Spirituality
Soul Seeing



(Unsplash/Guilherme Stecanella)

by Joni Woelfel

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I watched a PBS program about the poet Robert Bly. He lived by Madison, Minnesota, two small towns away from where I grew up. The documentary mentioned a poem of

his, "Watering the Horse," that called for "giving up all ambition," a phrase I found compelling. The Oxford Dictionary defines ambition as "a strong desire to do or achieve something." I think Bly was referring to the secular pursuit of success for the sake of ego, power, materialism, superiority.

When we look at ambition through the eye of the soul, what do we see? I think we see the joy of realizing something spiritual, a state of being that doesn't come easy.

In looking at my own life journey, I see numerous stages in the evolution of this quality that include the adventurous ambition of going to design school and finding a career as a young woman, the ambition of finding a life partner, the ambition of making a home for my family and understanding the concept of sacred space, the rewarding ambition of raising three kind sons, the poignant ambition of seeing them grow up and leave the nest, the wrenching ambition of writing through grief when our youngest took his own life, the healing ambition of putting a marriage back together that completely fell apart, the joyous ambition of welcoming two lovely daughters-in-law to the family and four little genius grandchildren and eventually, and most of all, the heartfelt ambition to spiritually make sense of my unfolding life.

Now, in my later years, I find that having poor health has caused me to move beyond having a lot of ambition for worldly approval to being empowered by a quiet passion for life. However, even that wanes when the tides of suffering have me in their grip. It is then that the experience of ambition is about aspiring to soulfulness and the ability to be with what is, with patience and endurance.

It all depends upon how we see our lives, doesn't it? Our callings, hearing our inner voice, finding a vision that validates itself. The true spirit of ambition is not about winning prizes or being at the top of the heap. Spiritual ambition, godly ambition, which we are born with, is a creative gift that brings hope, equality, strength, help, compassion and peace to ourselves, to our loved ones and the world.

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I once wrote in a book: "Living on the edge of greatness is not a place or destination — but rather a state of being." Maybe the same is true of divinely instilled ambition. If this is so, how can that be lived out in ordinary ways that we can understand?

The words from a 1928 novel, *A Lantern in Her Hand* by Bess Streeter Aldrich, help me see:

> *And now Abbie, thinking of what the girl had just read to her, returned thoughtfully, "You can't describe love, Kathie, and you can't define it. Only it goes with you all your life. I think that love is more like a light that you carry. At first childish happiness keeps it lighted and after that romance. Then motherhood lights it and then duty … and maybe after that, sorrow. You wouldn't think that sorrow could be a light, would you, dearie? But it can. And then, after that, service lights it. Yes … I think that is what love is to a woman … a lantern in her hand.*"

If love is a lantern in our hand, I see the true spirit of ambition as the keeper of the flame — an eternal energy in our hearts put there by God to encourage, guide and draw us forward all the days of our lives, good, bad, light, dark, and everything in between.

[Joni Woelfel is the author of several books, including *The Edge of Greatness: Empowering Meditations for Life*.]

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