



## **Be Alight with Who We Are, by Mark Nepo**

There is always purpose in being, but not always being in purpose.

How easily we get caught up in defining who we are in relation to those around us. I remember walking home from school in fourth grade, when I noticed Roy, a classmate I didn't really like, walking at the same pace as me on the other side of the street. Until I noticed Roy, I was lost in the joy of walking home, free of school, not yet enmeshed in the anger that waited inside my house. But once seeing Roy, I began, without a word, to walk faster, to try to outwalk him. He, of course, sensed this immediately and picked up his gait. As he strode ahead of me, I felt lacking and so stepped up my gait. Before I knew it, we were both racing to the corner, and I felt that if I didn't get there first, I would be a terrible failure.

I have lived enough in the world to know by now that this is how our ambitions often evolve. We first find ourselves alone in the joy of what we were doing. But somehow, there are suddenly others along the way, and we lapse into the breath-less race of comparison, and then we are hopelessly running to avoid being termed a failure.

From here, we often latch onto the nearest goal as a purpose; if we can't find one nearby, we are thought to be adrift. But our lasting sense of purpose is in our breathing, in our being. As the humanitarian Carol Hegedus reminds us, "Our purpose is that which we most passionately are when we pay attention to our deepest selves."

So underneath all our worries about careers and jobs and retirements, our purpose really comes down to living fully, to being alight with who we are beneath all the names and titles we are given or aspire to.

Imagine Buddha in his moment of enlightenment, of being lighted from within. I doubt if he knew he was aglow. In fact, when Buddha rose from under the Bodhi tree, it is said a monk approached him in utter amazement at his luminosity and asked, "O Holy One, what are you? You must be a God." Buddha, not thinking of himself as anything but present, answered, "No ... not a God," and kept walking. But the dazzled monk persisted, "Then you must be a Deva," and Buddha stopped and said, "No ... not a Deva," and kept walking. Still, the monk pursued him, "Then you must be Brahma himself!" At this, Buddha simply uttered, "No." The monk, confused, implored, "Then what are you--Tell me, please--what are you?!" Buddha could not repress his joy and replied, "I am awake."

Can it be that our purpose, no matter whom we run into, no matter what we are told, is simply to be awake?

