

## Discovering & Embodying One's Unique Life Purpose by Jonathan Gustin

Excerpted from *Discovering Purpose: Soulwork & the Purpose Octagon*

Purpose denotes your soul's deep calling, the place

to which you belong and your primary reason for incarnating.

How does one discover and embody their unique life purpose? The subject of life purpose is addressed here in light of the following: 1. There are three distinct purposes: to wake up, grow up and show up.<sup>1</sup> 2. A person is born with a unique purpose that is best understood in the context of their soul. 3. The key to becoming clear about life purpose is engaging in soulwork. 4. Several forces work against purpose discovery and require attention. 5. Eight facets comprise a unique soul-level purpose: known as a person's "Purpose Octagon."

### PART 1 - Three Worlds, One Life

Through multiple roles I have played in my career - which include psychotherapist, meditation teacher and purpose guide - I have observed first hand how the goals of each of these wisdom streams differ. I've also come to the conclusion that the missing piece in both spirituality and psychology is a recognition of the importance of purpose. Unlike psychotherapy, which promotes healing and growth at the level of the ego-personality, and unlike meditation, which emphasizes resting as unbounded awareness, a purpose guide helps the client identify what he or she is here to do in this lifetime.

In many forms of meditation, one inquires "Who am I?". In psychotherapy, one investigates "How do I heal and become happier?". In soul work, one explores "What is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?".<sup>2</sup> None of these inquiries yields its bounty easily. Yet, years of careful cultivation can produce robust results in each of these endeavors: enlightenment (the fruit of meditation); emotional adulthood (the fruit of therapy); and purposiveness (the fruit of soulwork) - that is, the discovery and expression of your unique purpose, the place "where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet".<sup>3</sup> (Note: soul will be defined in Part #2, and soulwork will be defined in part #3.)

Each of these three paths constitutes what I like to call a whole world of human development, with each world having its own purpose. Drawing upon ancient Greek, Sufi, and shamanic cosmologies, we can refer to these three spheres as the Upperworld (nirvana, heaven, enlightenment), Middleworld (emotional adulthood) and Lowerworld (soul-purpose embodiment). Figure 1 presents the three-worlds and their specific inquiries, desires, paths, foci and goals. (Note: please see the last note of this essay, *Disambiguation of the Three Worlds Map*, for two additional renderings of the map.) A

different world comes into view depending upon where we rest our attention.

### Fig. 1 Three Worlds Graph

**UPPERWORLD** When a meditator rests their attention upon awareness itself, he or she experiences being pure consciousness (which in this essay I'll usually refer to as unbounded non-dual awareness). Because a taste of this awareness offers a taste of primordial freedom itself, such "upperworld awakening" (aka, traditional enlightenment) has often been regarded as the ultimate purpose of life. Indeed, there are numerous monasteries that have been filled for centuries with individuals who regard upperworld enlightenment as the primary goal of their lives.

"Waking up" in this context refers to awakening out of an exclusive identification with the ego/personality, and into unbounded awareness. To be more precise, we actually wake up as unbounded awareness, not into it. However, such awareness is not disembodied or ungrounded. True unbounded awakening includes unitive intimacy with all of creation.

A valuable synergy exists between upperworld/meditative practice and soulwork. Transcendence of discursive mind through meditative awareness has the effect of loosening the grip of the ego. This loosening aids in both the realization of spirit and the realization of soul-purpose. In both meditation and soul-work, a narrowing or softening of boundaries occurs between one's conventional self and the "other" (Spirit or soul).

**MIDDLEWORLD** Through psychotherapy, or what I sometimes call ego work, we bring our unclaimed parts into the fold, the shadow into the light, the unconscious into consciousness. When awareness dwells with curiosity upon our everyday personality in traditional psychotherapy<sup>4</sup> we might successfully integrate the various facets of our selves. Sustained therapeutic attention can spur us into a (mostly) stable emotional adulthood - a psychic space where we can give and receive love without undue difficulty and rest in a quiet confidence and self-possession. Middleworld work is inherently relational - both intrapsychic (between parts of the ego-personality) and interpersonal (between two or more people.)

What is the connection between ego work and soulwork? The purpose we are born to often lays buried under the weight of the ego's frantic efforts to obtain acceptance, love, approval and appreciation. Psychotherapy allows us to grow into emotional adulthood, which increases our capability for receiving and trusting the messages that come from soul. When a person excavates the ego out from everything the ego thought it needed, that person is left with who he is meant to be.

**LOWERWORLD** When awareness turns towards the soul, a rich imaginal realm<sup>5</sup> of inborn archetypal figures opens up, enabling soul encounter<sup>6</sup> - a glimpse of your deep purpose. Imaginal/archetypal figures can show up as visual images, but also as a felt sense of purpose, where the body lights up with and aligns to our sense of purpose. Here in the lowerworld, awareness isn't concerned with unbounded non-dual awareness, nor is it focused on the maturation of the ego. Instead, attention can be mysteriously drawn to your mythopoetic identity<sup>7</sup>: the soul-level narrative that wants to live through us and as us. Mythopoetic identity transcends common identities regarding gender, race and class. The term refers to our innate ability for myth-making (story telling) that is generated from our depths. These personal myths arise from soul instead of being fabricated by the ego. A mythopoetic narrative is awakened when we recognize the

deepest conversation we can have with life, and then live accordingly. The ego is transformed by the soul's narrative/story, resulting in a soul-infused personality. In this way, living our life purpose is an expression of the ego's realization of the soul. Answering the question of how we can attain such a realization will be the focus of the remainder of this essay. What we are building towards in this essay is the opportunity we each have to discover the eight facets of our life purpose, our unique purpose octagon. Because of the increasing threat we pose to all life (including our own species), now more than ever all life on this planet needs a humanity that is awake to its individual and collective purpose.

Please note, that the three-worlds model outlined above represents a simplified map of human consciousness. As such, it necessarily creates walls where none exist. For instance, the term "growing up" in some schools of psychology (notably Carl Jung's depth psychology and James Hillman's archetypal psychology) includes both egoic health and the journey to the soul. From the perspective of these psychological approaches, "growing up" addresses levels of maturation beyond the well-adjusted personality. It includes becoming capable of a deep and sustained attention to the inquiries of Spirit (Upperworld) and Soul (Lowerworld.)

However, in this simplified three-worlds map, the term "growing up" refers exclusively to Middleworld health and wholeness (aka, the maturation of the ego). At the same time my intention isn't to forward the notion that these three pathways do not overlap with one another. Rather, it is to differentiate the fields of purpose guiding, meditation and psychotherapy and distinguish their most elemental inquiries. I hope to clear a conceptual space where one may contemplate the questions of soul-purpose discovery without having to simultaneously work with the rather different questions associated with emotional health and enlightenment.

**WORLD FIXATION** It is possible to shift attention, moment-to-moment, among the triple purposes of life. But even with this capacity to move easily among the three worlds, humans have a proclivity for becoming stuck within a single world of purpose (wake up, grow up, show up). World fixation<sup>8</sup> occurs when awareness focuses more or less exclusively on only one of three dimensions. Such a fixation can be understood metaphorically as having an excessive attachment to a particular topography: peaks, valleys, or plains. The transcendent peak represents a (disembodied) enlightenment; the depth of the underworld valley represents soul-purpose, and the Middleworld of daily life is the vast plain upon which we live (in the guise of our everyday personality/ego). (Note: Full Awakening isn't separate from anything, therefore enlightenment isn't just the peak, it's the suchness of the mountain, valleys and plains. See the endnotes for a deeper discussion on this point.)

Imagine building your home in one of these locations and rarely (if ever) exploring the other two regions. The danger of world fixation is a life spent neglecting the other dimensions of our being. A world-fixated person can become lost in the ego, or addicted to an unembodied experience of Unbounded Awareness, or consumed solely with expressing one's life purpose.

The opportunity before us is to become integrally awakened to our purpose in each world. We can roam freely among the three topographies of awareness so we wake up, grow up and show up as part of one seamless life. In other words: we are invited to inhabit three worlds in one life.

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