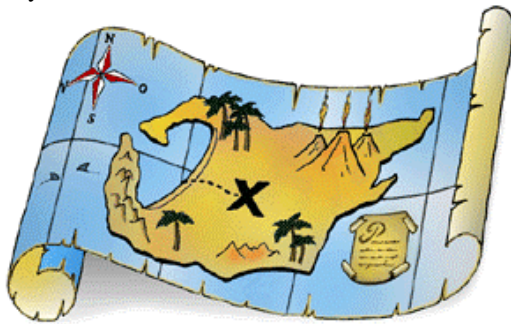


1.4.

Follow Your Own Path

If we want our lives to be meaningful personally, then we each have to be prepared to make our own way through life. But doing this often exposes us to the envy of friends and loved ones. Many of them may not have dared to step off the treadmill of normalcy and follow their inner dreams, and so they become envious of your decision to do so.



Rather than admit to envy, they treat with contempt anyone who does dare to begin moving toward independence. Unfortunately, you may have to experience the receiving-end of this contempt at some time or other.

In such times it is important to remain confident, holding onto your dreams and to disregard the skepticism of others. Perhaps it's not the best idea to tell all your plans to everyone right off the bat. Give your plans time to mature before you share them with the rest of the world.

It is important that you develop a sense of integrity so that you know how much of your personal plans you should keep to yourself and how much you should reveal to others. This way of thinking may seem particularly foreign to women. It is more common for women to share all their thoughts and feelings with friends and relatives. In many cases, this can be a great strength. But when it comes to telling about

plans and dreams that have not had time to mature, it can also be a great disadvantage.

When experiencing the negative reactions of others, it is helpful to remember that you don't need their approval. Unfortunately, we often react to disapproval of what we are doing by telling ourselves that the disapproving person is obviously stupid. When we find it difficult to take criticism, we sometimes try to get back at the person on an emotional level. We regress. Perhaps we tell them, "You really hurt my feelings." But this is nothing other than refusing to take responsibility for our own emotions.

We try to shift attention away from what we are being criticized for. Instead, we try to keep all attention on our feelings so we can get the other person or persons involved to feel sorry for us. We try to deflect the responsibility for our feelings onto someone else.

But it is impossible for anyone else to be responsible for how you feel. When I say something that makes you sad or angry, then I am responsible for what I have said, but I am not responsible for your reaction to what I have said. It is usually difficult to distinguish between one person's responsibility and another's, especially when the two people are closely related. The attempt to assign responsibility or blame often leads to complete confusion that no one can make heads or tails of.

If you have a tendency to get unjustifiably angry at certain comments you receive from a friend or relative, for example, then this is an indication of your inner climate, that you yourself have unresolved issues. When beginning a new project, it is quite natural to feel some degree of uneasiness or insecurity. It is natural to wonder how it is going to turn out. This uncertainty is only heightened when you

come into contact with others' skepticism. You might not be ready to answer all their questions. At this point, perhaps the only surety we have that we are headed down the right path is our gut feeling. But how can we convince others we are doing the right thing when our whole course of action is based on nothing more than a gut feeling? It's impossible.

If someone tells you that your project isn't economically feasible, you just can't tell them, "Yeah, but I have this feeling..." This is not a convincing argument. It is better to leave argument aside and get on with following your intuition. It can give you more information than a ton of statistics ever can.

Building an opinion about the future is such a tricky task that we usually have only our gut feelings to go on. This is because we can never see all the facts concerning the future laid out before us. There are just too many loose ends, so the best picture we can form is that which we can form based on our intuition. This may be because intuition is so closely connected with the subconscious part of the mind, which holds a vast amount of knowledge and information.

Choosing your own way through life is just that, you have to choose it yourself. It is a choice that no one else can make for you. The information you need to make this choice must come from within. It is paramount that this kind of choice is grounded upon inner knowledge rather than upon information from without. In many cases, we can be distracted from listening to this inner knowledge because we are bombarded with information from without. And so we look for confirmation of our inner convictions from outside sources. We may not trust our convictions fully.

Unfortunately, many times we never get the confirmation we seek from others. It is as if someone is trying to teach us that it is enough to trust our own hearts. We don't need to wait for others to tell us what to do. And we don't need to wait for their approval, because that could take a long time. No one can really know what we want in life except ourselves.

Once you have chosen your path, it is time to stick to it no matter what anyone else has to say. Others may tell you that you are making a big mistake, that you are destroying your home and neglecting your children. You are the only one who can choose how best to react to these accusations. Depending on your reaction, some of your friends may no longer be your friends. That's life. When one person chooses to change, to develop, there's no guarantee that everyone else he knows will be moving in the same direction.

Tensions may arise which prove detrimental to certain friendships. This is also a natural part of life. Those who do not realize this may be blocking their own progress.

There are unfortunately far too many of us who have not learned to listen to our inner voice. It all may have started early in life when our parents made statements about what they wanted us to be. Some might counter that this kind of thing doesn't happen anymore, but I recently heard a radio program in which young adults explained that their parents did have definite expectations about what they wanted them to become.

Children do not want to disappoint their parents; they want to make them proud. Even as adults we want to make our parents proud. This might lead us, although we don't realize it, into doing exactly what our parents expect of us instead of listening to our own desires.

Unfortunately, parents can be quite good at manipulating their children. A mother might tell her child, "Please don't do that. It makes Mommy sad." And what child wants to make her mommy sad? What child wants to be responsible for hurting her parents? This is about the same kind of emotional manipulation that I described in the beginning of this section. When a child is the victim, it only becomes worse.

Thank God it doesn't take twenty years of therapy to repair the damages from this kind of manipulation. You just have to realize that this phenomenon is normal behavior in most families. To counteract the negative effects of this kind of manipulation, we have to do something instead of just going to a therapist and talking about it. It is crucial that you ask yourself how you can break this pattern when dealing with your own or others' children.

Have you ever been made fun of by others just for doing things your own way?
Have you ever envied anyone for succeeding with a project of their own?
Have you ever decided not to do something because you were afraid of what others might think?
Have you ever been manipulated into doing something you would rather not have done?

All parents want the best for their children, and there is nothing wrong with this. Problems arise when parents think that they own their children, and when they expect the children to make up for their failures. It is all too easy to expect our children to do what we didn't do in life. But by

doing so, we deny their individuality. For it is not up to us to choose their paths in life.

By placing unfair expectations on our children, we are only demonstrating how we see our own lives. If we are happy with our lives, we will feel less of a need to interfere in the lives of others. But if we are unsatisfied with our lives, we sometimes try to live our lives vicariously rather than making changes in our own lives. This can never work out happily, because we are all different. This is a fact that cannot be ignored.

Your children are not your children. They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.

From *The Prophet*, by Kahlil Gibran

However close you may come to another individual, you will always be alone – alone in the sense that you are a single individual with a body, a will, a system of values, a history of

experiences, and so on. A great deal of life is about learning to live with this separateness. Only by doing this can we live a life in harmony with others.

To embrace this kind of aloneness, this separateness, you must have a good relationship with yourself. You must enjoy communicating openly with yourself. You have to feel safe and secure. For those who are not able to do this, it is natural to seek this sense of security from outside sources.

But this always leads you astray. This is true whether you are seeking your sense of security in a love relationship, in religion, in substance abuse, in money or career or mysticism or anywhere else. True security must always be built up from within, based on a feeling of satisfaction. Therefore you have to celebrate your individuality and listen carefully to your inner voice if you are to find the right path to take in any given moment.