

The Heartfelt Desire

by Anne Douglas

"Let yourself be silently drawn by the strange pull of what you really love. It will not lead you astray." -Rumi

In a traditional Yoga Nidra practice the Sankalpa consists simply of a *resolve* in the form of a one-sentence silent proclamation of something the practitioner wants to actualize in their life. It could be said that the main purpose in Yoga Nidra is to achieve the Sankalpa.

In iRest Yoga Nidra, the Sankalpa is potentized by breaking it down into 3 significant parts, the Intention, the Heartfelt Desire and the Inner Resource. Each step helps to clarify the direction and enhance the outcome of the practice. The purpose of this article is to explore the Heartfelt Desire.

Dr. Richard Miller, PhD, developed the iRest Yoga Nidra protocol and founded the Integrative Restoration Institute (IRI) with a mission statement to *provide programs and teacher trainings that show you how to live a contented life, free of conflict and fear, by opening your mind and body to its inherent ground of health and well-being. It is our vision to help people resolve their pain and suffering by rediscovering their essential wholeness and their interconnectedness with all of life. From this place of discovery, trauma and difficult life situations are then met with a deeply wise and compassionate response.*

To this end, Dr. Miller determined that the addition of a *Heartfelt Desire* would help to shift a resolve from being a potentially superficial matter, to something of greater impact and meaning in one's life. This could include the longing for liberation to our true nature that is already whole and perfect in this and every moment.

"We are mining for gold," states Miller, *"and receiving our marching orders from our True Nature each time we avail ourselves to our heart's call."* We accomplish this by asking ourselves questions such as, *"What is life asking of me?"* and *"How best can I serve my heart's longing?"* Miller suggests that we pause in silence as we ask, and allow a *pranic living force that manifests the desire to blossom as thought and thought to action.*

Miller has noticed that some people can't relate to the words *Heartfelt Desire* and so he continues to fine tune it's effectiveness by interviewing his audience for the words that best suit them. Some responses include *Heartfelt Mission*, and

Heartfelt Purpose or *Dharma*. Each variation provides a window into the infinite possibilities and can be used interchangeably.

These new translations of the Heartfelt Desire may convey a higher calling that invites a greater harmony with life. Correspondingly, the word *dharma* comes from the Sanskrit root *rta*, which means to be in total harmony with the universe.

Heartfelt Mission has been well received by the military community whose members have a strong sense of duty, a desire to serve and great respect and humility for a higher authority to whom they are willing to put their lives on the line.

The Heartfelt Desire is formulated at the beginning of the practice and seeded into the mind as a simple affirmation. It is germinated, so to speak, through the deep relaxation and receptivity that is invoked by sensing the body, breath and feelings, as well as emotions, cognitions and their opposites.

It's blossoming can come when the Heartfelt Desire is invited back into awareness towards the end of the practice, as one opens to the experience of just being. It is in this openness of being that the truth of the Heart's Purpose can shine forth uncloaked by one's conditioning or self-imposed limitations.

As we open to the experience of our desire, mission, or purpose being actualized, and allow spontaneous images and feelings to emerge, we are building new neural connections in our brain that hardwire it as our new reality. As Rick Hanson, author of *Hardwiring Happiness* wrote, "*Emotions are like rocket fuel for building new neural circuitry.*"

Continued practice in this way nourishes our Sankalpa right into life! As Swami Satyananda Saraswati of the Bihar School of Yoga stated in his book *Yoga Nidra*, "*When sankalpa becomes the directing force, everything you do in life becomes successful.*"

Alive in your very own heart is the code to living a fulfilling, purposeful life that is unique to you. Your heart is like a homing device or beacon that steers you ever toward fulfillment by what feels right and true. Every heartfelt "yes" or "no" is a clarion call from your most authentic self that can show you the way home to abiding peace and wholehearted living.

In iRest, we take the time to tune into our *heartfelt desires* as a means to harness our will, much like we harness a powerful steed that provides the means to accomplish the fullness of our destiny.

To help students flush out their Heart Felt Desire (HFD), I lead the following meditation to begin an iRest practice and then have them write down their insights before moving into the rest of the practice;

Imagine you are at the end of your days, on your deathbed, and you are looking back upon your life with a sense of wonder and accomplishment. What are the moments that you are most grateful for? ... What were your greatest successes personally, professionally and spiritually?... Are there any unfulfilled desires that if you could turn back time, you would add to your life experiences?

Now imagine yourself actually going back in time and inserting the fulfillment of these desires. Use all of the senses and emotions to help anchor this in as a new memory (the mind doesn't know the difference between real and imagined).

Now, as you once again look back upon your life, is there a common thread or theme to your hearts desires that might be revealed as your life's purpose or mission or dharma? ... Take your time with this. Allow it to bubble up from the heart. It might at first come more as a feeling rather than through thinking.

There is great benefit to seeing what is right and good in our lives. Rick Hanson, neuropsychologist and author of the New York Times best selling book *Hardwiring Happiness* explains that our brains are hardwired to be like Velcro for negative experiences and like Teflon for positive experiences.

The capacity to see and anticipate what's wrong is a primal function that helps to keep us safe and alive. Positive experiences slough off, almost unregistered or as non-events because they don't contribute to our immediate survival and longevity.

As a way to counter balance the negative impact of this unconscious behavior Hanson suggests "*taking in the good*", which is to proactively notice what is GOOD in our daily lives, and to really feel it's impact on our physiology. Examples of this might be to catch and linger in the joyful moments with a loved one, or to deeply feel the beauty of a sunset, a bird's song or an exquisite piece of music. Hanson suggests that we need 5 positives for every negative in order to build resilience in the face of our negative perceptions.

When we recall the HFD at the end of our iRest practice, we can invite our students to imagine what their daily lives are like with the HFD as already

true. To allow images and what I call “future memories” to emerge that show how the fruition of the HFD positively impacts our relationships, our daily activities, our health and well being, and how we feel about ourselves, etc.

As previously mentioned, Hanson states that emotions give a turbo boost to hardwiring new neural circuitry. So when we recall the HFD, we can ask students to truly FEEL how it is to live their HFD and notice what emotions arise, gross or subtle. We might invite them to keep revisiting this feeling, even after the formal iRest practice has finished, in order to continue to anchor in the new neural circuitry until it becomes habit.

For homework in a series of iRest classes, I invite students to list any inspired intentions and action steps that will help them to manifest the HFD and to include time bound deadlines to ensure success. In this way, we are birthing the Heartfelt Purpose with the Sankalpa, seeding it into our neural circuitry through the imagined imagery, turbo boosting it with corresponding emotions, and actualizing it through meaningful action steps in our daily lives.

When we really want what we want, whether it is for radiant health or to know the Oneness of Being, our will and Divine Will harmonize as one and activate the forces of destiny. As the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (IV.4.5) so succinctly states;

“You are what your deep, driving desire is.
As your desire is, so is your will.
As your will is, so is your deed.
As your deed is, so is your destiny.”

The forces of destiny are ever present, beating in our very own hearts. Will you heed the call?

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