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## THE SECOND ARC OF LIFE MISSION

By Daniel Goodenough

Conventional wisdom points to two fundamental arcs of our lives. The first orients outward. How does the world work?

What are the rules for the place we find ourselves in, and how do we succeed within those rules? What place can I achieve in this world? What do I want to achieve? The second arc turns inward. We might ask ourselves how we feel about the rules, and about success in those terms. This call to turn inward then invites a review of the first arc of life. Regardless of how we feel about how it went, life invites us to review what it means to us.

As our sense of a second arc, a second act of life, saturates our view of life, inevitably the question of “next” emerges. If life has gone well the question of next may surface later. If life has dealt us an unexpected surprise, disrupting our world, the question may surface sooner.

We no longer live in a conventional world. Wisdom doesn't seem to have the time to become conventional anymore.

Change is now the rule, and the rate of that change is only going to accelerate. In our lifetime we have experienced the industrial age's structures giving way to the information age, only to give way to the

digital age, now restructuring again in what some call the context age. With access to more information than we can process in a lifetime, “information flows” are now more important than accumulated knowledge. This means that anyone who can point to why a particular element of that “information flow” is important, and why we might care about that, is the gift to our time. This is the opportunity and high potential in the answer to what is next, particularly for mature entrepreneurs.

Considering the question of what’s next, I’m reminded that the average graduating high school senior today can expect to have 16 to 20 careers in their lifetime. This moves the question of a second act to an invitation to reinvent our contribution to the world ongoingly.

The good news of our age? Meaning is the question, and our life experience makes our own voice unique to the audience we’re meant to connect with. Who is the audience your life’s experience is meant to serve? Can you articulate your Why, the call your life is the answer to?

Asking these questions maps your life mission, meaning the answer to such questions as, why am I here? What does this “why” call me to do now, at this juncture of my life? Who will I need to be, to step into this “what,” and who will I become by acting on that call? What we’re called to do in life is the outer life mission, and who we’re called to be, and what that creates in us is the inner life mission.

I propose that clearly knowing your life mission at any point in your life is not some special realization available only to the lucky few. This is a skill you can develop, like any other in life.

Achieving an elite level in sports requires dedication to the practices required to develop that level of skill. Musicians, to achieve and maintain mastery of their instrument, practice scales for that instrument every day of their lives. The ability to articulate your life mission and masterfully respond to the changes of our time with a well-placed vehicle for the expression of your calling is a skill available to anyone willing to do the practices of life mission.

The context age puts meaning at the centre of our time. The ability to find and articulate meaning is called Existential Intelligence. What information is important? Why should I care about that? The context age then puts a premium on Existential Intelligence, on your ability to bring your “why” to the world in a way that brings meaning to others.

The ability to use your life experience to answer these questions is the emphasis of our time. If ever there was a time when you could make your way expressing the uniqueness of your gifts, whatever your age, this is it. Answer the questions of why are you here, what does this call you do, and who does this call you to be? Do the life mission “scales” or practices required to develop skill with this, and you will always know what’s next for you.

Practicing the scales of life mission often takes the form of enquiry. What for instance, are your favourite movies, stories, visual or performing arts? What activity do you most enjoy, in what place, with whom, and under what circumstances? What are your favourite sports and/or games to play or watch? What is your favourite time of day, doing what, and with whom?

As you answer these questions, the first pass may seem merely a curiosity. The answer to any one of the questions by itself could seem to indicate little. The nonlocal power to the answers will surface in the interaction between, and integration with, other answers. Perhaps the most important aspect of the answers is why they are your favourites. The ground or foundation to any of the life mission questions, is Why? The question of what you’re called to do and who you’re called to be will always be downline from “Why are you here?”

You might then apply all of these enquiries to other times in your life. How would you have answered these same questions when you were pre-teen, teenage, or in your twenties or thirties? If the answers are different, why is that and what does it tell you?

This points to another life mission scale usually thought to be a “second arc” question. What legacy do you intend for your life? Assigning this question to later life precludes much of what this might inform for the question of your life mission. Upon deeper enquiry we find the thread of legacy is present in every time of our lives. One could say legacy and life mission are only slightly different faces of the same question. The legacy of our life is a way of answering the question of the Why of our life. Looking for the thread of legacy over the whole of our lives helps us answer the question of what is next now. If the legacy we’re in service to has moved in our lives from the beginning and all along the way, then the same thread will be present in any vehicle required to bring the expression of our life mission to the world now.

This means the question of legacy is not bound by how many years we think we have left. Legacy, then, is exactly like all the other ways we're continuously called to reinvent ourselves.

Again, going deeper with the question of our legacy, there is the question of local and nonlocal legacy. Local legacy, like classical physics, addresses the tangible and easily identifiable effect of our actions. The effect of our actions causes something to happen for our family, friends, colleagues, communities or the world at large in ways we can point to, can identify and be recognized for. We might create a structure that we expect to outlive us, with an intention for a result we hope to repeat over time in a way we anticipate.

Nonlocal legacy, like quantum physics, points to an effect we can't so easily point to. The ripple of our Way of being, the manner in which we do something, the uniqueness we bring, the way we mentor others in the moment, even what we don't say or do in a moment, ripples out and away from us in ways beyond our ability to even imagine. While difficult to identify or be sure we create, contemplating the nonlocal legacy of what we do next and who we're called to be next can open a world of possibility at any stage of our life.

The golden thread of life mission, the Why of the journey present at each stage of life, universally fundamental to the question of what we're called to do and who we're called to be, guides and directs the fashioning of our "next," and the vehicle we use to express it.

When we share the question of how to bring our life mission to the world with our fellow pilgrims in the Caravan of this life, what we bring to this question in the second arc of life is different. The story we tell ourselves about our pilgrimage is what is most important.

While physical challenges can be present at any age, and lack of opportunity, automation and disruption are common at all levels, the emotional toll we all confront, the flavour of this challenge, changes as we age. The story we tell ourselves about this creates the flavour and the perfume of the way we experience our life transitions. As author and psychologist James Hillman wrote, "It's not so much the damaging things that happen in our lives that matters, it's the damaging things we tell ourselves about it."

We can presence and bring awareness to the "high story" embedded in our experience. The story we tell ourselves about our lives can disempower

us or lift us up. One definition of the word “anagogical” is “the great uplift,” sometimes described as heaven reaching down to lift up a person or situation. The anagogical view of our experience lifts and empowers. We can tell and retell the story of our lives, and what that means moving forward, with each retelling uplifting the way we tell it, each retelling a “higher story.” This movement to a higher view of itself often brings with it the seed call of the future that wants to connect with us.

This retelling of our story is one kind of life mission scale. Additional life mission scales along these lines could be exploring the many levels of our biography for the clues to the future our experience has prepared us for. This way of exploring our biography is metaphorically a detective’s work, culling the clues of our life mission, relative to the future calling we’re looking for, discerning what is right about our experience. In those times and places we signed up for tough life classes, what were they preparing us for upon graduation? It’s not uncommon for us to finally use the education we gained from traditional schools or life experience many years later in life. In this way we may examine the biographies of our relationship with our body, our family and friends, our teachers and mentors, our work in the world, our relationship with money, life force in general, opportunities and the decisions we made around them, spiritual traditions and teachers, cultures we experienced and were embedded in, and more.

When our story empowers our view of ourselves, bringing inspiration to where we find ourselves, the vision of possibility meets the unique and singular nature of our life mission, like a snowflake or fingerprint. Remembering (making part of us again) our life mission strengthens our ability to move through the challenges of life, and has a well-documented positive healing effect on our physical, emotional and mental wellbeing.

A clear sense of the high story of our life and our life mission facilitates temporal integration, the ability to stay present in the face of uncertainty. We’re less likely to be carried away by the fear this can engender. Temporal intelligence can mean we’re not just at peace with uncertainty, we may actually embrace uncertainty for the open system opportunity that it’s part of. Uncertainty is kindred to the zeitgeist of our particular time, and the ability to embrace uncertainty empowers us to dance with our time, to be “of” our time.

Embracing uncertainty also dispels the creeping sense of anxiety and fear that comes from the way age can point to the temporary nature of our physical mortality. With a higher state of temporal awareness, we aren't as afraid of "time running out." We aren't as afraid of the precariousness of life. Connected to the "high story" of our life, and the life mission that embodies that "high story," the inspiration of existential intelligence or the ability to be present to meaning, to create meaning, to bring meaning, informs our response to life moving forward.

Instead of increasing anxiety, we are empowered to ask empowering questions about where we find ourselves. We no longer take as inevitable increasing dysfunction in financial, physical, cognitive, career, relationship and family, and other areas of life. We become an empowered advocate for our future, continuing to cast our awareness outward, close and wide, focused on the opportunities ever present.

There are universals that are the birthright of all human beings. Each of us is meant to up-level our IQ or cognitive intelligence, EQ or emotional intelligence, SQ or spiritual intelligence, and EI or existential intelligence. The uniqueness of our life mission points to a particular combination of lines of intelligence, not universal to everyone, needed for our life mission.

The enquiry of the scales and practices of life mission will create an emergent pattern for us that points to the lines of development rooted in our nature, growing toward the fruit and flowering of our life mission, the flowering of the person we are meant to become.

A writer committed to his or her domain will develop linguistic intelligence, while also perhaps developing inter- and intrapersonal intelligence. A visual artist will develop spacial intelligence, while a performing artist may add to that, kinesthetic intelligence, and a musician will develop musical intelligence along with kinesthetic intelligence. A chef will develop culinary intelligence. A scientist will develop amongst other intelligences, mathematical intelligence. Our life mission calls us to develop a particular combination of these lines of intelligence, interconnecting with the universal intelligences, enabling us to manifest our life mission into form.

As we do our life mission scales, we can contemplate the kinds of intelligence present in the events of our life, developing along with us as we move forward. The lines of intelligence that show up are like fractal

repeating patterns, pointing to a theme or purpose hidden perhaps in plain sight.

We might now, as a way of going deeper with the scales given earlier, contemplate the lines of intelligence present in the question of our favourite stories, music and songs, activities, places, heroes, etc. moving with us in each of the stages of our life. Even when some favourites change, we may notice they have been replaced by a favourite resonant with the same combination of intelligences.

Awareness of the combination of intelligences meant to support your life mission will help you to up-level your innate strengths, and delegate your weaknesses. Awareness of the lines of intelligence that make up your nature acts as a search image, helping you to focus your attention on the possibilities aligned with who you are.

People demonstrate everywhere on a daily basis their ability to do amazing things at any age. I've had clients who retired and went on to successfully manage an ongoing series of career-like projects, sometimes lasting two to five years before the reinvention and creation of the next project. In some cases, the career-like projects were an interconnecting and evolving weave. In each person's creation of what was next, then next, then next, the sense of an end point no longer applied. A trust in life came with the experience of life itself bringing "next" before it was needed.

The gift of consistently doing life mission scales or practices is a heightened awareness of co-creating our unfolding with life. A clear sense of why we are here is a clear sense of our agreement with life and the One that sent us. A clear sense that this agreement has been with us is carried in the deep self, not entirely outside of our awareness, in each moment of our life. The guidance inherent in knowing this agreement is always available, waiting for us.

This agreement with life, with the One that sent us, is the blueprint of our life mission. This is the blueprint we remember or make part of us by doing the scales. Why we're here, what this calls us to do and who this calls us to be, is the opportunity to honour that agreement. There is no point in life too late for this enquiry. As long as we are living the process of this enquiry, we are living our life mission. Our life mission is not a product or result to be accomplished, indicating we have successfully manifested our life mission. We do our life mission for what

it changes in us, for who we become in the process. Life mission is an ongoing, living, breathing process interconnected with all of life.

We have the opportunity to embrace the ongoing interconnected promise of our life mission that makes each moment precious, deeply meaningful personally and in harmony with life, making the world a better place for our having been here.

Practice the scales and develop the skill, and allow your life mission to bring your life alive.

Join the Caravan of Remembering. Enquiry of life mission scales might ask: Why have you surrounded yourself by the things that surround you? Who is this person who has these things, what is the quintessence of your life's experience, and what is for you "an environment for life"? What is the question at the centre of your life, and where would you look for the secret of life? If you, as the poet Rumi suggested, "let yourself be drawn by the pull of what you really love," what would that mean to you in your life? And . . . and . . . and . . .

### **ABOUT Daniel Goodenough**

Daniel is the author of *The Caravan of Remembering, A Road Map for Experiencing the Awakening of Your Life's Mission*, from Heart's Way Press, and is co-founder of The Way of the Heart, an international program building personal growth and self-development.

Daniel has worked as a research scientist, professional musician, fine artist and graphic designer. Over the past 30 years, he has taught thousands of students how to discover their unique, authentic path in life, and how to walk that path in the world. Recently, he has been consulting with entrepreneurs and companies whose intention is to succeed in business in a new way, with integrity, purpose, and heart.

### **TO CONTACT Daniel Goodenough**

*The Caravan of Remembering* can be ordered from the book's website, [www.caravanofremembering.com](http://www.caravanofremembering.com) and Amazon.com. The ebook version is available from Kindle, Kobo, Nook and iTunes.

Join the conversation! A global community of life mission explorers is meeting in person and online to explore questions posed by *The Caravan*



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[www.caravanofremembering.com](http://www.caravanofremembering.com).

You can also sign up there to receive the Caravan Connections newsletter. You may contact us with any questions at:

[caravanconversationsclub@gmail.com](mailto:caravanconversationsclub@gmail.com).

Daniel Goodenough's email: [DanielGoodenough@me.com](mailto:DanielGoodenough@me.com)