towards our True North and points out:

> True North is the internal compass that guides you successfully through life. It represents who you are as a human being at your deepest level…. Your True North is based on what is most important to you, your most cherished values, your passions and motivations, the sources of satisfactions in your life. Just as a compass points toward a magnetic pole, you True North pulls you toward the purpose of your leadership. When you follow your internal compass, your leadership will be authentic, and people will follow you naturally.

George acknowledges that finding our True North is a life time journey beset with risks and uncertainties. It takes hard work and a sincere look at our strengths and shortcomings: "Becoming an authentic leader," observes George (2008, p. xiii), "takes hard work. It is not much different from becoming a great musician or a great athlete. To become great in any endeavor—whether it is your career, your family, your community—you must use the unique strengths you were born with and develop them to the fullest, while acknowledging and learning from your shortcomings."

In the Epilogue to his book *True North: Discover Your Authentic Leadership*, George (2007, pp. 201-203) invites us to reflect upon what our legacy will be by envisioning the end of our life. What would we like to say to our children, grand children, and great grand children about the impact of our lifework? He concludes reflectively: "Why not take the opportunity to think about that question right now, while you are still writing your life story? Just as it is never too late to lead, it is never too late to make a difference in the world and to leave a legacy."

This is the true fulfillment of leadership.

Concluding Story and Thoughts

A father left a large inheritance of gold, money, land, and 17 horses to be divided as 1/2, 1/3, 1/9 among three children. Everything else got divided easily but they were confused how to 'divide' the horses. In desperation, they contacted an old friend of their father. He came riding in his horse and offered to add his to the herd, to make the total=18 in all. Now they could easily divide it in 1/2, 1/3, 1/9, as (9+6+2)=17. The friend still had his horse. (Thomson, 2000, p. 282)

Our true purpose in life is that 18th horse, without which life has no meaning. Once we have found our highest purpose, it can stay in the background, as a substratum and as a *raison d'être*, of everything we do or undertake.

Here in lies the real value of studying such philosophies of self-transformation: They serve as invitation to become what one is capable of becoming. They also serve as a reminder that one cannot reach one's potential or realize one's possibilities overnight. It is a long, arduous journey, beset with challenges and pitfalls. But there is help along the way for the serious seeker. Armored with self-knowledge and courage to be, we can rise to meet these challenges squarely. *"The meaning of life," said Ouspensky (2005, p. 352; 1922), "is in eternal search. And only in that search can we find something truly new."* By undertaking this search, we plant our feet firmly on the path that leads to the full blooming of our potential, to self-fulfillment--the fulfillment of our true mission in life.

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