

Reclaiming *your* Destiny

By JOHN HOWARD PRIN, LADC

“The greatest despair is to not become the person you were meant to be.”

– Soren Kierkegaard

Helping Clients Experience Personal Wholeness

Many people in early sobriety deny their spirituality. In my years of helping people recover from addictions, I’ve observed this often. Such a stance erects stiff barriers to willingness, open-mindedness, and fresh thinking, all necessary essentials for genuine recovery.

Does this describe your clients? Does the role of spirituality that they hear about from others confuse them? Are they puzzled by talk of a Higher Power? Is this a common predicament?

If so, offer clients the idea that a large part of living spiritually is knowing who you are and why you are alive. You might tell your clients something like: “If you are striving for stable sobriety after being trapped in addiction, there is hope. Others like you have found personal wholeness by defining their dream in life and their purpose for making it come true—in short, their destiny.”

Why Destiny Matters

The single biggest reason for reclaiming one’s destiny is that doing so gives a person an ongoing, worthwhile goal of *his or her choosing* that takes the mind off addiction and refocuses it on the desires of the heart.

Sooner or later, every functioning adult faces a primal, deep-rooted quandary: “Why am I alive?” “What is my purpose in life?” “What am I going to do about it?” Many people avoid the responsibility of answering these questions by abusing alcohol, drugs, food, gambling, sex, or video games. A great deal of addictive thinking and bizarre, destructive behaviors are grounded in avoiding responsibility.

For anyone seriously considering the need for recovery and hoping that the multiple changes they are making will pay off (and the payoffs *will* come), I encourage them to face this quandary head on. As others’ stories attest, it’s clear that once you combine your purpose in life with the Higher Power of your understanding (using spiritual practices such as Step 11, for example), you open yourself

to unleashing and radically embracing the most complete version of your authentic self—what I call your “True You.” This self is essential to your destiny. Rediscovering your “True You” destiny becomes the foundation of your personal inner journey of recovery, of profound transformation and fulfillment that leads to personal wholeness.

Let’s Get Practical

This article offers a three-layered model that I have used when facilitating therapy groups, The Meaning Tree® (Prin, 2008). It helps people find practical ways to make this admittedly ethereal goal come alive for them. The good news is that an individual in early sobriety does not have to begin the recovery journey as a “believer.” Fortunately, one of the innovations of Alcoholics Anonymous was to free spirituality from its explicitly religious roots. This means, in one’s struggle to stay sober, the individual is free to choose spiritual help either theistically (belief in God) or non-theistically (inner strength, moral values).

“The spiritual part of recovery is like the wet part of the ocean.”

– Anonymous

Like the veteran swimmer who coaxes novices to plunge into deep water, my favorite method of getting folks “spiritually wet” is by making a simple declaration: “You know you are living a spiritual life when your life has *meaning*. So let’s take a spiritual plunge!” Meaning is the elixir of life that we all seek and desire, the fulfillment of one’s life lived with passion and purpose, the source of satisfaction that many have sought through addictions. In recovery, meaning can be experienced as inner joy and security, even in the midst of outer trials or severe circumstances. Meaning can serve as a connection to an “All Powerful, Guiding, Creative Intelligence” (*The Big Book*, p. 49).

The Meaning Tree

The Meaning Tree diagram provides an organic metaphor that helps spur a client's motivation and also helps anyone in early sobriety visualize the interconnections between the concepts of "dream," "purpose," and "meaning."

1. My Life Dream: What Nourishes Me

Following are sample statements from clients who have expressed their unfulfilled life dreams:

- "My dream is to prevent any animal on the planet from ever being harmed."
- "My dream is to raise the status of minorities in America."
- "My dream is to study law and stand up for the underdog in our legal justice system."
- "My dream is to stay sober and study to become a counselor, so I can help others discover their sobriety and find what I've found."

To strive for such dreams, individuals in early recovery need nourishment. The "healthy soil" represents the nutrients available to clients once they switch to sobriety from the "unhealthy soil" of addiction. "Nutrients" include, for example, attending 12-Step meetings and making new-and-improved choices that stem from the fruits of the person's daily recovery: replacing "stinkin' thinkin'" with healthy self-talk; practicing surrender and acceptance; seeking psychotherapy for emotional issues; and partnering with the Higher Power of his or her understanding.

The tree's root system represents the person's un- or underdeveloped capabilities that have gone neglected during active addiction. At last these long-buried capabilities are now available for fresh attention and new development. What's special about "interests" is that they originate from the person's passion or deepest desire, commonly something vitally important that began to blossom in the newly sober individual's youth, but that addiction sidetracked and abandoned.

This passion or core desire is what's reawakened and now has the chance to emerge as one's destiny. I've witnessed numerous "Eureka!" and "A-ha!" moments, signals of reconnecting with long-delayed destinies. This process also spawns the rediscovery of the authentic person who existed before one ever used, and who will be the basis for rebuilding a day-by-day sober life.

2. Purpose: How My Dream Comes True

After similar exercises with the "skills" and "talents" in the tree's root system, clients learn how purpose, represented by the tree's trunk, naturally sprouts from one's revitalized roots that are currently growing in healthy soil. The distinctions between "dream," "purpose," and "meaning" now become clearer.

Dream: *An ideal that nourishes my soul and motivates me to be my best.*

Purpose: *Arranging my life's responsibilities, including staying sober, to nurture my dream.*

Meaning: *The rewards for myself and others from me acting freely and authentically (from my "True You") for the benefit of all.*

Purpose becomes the reason to get up in the morning and move through the day. It energizes and focuses one's choices, even in the face of obstacles and challenges. Even with competing daily priorities like careers or parenting, the newly motivated individual finds some way during the day to accomplish a chosen goal that, in turn, will one day make his or her dream a reality.

*"The purpose of life is to
live a life of purpose."*

– Robert Byrne

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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3. Meaning: Why My Life Matters

Meaning, represented by the tree's leaves, results from:

- Accomplishing goals that achieve one's purpose,
- Knowing and expressing one's gift to the world, and
- Serving someone we choose or something larger than self (a cause, a population, a life mission).

As the tree's leaves take in sunlight, they send valuable nourishment down to the roots . . . and the cycle is completed. Re-nourished, the roots send nutrients back up through the trunk to the branches and leaves, and the organic cycle continues.

Let's consider the woman whose dream was "to prevent any animal on the planet from ever being harmed." At age 40, she reconnected with her childhood love of animals. That by itself reawakened her spirit. Asked in what ways she might rekindle that passion as a sober adult, she drew a blank. One group member suggested she could volunteer for a few hours at a local humane society where injured or abused animals were brought in for care. Another member offered to help create a Web site that could promote her cause. She perked up at these ideas, and her energy level radiated enthusiasm. As the practical aspects of her newly reclaimed dream dawned on her, the potential for reclaiming her destiny grew more real, and her self-esteem visibly improved.

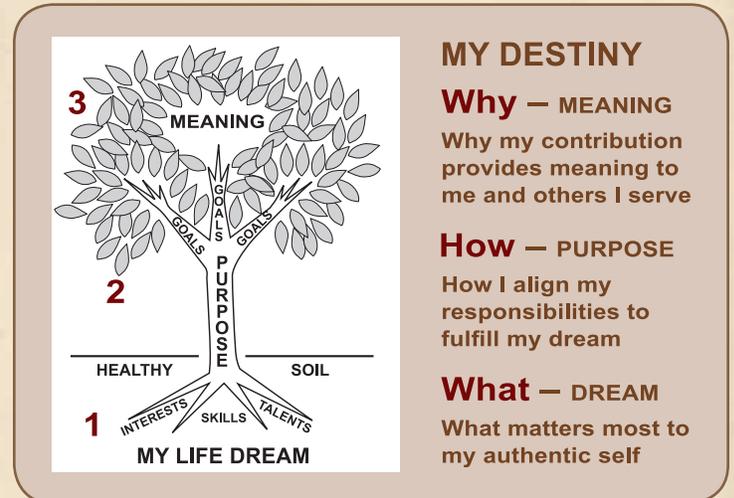
When people focus on positive and authentic goals that matter deeply to them, their energy elevates and they become motivated. One person responded, "After I heard The Meaning Tree explained, the possibility of finding my way back from addiction became tangible. I felt a powerful surge of healing right then, even though I knew the healing process itself would take more time." It also helps to pose questions such as: "With every day being an opportunity to make your dream come true, when do you think there will be time for getting stoned or drunk? For having hangovers or blackouts?" The response invariably comes back, "Never!"

References

- Alcoholics Anonymous (known as *The Big Book*), p. 49.
Prin, John H. *The Roadmap to Lifelong Recovery Guidebook*. (PESI, 2008), p. 38.
Alcoholics Anonymous (known as *The Big Book*), p. 28.

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This diagram summarizes The Meaning Tree and its components:



Living My Destiny: The New "Me"

I encourage the individuals who follow this path to plunge into the "wetness" of spirituality. Sooner or later, everybody wants their lives to work better, and they aim to make the most out of life. Doing so requires reprioritized time, energy, and resources—now revitalized by a newly reclaimed destiny.

Our key task is to help clients discover that, deep within themselves, beyond being a mom/dad and wife/husband and employee/boss, there is another "me" who is an artist, inventor, explorer, or other innovative being. Taking the plunge into "the wet part of the ocean" means living out one's dreams. Anyone who lives in sustained recovery hopes to fulfill their "True You."

To discover and express this authentic identity/destiny is to make possible the finest moments of being alive. We have the opportunity to help clients find sobriety, help them use the tools of recovery, and guide them to actually experience an abundant life—the personal wholeness that comes from acting out the desires of their heart. Defining and living daily our "True You" destiny becomes an adventure in experiencing this personal wholeness; it demonstrates that "a new life has been given us, a 'design for living' that really works" (*The Big Book*, p. 28). ∞