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# Discerning Intention

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**in·ten·tion** (*noun*)

1. An act or instance of determining mentally upon some action or result.
2. Purpose or attitude toward the effect of one's actions or conduct.

Intention is the force directing an *act of will*. One must be aware of his/her own genuine intentions in order to take responsibility for the consequences of his/her actions.

## IMAGERY EXERCISE

The following is a simple but effective technique for contemplating and discerning one's genuine intention. It has three parts: a guided imagery script, a follow-up worksheet, and an embodied commitment.

## INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Read the following imagery script.

Allow yourself to be comfortable . . . either lying down or sitting up with your back, neck, and spine fully supported. Knowing that you will not be interrupted for the next little while, begin by gently closing your eyes. . . . Now begin to bring your attention to your breath—the direct experience of your breath—however it is . . . and however it changes. Allow yourself to softly focus your awareness on the breath that is arising right now . . . the in-breath and the out-breath . . . the rising and the falling. If you can, try to follow one full cycle of the breath from the beginning of the in-breath and through its entirety to the beginning of the out-breath and through its entirety. Allow yourself the time and the space to be in direct contact with the breath throughout one entire cycle.

As you continue to pay attention to the breath, you may notice that many, many distractions arise. Just allow yourself to notice those distractions and any bodily sensations or any thoughts that may arise. If possible allow yourself to become aware of the separateness of these bodily sensations—notice how these sensations are separate, distinct from thoughts, ideas, and words.

Now, if you will, bring yourself psychologically to the end of your life, not in a frightening or threatening way, but in a contemplative way, as if you are considering the message or moral at the end of your story. Begin to examine your values and your successes. Now, if you will, with great compassion understanding, and forgiveness, begin to consider how you might have done a better job of living out your personal values. Perhaps you might have done better for yourself and for others. Use this gentle consideration from that future place to uncover what this *future you* might say to the *present you*: What brings meaning to your life? What is your true purpose? How could you better fulfill that purpose?

After time for contemplation, return to this room. Gently open your eyes. Take a few conscious, cleansing breaths.

2. Summon as much compassion for yourself as possible, and continue on to the worksheet.

Now, using a mirror or talking with a friend, explain what you have written on the worksheet and what it means to you. Whether using a friend or a mirror, no response is needed, Just listen.

3. Finally, come to a standing position, come into fully embodied awareness. Once established in this empowered stance, bring to mind one of your intentions, perhaps the one that is easiest to realize.

Now, bring to mind the opposite side of this intention (i.e., what might stand in the way).

Carefully consider this obstacle, then bring to mind the decision to act despite the presence of an obstacle.

Becoming fully cognizant of your strengths, consider how much it would benefit you and others if your intention were realized.

Now, becoming fully and entirely aware of the other side, try to completely understand its opposite position and how you can appease its needs reasonably without renouncing your intention.

Finally, allow yourself to open to the universe. Consider the consequences of your intention and appraise whether it would truly increase the good of all. Fully examine your intentionality. When you are sure that your intentions are sound, make the decision on what first step you will take.

## WORKSHEET: LIFE'S PURPOSE/CORE VALUES

*My life's purpose is:*

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*My personal guidelines for living well in the world are:*

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*Core values that reflect this purpose are (e.g., if your life's purpose is to advocate for the less fortunate, you might write "compassion," "courage," "generosity," etc.):*

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*One instance in which my core values(s) made a difference in my life was:*

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Using your core values as intentions, list the concrete actions and necessary behaviors to realize these intentions (e.g., if your life's purpose is to advocate for the less fortunate the necessary behaviors might be working with a charitable organization, donating time and money, etc.).

*The concrete actions to accomplish these intentions are:*

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## **AN ACTION PLAN: "WILLINGNESS"**

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My (specific) goal is to:

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The values underlying my goal are:

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The (specific) actions I will take to achieve that goal are:

1. 

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2. 

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3. 

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4. 

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In pursuit of my goal, I am willing to open up to and make space for all of these memories, thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, longings . . .

Memories:

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Thoughts:

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Feelings:

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Sensations:

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Longings, needs, and urges:

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It might be useful to remind myself that:

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If necessary, I can break this goal down into more manageable steps, such as:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

The smallest, easiest step I can begin with is:

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I will begin on \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_ @ \_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_ (I will take the first step.)

## **WORKSHEET: IMPORTANT QUESTIONS**

### ***A Writing Exercise***

#### **WHO I AM**

Today I am . . .

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Yesterday I was . . .

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In the past I have been . . .

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I am becoming . . .

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I define my identity as . . .

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I am known by all of these names . . .

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The parts of myself that I reveal to others are . . .

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The parts of myself that I conceal are . . .

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I have worn masks and played many roles. The ones that I have worn and since discarded are . . .

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I would define my authentic self as . . .

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I share my true self with . . .

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**WHY I'M HERE**

My purpose for being in this place right now is . . .

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I have to learn . . .

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I have to teach . . .

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The following experiences in my recent past have prepared me to be here . . .

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This is how I got here . . .

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Do I want to stay here?

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Where do I want to go next?

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What does this present moment offer me?

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What do I bring to the present moment?

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**WHAT I WANT**

For myself, I want . . .

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For others, I want . . .

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This is what I want to do . . .

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I want to be . . .

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I want to have . . .

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The most important thing for me to do is . . .

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In order to do this, I need to have . . .

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In order to do this, I need to know . . .

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In order to do this, I need to do . . .

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Do I have what I want?

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Do I want what I have?

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# WORKSHEET: THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT KNOW ABOUT ME

## *Couples*

Both people should answer the following questions. The information is then shared and processed, usually within a couple's session.

1. What do I need to do or be in order not to engrave "*if only . . .*" on my gravestone?

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2. If I could change only one thing in my life, what would that be and why?

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3. In what settings am I the happiest/eager/most comfortable?

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4. In what settings am I the saddest/unsure/afraid?

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5. In a typical day, what do I find myself thinking about the most?

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6. What do I feel is my greatest accomplishment to date? Was it done alone, or were others involved?

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7. Presently, what major regret do I have in my life? If it is reparable, what would be required to repair it?

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8. What other things do I want to change now, and why?

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9. Who was my best friend in grade school, in high school, in college, and why?

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10. Of all the people I have ever known, read about, or dreamed of, who is the worst, and why?

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11. Of all the people I have ever known, read about, or dreamed of, who is most heroic, and why?

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