

P A R T 4

*I*lluminating the Path



*No one can persuade another to change.
Each of us guards a gate of change that can only be
opened from the inside.*

-Marilyn Ferguson

Developing 20-20 Vision



*Your vision will become clear
only when you can look inside your own heart.
Who looks outside, dreams;
who looks inside, awakes.*

-Carl Jung

The next step is brutally simple, yet undoubtedly one of the more frightening steps to apply. For after we awaken to what we want our lives to be, after we awaken to how we have drifted from what that picture looks like for us, after we have liberated the energy that lifts us out of our paralysis, we need to set out in a new direction.

Although a new direction may be what we desire most in our lives, discovering the direction that will honor the awakening that we have undergone can still be an elusive end to achieve. For not only do we need to discover a path that is uniquely suited to who we are, we also need to learn how to pass on the inevitable temptations of following a path that is the creation of someone other than ourselves. I refer to the next step as *Illuminating the Path*. I can best explain it in the following story I once heard.

It's a story about a man who had set out on a very special journey, a search if you will. This man was determined to discover the one true path that would bring him to his own spiritual awakening. You see, he had studied the various spiritual ways of the world, never really settling on any one path to follow. So he set out to find someone who could prescribe for him the one true path that would best serve the awakening he so desperately wanted to experience.

For ten years, he went from spiritual leader to spiritual leader trying to get each and everyone of them to tell him what the one true way was. But time after time, he had the same experience.

He would follow their way for awhile, become

dissatisfied and leave. He roamed the world, going from spiritual leader to spiritual leader, following their way but never being satisfied with their practices or what their practices brought him.

After ten years of searching, his travels brought him to the foot of the tallest mountain in all of India. There he was informed that if he climbed the mountain to the very top he would discover the answer he had been searching for.

Our searcher, ever the adventurer, set out on foot to climb the mountain. After three weeks of brutal physical exertion, the man came to the last ledge that he had to climb in order to complete his daunting ascent.

As he boosted himself up over his final hurdle, there before his very eyes his long sought after answer appeared. For as he reached the top of the mountain, he stood before a pool of water from which he saw his own reflection shimmering against the bright light of the noon sun. And all at once the answer came rushing into his consciousness, the answer that he had been seeking from everyone with whom he had spoken over the last ten years. The answer, simple but profound, "My true path lives only within myself."

Upon hearing that story for the first time, I realized how I too was looking everywhere but within myself for the one path that would honor my life. You know that song *Looking for Love in All the Wrong Places*? Well, I promised myself that I would stop looking to others for the answers that lived only within me.

As a result of that pledge to myself, I have created over the years a set of criteria to follow that keeps my path illuminated, allowing me to determine where I am, whether I have strayed, or how true I am being to my path.

When I think of others before myself, my path is illuminated.

When I maintain a discipline that nourishes my mind, body, spirit, and soul, my path is illuminated.

When I act spontaneously, my path is illuminated.

When my actions are a reflection of my life's purpose, my path is illuminated.

When I rise above my fears to do what I must do next, my path is illuminated.

When I take responsibility for my emotional and spiritual well-being, my path is illuminated.

When I am flexible enough to withstand the never-ending winds of change, my path is illuminated.

When I steel myself by remaining grounded by my life's vision, my path is illuminated.

When I allow myself to adapt to the circumstances of my life rather than forcing the circumstances to conform to my life's plan, my path is illuminated.

When I offer forgiveness to myself rather than condemnation and shame, my path is illuminated.

Although I have devised my own means by which I light my path, there is nothing simple about keeping the lights from flickering out. No indeed, in the course of learning how to illuminate the path of my life's journey, I have discovered that there are basic elements that keep the flame alive.

The first elements that I am referring to? In a word, *trust*. Learning to trust ourselves. Trusting ourselves that we know what is best for us. How many of us have gone through life not trusting ourselves? Not trusting what we think. Not trusting what we feel. Not trusting the choices we make.

Roland understands how important trusting himself is. For much of his life he focused on others rather than centering himself from within.

"I grew up in my family always feeling like I was crazy. When I tried to tell someone what I was feeling, my feelings were minimized or belittled. 'Oh, you're too sensitive, you're always overreacting' was the way I was always dismissed. When I tried to tell someone what I was experiencing, I was told to shut up. When I tried to tell someone what I thought, my thoughts were questioned.

"So I learned to ignore my experiences, I learned to invalidate what I was thinking and feeling. Most damaging of all, I learned how to look to others to affirm what I was experiencing about myself and the people in my life.

"The result was that I never pursued what I wanted, because I could easily talk myself out of it. After all, why subject myself to the inevitable second guessing, the inescapable belittlement. That only served to make the noise in my head, you know, the self-doubts, even the self-loathing, get louder and louder.

"You know, I had to do a lot of spring cleaning in my life. I couldn't really begin to trust myself until I found people in my life who encouraged me. People who understood what it meant to support me. People who understood that I could learn best by doing for myself rather than being told what to do. People who knew how to let me pick up the pieces when I fell, rather than wag their finger at me and say 'I told you so.'

"Their kindness and respect acted as a mirror, teaching me how to trust myself as they invested their trust and faith in me."

A second element of keeping the flame alive is

fortitude. The internal strength we all possess to withstand the discouragement of setbacks and wrong turns. The strength that we all possess to calm ourselves in times of crisis. Being able to withstand the tides of doubt. The doubt washing over us, tugging at us, tripping us up, making us dive for cover with each new step we take. The doubt foisted upon ourselves by others who would rather pull us down because of their own fear, their fear of losing us if we heal, grow, and transform. The doubt that lives within ourselves, the self-doubt so easily activated whenever we feel like we are venturing out on our own.

Whenever I am feeling unnerved, whenever doubt creeps into my life, whenever fear overtakes me, causing me to second guess myself, I have a very simple exercise I do. I turn the world off for fifteen minutes. I simply sit in a chair, close my eyes, and focus on my breathing. That's all there is to it. But you would be amazed at how restorative that simple little exercise can be.

The final element I rely upon to keep the flame burning bright? In a word, *patience*. If we follow a path that flows from within ourselves, then we will experience our lives as a series of trials. Quite simply, life is full of pain and suffering. We will be tested by the trials that appear along the way. The choice will always be there for us: persevere or turn around.

What we learn from our journey is that there is nothing in life that does not extract some cost. More importantly, there is nothing in life that can be achieved without going through a series of small trials.

Herb knows the value of patience. He has learned the hard way about the game of life, the fact that you don't hit a home run with one swing of the bat. Herb was in

drug rehab five times before that truism sunk in for him.

"For me, it was always easier to give up, give in. I would always choose self-indulgence over patience. I knew the steps I was suppose to take whenever I wanted to use. Call my sponsor. Get to a meeting. Call somebody from my contact list. I could have taken a quiet time or read the *Big Book*.

"I didn't get it, you know, I didn't get that being sober meant more than just not drinking. It meant doing every little step along the way that went into not drinking.

"I didn't understand one very important fact. Sobriety was a state of being, a way of life, not an act of abstinence. I had to learn that not drinking was the outcome of continual striving, patiently doing all of the little things. Once I figured that out, I was able to stop indulging every little whim I had."

How about ending things up for this section by doing our familiar exercise. What about this step *Illuminating the Path*? For me, the path is turning inward for our answers. Cultivating a level of awareness that will enable us to transcend the limits that we experience by following our own conscious thoughts over the directives of others. Discovering the essence of our path—patience, perseverance, and our own inner strength.

But how about for you? Where does this idea of a path take you? What does it mean to you to *Illuminate the Path*? More importantly what is the means by which you want to light that path? Take your time with this one.

It's critical for you to devise for yourself a path that is meaningful for you and you only. We are trying to find the vessel by which you can express the energy that is beginning to stir deep within you. Let yourself be as

Which Way to Albuquerque?



*The great thing in this world
is not so much where we are,
but in what direction we are moving.*

-Oliver Wendell Holmes

Pathfinder's Tip



Our path is illuminated when we focus on becoming more of who we are rather than continually trying to become who we are not.

There's no getting past this tip. Yet sadly, we all can look back on parts of our life where we have invested our emotions, our time, and our money trying desperately to escape the inescapable. We are who we are. To pursue a path that promises to transform us into what we are not is sheer folly.

In fact, the more we violate this principle, the more we try to stop ourselves from being who we are, the more we wind up super-charging our life's energy with the very characteristics we do not want.

I see this all the time in my Relationship Bridge Building groups. Alvin is a good example of how this happens. Alvin desperately wants to be viewed as kind, earnest, sincere, well intentioned. He's quite wary of upsetting anybody, not wanting to risk being disliked. He hides how angry he is, how judgmental he is about most of the people in the group. To each group member's face, he tells them how much he cares for them, but his behavior appears to be anything but caring. He's often withdrawn, emotionally unavailable. Alvin is quick to offer a word of kindness when he is challenged to participate more, to give more of himself.

However, the group members are never satisfied with his words. He is often experienced by the group members as patronizing, insincere, withdrawn, and unavailable. And this confounds Alvin to no end. After all, doesn't he always say the right thing, doesn't he always do the right thing, doesn't he always hide how angry and judgmental he can be?

But seemingly to no avail. The lesson Alvin needs to learn is both simple and frightening at the same time. Become more of who you are rather than creating someone who you are not.

Easy to say but how do we exercise it? Focus on two things: attitude and action.

The attitude? Accept where you are. Accept the simple fact that we are growing; after all, our journey is a process of transformation. We are where we are in our lives today, but that doesn't have to stay that way forever. It's always tempting to compare ourselves to others, defining ourselves solely by what we are not because we focus on what we believe others to be. Unfortunately, this is a formula for pain, a formula for chasing an ever elusive way of being.

Ralph knows the shame he brings to himself every time he belittles himself for lacking what he believes others have but he is so sorely lacking. He focuses on the fact that he isn't kind enough, patient enough, forgiving enough, smart enough, slim enough, perky enough. *Enough. Enough. Enough.* Ralph seldom thinks about what he is, because he is always focused on what he is not *enough of.*

Ralph has limited his job opportunities, the opportunities to be in loving relationships, he has even passed up

opportunities to live in exotic places where he would much rather live. The reason why? He never believed he was *enough*. But Ralph is slowly learning that he can accept where he is at today, that this acceptance does not condemn him to remain that way forever.

Ralph has learned to trust that he will grow in his own time and his own way without the need to condemn himself for what he is not. If you asked Ralph, he would tell you that it isn't easy, this idea of accepting where he is at, but he also realizes that the universe will provide him with the opportunities he needs to grow, and those are really the only worthwhile lessons to experience.

The action? Let go of the judgments we hold against ourselves. There is nothing that pushes us further away from who we are than the judgments we hold against ourselves. We recognize all those things about who and what we are that we judge, that we dislike. Is *despise* too strong a word? We recognize all the ways we have of covering up, glossing over, disconnecting as a means of honoring those judgments.

Letting go of our judgments is the path to stepping out of the shadows. It's the means by which we accept where we are in our life's journey. It's the path we all walk in order to claim who we are rather than deride ourselves for what we are not.

That's a hard lesson to absorb. For we all want personal growth. We all long for the freedom that comes along with a better understanding of how to better live life. In order to enjoy such freedom we only need to liberate ourselves from a myth that binds us. We cannot *will* ourselves to a different life. We cannot push our way to a different life.

There's only one lesson for us to embrace. Don't judge yourself for not being anything more than who you already are. The energy you invest in who you are today will forge the path for who you are to become in the tomorrows of your life.

Let's Play the Match Game



*We are the products of editing,
rather than authorship.*

-George Wald

Pathfinder's Tip



Our path is illuminated when the essence of who we are is expressed in the way we live our life.

People often ask me if my life has changed much since my first two books, *Building Better Bridges* and *Moving Mountains*, were published. I tell them that nothing has changed except for one thing.

You see, there's one person in my life who has made it her personal mission to see that nothing about me changes. She keeps me grounded. She reminds me of who I am. She spares no words when she thinks I am getting too big for my britches.

I wrote about her in *Moving Mountains*. Her name is Sylvia. She's been tending bar for almost forty years. For the last fifteen years my name, in her mind, was simply *Little Stevie*. But that is the one thing that has changed since I have started writing.

I am no longer *Little Stevie*. No, whenever I go visit her now, upon seeing me she immediately yells out, "Well, if it isn't Mr. Big-Shot-Writer" or "So Mr. Big-Shot-Writer, what'll it be?"

Well, a couple of weeks ago I went to visit Sylvia. I was on a mission of sorts. I had just finished a meeting with my editor, showing her the outline for this book. My editor was mystified that I had left Sylvia out of this book, so I was instructed to go see Sylvia

and get her to make some kind of contribution.

I reluctantly agreed to go. You see Sylvia has been getting harder to live with since her appearance in *Moving Mountains*.

So I walked into the bar and there was Sylvia with the ever-present cigarette hanging out of her mouth, leaning on the top of the bar, gabbing with a couple of the regulars. As soon as she saw me, she motioned for me to join her, pushing two of the customers out of the way so that I could sit at the bar.

"Well, Mr. Big-Shot-Writer, how nice of you to come around to see me, where ya been?" she asked.

I explained to Sylvia how busy I had been, reminding her that I had called her twice in the last week to check up on her.

"So, Mr. Big-Shot-Writer, what brings you around tonight?" Her tone told me she was not at all placated by the idea that I had been keeping in touch.

I explained to Sylvia about the meeting I had with my editor and her request to have Sylvia contribute to the new book I was working on.

Sylvia stared at me for a moment, then smiled. Before I could bat an eye, she quickly reached underneath the bar, pulling out a file that was at least three inches thick.

As she leafed through the file, she said, "You know Mr. Big-Shot-Writer, I've been making some notes, you know, just in case you needed me to help you again with your next book.

"Now I've been thinking about how we can do this book a little differently. You know your last book, *Running On the Hillside?*"

"Uh, that would be *Moving Mountains*," I corrected her.

With that said, in one swift motion, Sylvia grabbed a bar towel and flicked it at my forehead, striking me between the eyes. “I told you to stop correcting me all of the time!”

As I wiped the tears from my stinging eyes, I thought to myself that this is what they must mean when they say an artist must suffer for his craft.

“Anyway, that book—it had way too many words in it. We can make this one a lot shorter.”

“We’re writing a book, not a brochure,” I offered somewhat defensively.

“Yea, yea, you’re always so sensitive. Now listen to me. If your readers follow this one idea, they won’t need to read anything else.”

“Well, tell me what the idea is and I’ll see if we can use it,” I said somewhat impatiently.

“Now settle down, just settle down and I’ll tell you, you hear?” she shot back.

“Are you ready? Now listen real careful.”

With that said, she leaned over and whispered in my ear as if she was about to reveal some secret concerning national security. “Your innards gotta match your out-ards,” she whispered.

“What?!” I exclaimed, feeling like I was in a time warp talking to ol’ Granny Clampett.

“You know what I mean. Your life is working for you when your life on the outside matches the inside of you.”

“No, I don’t know what you mean,” I said, slumping forward in my chair, my head falling to the bar top.

She slugged me in the arm and said, “Well then, listen real good, Mr. Big-Shot. I was with Marge yesterday. We were shopping for some furniture for her new apartment.

Anyway, the man who waited on us, he was a miserable soul. You know how I can tell?”

She didn’t wait for me to answer.

“His insides didn’t match his outsides. His mouth smiled at us but his eyes were dark as night. He talked real fast but his words didn’t say a damn thing. He acted like we were the most important people in the world, but he always kept one eye peeled on the front door checking out whether he was missing out on his next customer.”

“So?” I said not getting her point.

“Listen, sonny. I’ve been behind this bar a long time. I’ve seen them come and go. Oh, you got your big fancy words for it, depression, anxiety, what’s that word you taught me a couple of weeks ago, actual..., actual...?”

“Self-actualization,” I muttered.

“I don’t need any of those big fancy words. You know why? I can tell the happy ones from the not so happy ones. You know how I can tell?”

I had an answer all ready for her but she kept talking without pause.

“The happy ones, they always match. Their eyes, their eyes tell me a story about who they are on the inside. No one can fake the eyes. And that’s what I’m trying to tell you. This guy wasn’t real. He didn’t want to be there selling furniture. He didn’t want to be there dealing with us.”

“But what is so damn helpful about you and Marge buying furniture from this guy?”

“You tell ’em Mr. Big-Shot-Writer, you tell your readers that Sylvia says to start getting their lives to match.”

“Match what?” As usual, I was totally exasperated trying to follow her logic.

“What they’re doing with who they are? Listen, life is hard

enough without making it harder, you know what I mean?

“We all need to find our place in life and be happy with whatever that is. We all need to know our insides, so we can get our outsides to match.

“So many people are like zombies. You know how I can tell?”

I started to mouth my answer but she didn’t take that as a signal to stop and listen.

“They wind up with jobs that don’t match them, they wind up with boyfriends, girlfriends, husbands, wives, all of them, they don’t match. They wind up spending most of their lives doing things that don’t match what they like to do.

“Do you ever ask ‘em why, Mr. Big-Shot-Psychologist? ‘Cause I don’t get it. Why do so many of them refuse to let go of their lives? You know, let go of all of that dead weight?”

I scratched my head and ticked off the some of the reasons I had been told throughout the years. “I dunno, mortgages to be paid; retirement plans to maintain; don’t want to disappoint their parents; don’t want to hurt their children; it’s a lot more complicated than you make it seem, Steve; it’s easier to stay quietly numb; I don’t believe I deserve anything different; it’s my parents’ fault.”

“That’s what I’m trying to tell you, Mr. Big-Shot. Look at me. I’ve been tending bar my whole life. Been with my old man forever. Got more hobbies than I have time for. Organize the bake sale for the food shelter every year. I love it all. Know how you can tell?”

I quickly put my hand over her mouth and hurriedly shouted out, “Because it matches!”

As she removed my hand from her mouth she said with a look of satisfaction, “You betcha Mr. Big-Shot-

Writer, because it matches.”

Alright, so Sylvia may have a point. In fact, I know she does. *Illuminating the Path*—our inside matching our outside. I suppose that is the eventual outcome of awakening our soul and liberating our spirit.

The word I would use is *congruent*, but that really is the same as *matches*. When people come to see me, they really are searching for what that match is. They may not say it that way. They may not even recognize it that way, but much of the pain we experience in our life stems from the fact that some aspect of our lives doesn’t match the essence of who we are.

Time and time again I walk down the very lonely path with another person, helping them discover what is locked up inside them. I often think of it as finding a magical lamp that lives inside of us. You know what I mean? There is this old dusty lamp inside of us that we only need to dust off and release the magical genie that lives within.

Once the genie is released, we only need learn how to use the genie to help us construct a life that is congruent with who we are. Or in the words of Sylvia, “We only need to have our innards match our outards.”