

THE POWER OF

*A
Practice
for
Engaging
Your
Voice
of
Wisdom*

THE POWER OF 10

*A practice for engaging your voice of wisdom
to be the greatest you—the you who is meant to be.*

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*Wisdom tells me I'm nothing. Love tells me I'm everything.
Between the two flows the river of my life. —Nisargadatta
Maharaj*

CONTENTS

PREFACE.....	XI
ABOUT THE NUMBER 10.....	XV
ABOUT THE NAMES OF PEOPLE IN THIS BOOK	XVII
INTRODUCTION.....	1
The Pursuit of Happiness	3
The Power of 10.....	6
A Practice for Engaging Your Voice of Wisdom	8
Learning to Listen to Your Voice of Wisdom	11
Our Toolkit	14
PART 1: INQUIRY.....	17
CHAPTER 1. WHO AM I?	25
For My Self	29
For Others	34
For Living Into	37
CHAPTER 2. HOW DO I IMPACT OTHERS?.....	43
For My Self	46
For Others.....	50
For Living Into	53
CHAPTER 3. HOW WILL I SPEND THIS DAY?.....	59
For My Self	62
For Others	65
For Living Into	68

CHAPTER 4. WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THIS MOMENT?	75
For My Self	77
For Others	81
For Living Into	84
CHAPTER 5. HOW DO WE BECOME OUR GREATEST SELVES?.....	91
For My Self.....	95
For Others	98
For Living Into	101
PART 2: ADVOCACY	107
CHAPTER 6. STAND TALL	115
Root.....	119
Rise	125
Reflect	129
CHAPTER 7. BE KIND	137
Ask.....	141
Accept	143
Acknowledge.....	150
CHAPTER 8. PLAN AHEAD.....	155
Dream	161
Declare	165
Do	167
CHAPTER 9. LET GO	173
Posture	176
Presence	184
Perspective	193

CHAPTER 10. CHOOSE LOVE	203
Commit	207
Challenge	213
Choose	224
PART 3: PRACTICE.....	235
Lean forward	237
Lose your balance	238
Face resistance.....	240
Create a community of intention.....	241
Practice always; practice everywhere.....	243
APPENDIX 1: OUR TOOLKIT	247
APPENDIX 2: DESCRIPTIVE TERMS	249
APPENDIX 3: LIST OF COMMON VALUES	255
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	257
ENDNOTES	259

CHAPTER 1. WHO AM I?

Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom. —Aristotle

Who am I? Ten thousand questions return to this one. Every language, every culture, every spiritual tradition petitions us to answer the question: *Who am I?* The great philosophers of ancient Greece engraved this question on the entrances to their temples. And it has echoed throughout history, from Shakespeare, who advises in *Hamlet* “to thine own self be true,” to our contemporary popular culture. In the film *The Matrix*, when Neo meets the Oracle for the first time, the sign above her kitchen door reads: “Know thyself.”

This first question invites us to examine the domain of self. With three simple words, the question elicits an almost infinite number of responses. Why? Because we each think, speak, and act in our own unique ways.

We all recognize our obvious physical differences: we are blue-eyed or brown-eyed, tall or short, left-handed or right-handed. Each of us experiences life from a unique vantage point, one based on our unique preferences and experiences. Our *preferences* are an innate disposition toward a certain condition, character, or effect—or, more simply, what we think of as our likes and dislikes.

Even when we agree on the names and circumstances of certain people, places, and things, we still attach different meanings to them. For example, she may remember the big

tree in the back yard as the secret hideout where we built a fort, but he may remember it as the high place he fell from and broke his arm. He may remember Aunt Helen as a stern old woman with hands made for spanking, but she thinks of her as the family historian who baked delicious pies. Even identical twins growing up together make meaning in uniquely different ways. Though they may look alike and share the same history, each has a distinctly individual identity and way of relating to the world.

So if we are each unique, does it not follow that each of us has a unique purpose as well? That there is something distinctly ours—some talent, some skill—that offers us the opportunity to manifest our greatest potential? We may even experience an innate calling in the areas where we feel most alive, even if focusing on the term “purpose” can feel intimidating.

Identifying one’s “purpose” suggests a lofty goal, like saying, “I will make a billion dollars,” or “I will cure cancer,” or “I will win an Academy Award.” It might even be so, but need it be so grand? Maybe it is far simpler. Perhaps the secret to identifying your purpose is not in describing some aspirational future state. Rather, it is about connecting to what you are already great at, transforming the intuitive into the intentional by bringing forth that talent for your own and others’ benefit—manifesting the you that is already meant to be.

If you live for creating businesses, your purpose is about building organizations to solve problems that matter. If you are brilliant at research, then it is about spending time solving rational problems. If you are a natural performer and want to enrich the lives of others, then it is about spending more time entertaining. What could be a better purpose than

- to catalyze entrepreneurship?
- to extend human life?
- to make people laugh?

It makes sense, does it not, that your true purpose has less to do with achievements, whatever their magnitude, than in being the best, most authentic you? Being the best you may have a scope as large as the entire world or as small as a single person you love with all your heart. However you express it, you know when your purpose is shining through by the way you feel. Experience tells us this—what happens when you’re being the real, best you? You feel alive. Happy.

The challenge for us all is the same: to choose to manifest what we are truly great at in this moment and in each moment in the future. What we choose to be, we become. To be our authentic, best selves, each of us must choose to be that self now, in the next moment, in the following moment, and so on. As we choose, we create the experience of the present and lay the foundation for the future.

A reasonable person might ask, “How does finding your purpose really make a difference in your life?” Or somewhat more bluntly, “What’s the ‘cash value’ of connecting with your purpose?”

Consider a few examples of people who have clearly found a response to the question: *Who am I?* Although these people are well known for their accomplishments and for living unapologetically on their own terms, their greatness arose from consciously *living into* their purpose—simply by aligning their thoughts, words, and actions with their true nature.

Picasso, one of the twentieth century’s most influential artists, described his purpose this way: “I am always doing

that which I cannot do, in order that I may learn how to do it.” Mother Teresa, a saint in her own lifetime, described herself as “. . . a little pencil in God’s hands.”³ Finally, Muhammad Ali, whose courage extended beyond the world of sports, put it this way: “I know where I’m going and I know the truth, and I don’t have to be what you want me to be. I’m free to be what I want.”

In answering this first question, each of these people declared themselves into being and found the purpose and meaning to live rich, full lives. Here it is important to distinguish between being good at something and living your purpose. Although you may be good at many things, you have only one real purpose in life, though it may express itself in many different forms. Until you acknowledge that purpose, life can appear slightly distorted, like a cubist painting: all the angles are visible, but the essence of your being is out of focus. We see this in others and, less frequently, in ourselves.

An example to help illustrate the point is the story of a once-promising prospect in professional baseball. He began his journey into the big leagues in 1994, working his way up from double-A to triple-A teams. The major leagues were only one step away. Then, on the eve of signing with a professional team, he suddenly quit baseball, never to play the game again. Why? Because he realized that baseball wasn’t his true purpose. The expression of his fullest potential was outside baseball. But even though he never played baseball at the highest level, you still might remember him: his name is Michael Jordan, arguably the best basketball player to ever set foot on the court.

Despite extraordinary success in basketball, Jordan quit to follow his father's dream that he play baseball—only to realize his true passion was basketball. A year after returning to the game, Jordan led the Chicago Bulls to win the first of three straight national championships. In the process, he broke almost every record in the game: five-time league Most Valuable Player, ten-time scoring champion, three-time steals champion, over 32,000 points, 6,000 rebounds, and 5,000 assists. He then went on to write a book about it—*For the Love of the Game*. Michael Jordan loved to play basketball.

Although he was good at almost every sport, his purpose was to elevate the game of basketball. While we might remember him best for his talent on the court, the expression of his purpose took form in different ways over time, from collegiate athlete to professional player to Olympian to team owner. Moreover, by living into his purpose, he inspired many others, both on and off the court. As every kid who laces up a pair of basketball shoes today knows, Michael Jordan found his purpose.

Now ask yourself—what would the world be like if Picasso, Mother Teresa, Muhammad Ali, or even Michael Jordan had not found their purpose?

For My Self

Mediocrity is self-inflicted. Genius is self-bestowed. —Walter Russell

Some people know early on exactly what they want to be in life. Think of the kid you knew in grade school who just knew he would grow up to be a firefighter. Let's call him Adam. Decades after graduation, when you bump into him

again and ask the inevitable question of what he has done with himself, you learn that Adam has, indeed, gone on to become a firefighter; then he specialized and is now a paramedic. When you ask him what it's like to work as a paramedic, he might describe the numerous false alarms, the mind-numbing paperwork, the financial challenges of municipal budgets, and so on.

But when you ask him why he puts up with it, it's like flipping a switch. Adam's eyes light up and he declares, "Because I get to help people!" Then he describes how everyone has a moment when they have a real emergency, when their life depends on the immediate care of someone who can help them in a way they desperately need. Watching him speak, you have no doubt he enjoys being that person and is quietly proud of making a difference. You can see in his eyes and hear in his tone that he loves being a paramedic and that *Adam's purpose* is to help people in physical distress. Perhaps you even feel calmer in his presence knowing people like him exist.

Like Adam, most of us start with a dream. Maybe you have inherited certain aptitudes from your parents or are attracted to the vocation of someone you admire. However an inclination arises, you only begin to understand its true nature once you pursue it. Over time, you begin to understand the nature of your intended vocation. For instance, you may learn that being a firefighter is more than just saving people from burning buildings. It also entails hours of training, cleaning equipment, and waiting.

Taking classes in school, and later working at different jobs, you gain the perspective necessary to recognize and define your abilities and interests. While it is unlikely

that your friend, for example, realized he would one day be a paramedic when he said he wanted to be a fireman, he *knew* he loved helping people. Pursuing his dream of becoming a fireman, Adam realized the true expression of his desires was best channeled through working as a paramedic.

Where to begin if you're unsure about your particular purpose?

Even without looking outside yourself, you can start by taking an inventory of what comes easily to you and what does not: What are your greatest talents? How can those talents be used to provide something others want and need? Which activities do you enjoy the most?

To better focus on the question of identifying your purpose, notice what you are instinctively attracted to and what repels you. In other words, while you may have the capacity to do anything, what would you *prefer* to do? For example, would you rather

- spend time with many people each day or just a few?
- work in one place or travel wherever your work takes you?
- focus on numbers and spreadsheets or words and documents?
- generate novel ideas or organize information?
- confront new challenges daily or spend a lifetime mastering one skill?

Listing your preferences, you are likely to see the outlines of your natural talents. You might notice, for example, that you enjoy analyzing information and are good at it. It would then be helpful to learn this skill is essential in *accounting*,

programming, finance, and related disciplines. This knowledge might illuminate a number of paths you had not previously considered.

Just notice what *pulls* you in contrast to what you have to *push* yourself to do. For instance, you may notice that you enjoy solving problems on your own, but have to force yourself to give presentations to groups. Conversely, you might realize that you like interacting with strangers and would feel chained down sitting at the same desk in the same office every day. It's important to spend time developing the talent or talents that you enjoy—the activities that draw you onward, body, heart, and mind.

Aligned with your purpose, you naturally feel connected to the best you.

- An aligned body feels strength born from the vitality of creation in motion.
- An aligned heart experiences a deep emotional connection to your work.
- An aligned mind directs itself naturally toward fulfilling your objectives.

Unfortunately, too many of us ignore or postpone the sometimes confusing work of exploration. How do we know we're not being ensnared in *someone else's* notion of what should be or in yesterday's dreams? Distracted from our real purpose, we abdicate our potential. The voice of self-defeat whispers, *I don't know how. I don't have what it takes. I don't deserve it.* But who is holding us back? Why not challenge the limits of what we think we are capable of?

What keeps you from being the real you?

Challenges are easy to put off if they entail risk. For example, once you say, “I’m going to be a firefighter,” you commit to running *toward* the fire. You also commit to signing up for and completing rigorous training. Commitment entails the real risk of failure. Maybe you can’t carry all your equipment plus the weight of another person over your shoulder down many flights of stairs. Maybe you will not get the job assignment you most desire. Maybe you will complete the training and learn you don’t want the job. It takes extraordinary courage to commit your life to your passion openly, to shrug off others’ expectations, and to take responsibility for making your dream come true. But what happens if you never try?

For most of us, the greatest challenge of our lives may be identifying our purpose, but our greatest accomplishment is choosing to live into it.

The truth we all come to, sooner or later, is that we can only be ourselves, unique and perfect in our own way. Our distinct perspective contributes to the whole, like a piquant spice in a savory dish or the plaintive sound of a violin floating above the orchestra. Once you fix upon who you are—your true self and your associated purpose—and choose to *live into it*, you will feel it take hold of you. Being the true you is your purpose in life. Choosing that purpose ignites the fire of greatness.

Almost everyone runs *away* from a fire. What fires are you willing to run *toward*?

For Others

Your work is to find out what your work should be and not to neglect it for another's. Clearly discover your work and attend to it with all your heart. —Dhammapada

Who am I to others? So much of who we are is reflected by the people closest to us. As the saying goes, show me your five closest friends, and I will tell you who you are. Those same friends also know you best, in some ways better than you know yourself. When you encounter a long-time friend they will often say, “You look happy,” or “You look tired,” or “You look as though you’re not feeling well.” Their impression of you is a source of invaluable feedback.

Friends who know us well and can remain impartial provide the best advice; they see things in us that we can’t. We may think we know ourselves well, but how much do we really know? Just consider your outward appearance. How often have you seen your picture and thought, *do I really look like that?* Or heard a recording and been astounded at the sound of your voice? The way we see and hear ourselves in our minds is often very different from objective reality. And then there are our mannerisms, the unconscious tics, gestures, and speech patterns that our friends find endearing and that so surprise us when we are reminded of them.

How might the people closest to you see something more?

Others help us overcome the limitations of our inescapable subjectivity. They help us to uncover overlooked strengths and abilities by directing our attention to what we may not otherwise see. One of the best ways to find out who we are to others is to ask our friends to describe our most basic

characteristics. Their responses may be surprising. For example, they may say, “You are so adventurous,” even though you consider yourself to be cautious and restrained. Or they may point to character traits you are unaware of. They might say, “You seem happiest when focused on a challenge,” suggesting you are fundamentally oriented toward achievement. Those who care and who see objectively will likely discern something unique, something you are unaware of. They may also have a strong sense of the most appropriate course to follow—how you might most profitably spend time. So what do you think your friends or family members would say about you?

Try this: ask five people who know you well the same questions you would ask yourself, plus one that might reveal something new:

- What are my greatest talents?
- How can those talents provide something others want and need?
- In what ways am I holding myself back from reaching my greatest potential?

Let’s say, for example, your friends agree that you are a talented painter; you have skillfully reproduced works of great masters. Yet when mentors suggest that you extend the range of your work, you dismiss them. Following a well-trodden path, how far will you get? Not far—your art will seem contrived. The world does not need imitation. What the world wants from each of us is a truthfulness and honesty expressed through our unique point of view. While imitating masters in any medium may increase our understanding of a discipline, greatness ultimately demands that we stand up

to be judged on our own merits. Although there will never be another Picasso, other great artists are yet to be revealed.

Why not be among them?

Only by connecting your talents to a purpose will you discover the unique gifts you have to offer the world.

What true purpose does not benefit others?

Living with purpose we discover our true strengths; committing these strengths to a higher purpose creates a platform for greatness. Our *greatest selves* are manifested when we harness our talents to serve something greater than ourselves and learn that our vocation, as Aristotle pointed out, lies “where talents and the needs of the world cross.” While this may sound like charity, it is not. Everyone has to eat.

Muhammad Ali was a great boxer. He could easily have fought and earned titles only to make money. Hundreds of boxers have had exceptional careers but are little known outside the world of sports. Ali, however, used his ability to box for something more. A controversial and polarizing figure during his time, he used his notoriety to bring attention to the war in Vietnam, to the condition of race relations in America and, later, to the danger of brain injuries associated with contact sports. While he certainly earned a fair sum as a professional fighter, he found his purpose in speaking to causes where he perceived a need. Boxing merely provided the platform to fulfill this purpose.

Ali freed himself from the constraints of just being a successful athlete by asking how he could serve others. Today, he is widely regarded not just for the skills he displayed in the ring but for the values he exemplified outside it. His

question is our own: whether to be merely a successful man or a great advocate for mankind.

Considering what we can do or be for others, we extend the range of our capabilities and in so doing, expand what is possible for ourselves. The only limit to our greatness is the scale by which we choose to measure.

For Living Into

The gap between vision and current reality is also a source of energy. If there were no gap, there would be no need for any action to move towards the vision. We call this gap creative tension.
—Peter Senge

The moment we sink our roots into the ground of our environment, intuition springs forth into intentions. *Where* we first take root is less important than *planting* our roots. Action initiates the process. We can always grow in a new direction—and we will when new revelations mandate change. But first we need to establish a place to begin—and from which we grow.

Reflecting on our earlier examples, the initial seeds of our intentions might be to start a business, to extend human life, or to make people laugh. Only through tapping into a particular set of intentions can we determine whether our thoughts, words, and deeds align with our purpose. This assessment begins with self-awareness. Where do we spend our time, money, and energy? Where do we focus our attention? How might our actual allocation of resources conflict with our stated purpose? The more honest we are with ourselves, the more likely we will be able to recognize, react to, and change our behavior until we get it right.

What holds us back from living into our intentions?

Facing our choices, we confront the fear of failure almost immediately. Fear is debilitating, weakening even the most resilient among us, eroding our confidence and compromising the ability to break through the invisible barriers that keep our potential in check. Imagine, for example, that despite dreaming of playing an instrument or painting, you never acted on this desire simply because you believed you were not good enough.

Whenever you have thoughts such as this, just ask yourself what led to these beliefs. Is it possible your attitudes are driven by an ancient fear that has become a story you tell yourself—one you never thought to question? What other evidence do you have that your case is hopeless? Violinists and painters don't just pick up a bow or brush and create an immediate masterpiece. Mastery takes years of practice. But if you deny yourself the opportunity to learn from your mistakes and develop your talent, you forfeit any possibility of success. There is, after all, truth in the timeworn saying: it is better to try and fail than never to try at all.

Begin by taking a calculated risk. Do it *because* it scares you, because it is essential to face it and live into your authentic self. To commit to this experiment is to embark on a wonderful adventure. So long as you postpone this adventure, you may never find what you truly love. Setting the intention to develop your talents will not only be in accord with your purpose; it will be the ultimate expression of your purpose, even as you learn to improve along the way.

There will inevitably be moments of discord when you wonder, *how did I get here? What am I doing with my life?* Be alert to

such moments, because they probably indicate you are acting at cross-purposes to your true intentions. If you are willing to face the truth, you will dare to hold your life up to a mirror. And more often than you might imagine, what you see will be surprising. If you stay committed to developing your talents, one day you will look up and find that you actually can play the violin or paint. Conversely, you can almost certainly point to at least one cautionary example of the friend who invested years in an unsatisfying career only to look back one day in utter dismay, recognizing a life wasted fighting an imaginary foe or pursuing someone else's dream.

How do we know when we have lost *our* way? Unbiased feedback from others is good, but it is only half the equation. The other half is to be open to and willing to *act* on the feedback we receive. As we begin to recognize the difference between our potential and actual lives, we become aware of a dissonance in body, heart, and mind—a gap between potential and reality filled with anxiety, disillusionment, and regret. For example, we may say family is the most important thing, only to find ourselves working at our job sixty hours a week. Meanwhile, birthday parties, soccer games, and piano recitals pass by without us.

The good news is that this gap also drives us toward resolution. In other words, it provides a creative tension, energy to harness for the benefit of making necessary change. If you want to play the violin well, the desire to close the gap between your *vision* (playing beautiful music) and *current reality* (shrieking sounds that cause the neighbor's dog to howl) creates tension and energy. You sign up for lessons; you critique your performance, practice, and expend real energy to achieve your goal.

And what if you discover that you don't really like playing the violin? Sometimes the gap illuminates what we have concealed from ourselves or confronts us with a reality we have denied. Maybe your parents are avid musicians and you feel pressured to be the same. The gap, however, reinforces the need to align your intentions with your natural way of being. In this case, it may mean accepting that you are "musically challenged." Beating yourself up when you're not completely aligned accomplishes nothing; forcing yourself to keep taking violin lessons even when you find no pleasure in learning to play only makes you miserable and wastes time and money.

Once we identify the gap, how do we close it?

We know we're on our true path when we feel vital and happy. As vision, words, and actions align, we feel the flow of positive energy of living into what we are capable of, and this growing happiness brightens the lives of people around us. And once we are on the right course, if we are truly passionate about what we are committed to, there can be enjoyment even in the effort.

Aligning to your commitments is a practice, even if you never entirely succeed in eliminating the gap. With practice, you progress. Any missteps merely help distinguish the path to success. Even the masters never cease trying to improve. They just learn to enjoy the journey. In the end, you really have no choice but to give yourself over to the fulfillment of your purpose, though its realization may take more than a lifetime. Greatness is not about succeeding; rather, it's about choosing to be the best you through every thought, word, and action in service of something greater than yourself.

Chapter 1 Summary: *Who Am I?* invites us to examine the domain of self

Just as each of us is physically different, we each have a unique purpose, even if it overlaps with that of others. No two violinists play exactly the same way. A purpose need not be a lofty goal; a purpose connects the intuitive (what is) with the intentional (what is possible). The highest expression of our purpose brings forward our natural talents for the benefit of others—not merely in doing what we are good at but what makes us feel alive. And living into our purpose, directly and indirectly, contributes to our happiness and the happiness of others. Should we fail to live into our purpose, on the other hand, we are destined to a life of nagging dissatisfaction.

From the perspective of *self*, purpose appears where responses to these three questions intersect:

1. What are my greatest talents?
2. How can they be used to provide something others want and need?
3. Which of these activities do I most enjoy?

From the perspective of our relationships with *others*, taking advantage of their objective feedback can be helpful. Others' insights can be invaluable; often, they see potential within us that we are unable to see. They are not burdened with the stories we tell ourselves that distort or damage our confidence and have us believe we are incomplete.

- How might those closest to you see something more?
- How do you hold yourself back from reaching your greatest potential?
- What is a true purpose that does *not* benefit others?

From the perspective of *living into* our purpose, the gap between status quo and what we are capable of creates useful tension. When we are living into our purpose, we feel vital and engaged, the tension propelling us toward what is possible. When we resist, the tension compounds frustration and discontent. However, until we are willing to try, and face the risk of failing, we cannot realize our greatest potential. Failure is merely the seal of an authentic challenge.

- What holds you back from living into your intentions?
- How do you know when you have lost your way?
- Once you identify the gap, how can you close it?

THE POWER OF 10 is a practice for engaging the *voice of wisdom* through inquiry and advocacy. Inquiry raises our awareness of *what is* through inviting us to examine our current state of being; advocacy prompts us to live into *what is possible*. Together, inquiry and advocacy evoke the voice of wisdom—the quiet, still voice inside us, the confluence of knowledge, experience, and insight flowing through all living beings that speaks through our bodies, hearts, and minds.

As we learn to listen to it closely, the voice of wisdom reveals our true nature and purpose, calls upon us to commit to something greater, and guides us toward being our best selves in every thought, word, and action. In aligning *what is* and *what is possible*, we realize our highest potential and begin to experience deep, abiding happiness.

At its heart, **THE POWER OF 10** sensitizes us to our own, unique purpose, and helps us discover that spark of the divine at the core of our being. Put simply, it is a practice for engaging your voice of wisdom to become the greatest you—the you who is meant to be.

**STAND TALL
BE KIND
PLAN AHEAD
LET GO
CHOOSE LOVE**

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