



Vision and Viewpoint

a weekly e-newsletter from

Joan Chittister

Coming Home to the Self

We are a culture of misfits—not because there is anything wrong with us as a people but because we are accustomed to becoming things we aren't. So, we don't fit into our own souls. Our schools put out students to fit the economy, for instance, rather than the heart. Good thinkers go into accounting rather than philosophy because accounting pays more. Fine writers go into law because law is more prestigious. Young people with artistic talent go into computer science because computer programming or hotel management or engineering are full of “opportunities”—read “money”—that a water-colorist lacks.

The problem is that when we do not do what we are clearly made to do we are doomed. We spend the rest of our lives looking for the missing piece of ourselves that we lost before we knew we had it.

Then we wonder why the work we do bores us, no matter how many cars we have, no matter how beautiful the vacation house may be. We can't figure out why we still feel restless about life. We wonder what it is that isn't right: the schedule, the children, the marriage, the place.

We lose a taste for life.

Then, it is time to give ourselves the space and means to become again. We need to rearrange the furniture of life to make way for the essence of life: We need to set up an easel and paint. We need to start the woodworking we always wanted to do. We need to take the courses we always wish we had. We need to join the book clubs that talk about the things we are interested in discussing. We need to begin to knit and cook and write and garden. We need to do those unfinished, unstarted, undeveloped things in us that ring the bell of bliss and authenticity. Then life will become life again and all the rust of it will wear away. When we become what we know ourselves to be, we will come home to ourselves.

The rabbis put it this way: “Rabbi,” the disciple asked, “what shall I do to be saved?” And the Rabbi said, “How should I know? Abraham practiced hospitality and was saved. Elias loved to pray and was saved. David ruled a kingdom and God was with him. Follow the deepest inclination of your heart and you, too, will be saved.”

When we live from the inside out rather than from the outside in, everything in life begins to fit.