

It is generally considered admirable for a person to work toward a goal of some kind. It seems, for work to be thought of as worthwhile, that we must always think about the finished project. In addition, most of us are moving ahead in our minds to the next job on a long list.

I read a book a few years ago that cast a bit of doubt on this notion. The author suggested that working toward a goal is not always the best way to view our labors. This book put forth the idea that it is also the work itself that is important and often interesting. It is an aspect of "living in the moment," of concentrating on and enjoying what we are doing without anticipating the success of the accomplishment. Our devastation because of the failure of a project might also be less if we had assigned its success less importance in the beginning.

So, perhaps we have become too goal-oriented. Maybe, we do need to step back and survey what we are doing and sometimes pat ourselves on the back for being diligent workers as well as for becoming society's successes.

I began to think about the work I do and have tried to put it into better perspective. Some jobs I do only because of the end result. But, I complete other tasks almost with a feeling of regret that I'm finished. These jobs that are "fun" are probably no more worthy than the ones I don't enjoy doing. I decided to look at some of the work I do and see if I can figure out why I particularly like some tasks.

I like to write these newsletters. It does please me when someone mentions that a certain week's essay was enjoyable or informative. But, that's not why I write them. No, it is the actual work of composing the essay that is the most satisfying part. Putting my thoughts into words on clean, lined paper with a pencil is especially gratifying. I like paper, I like pencils and mechanical pencil sharpeners, and I like the smell of these elemental tools. Often, I do write the newsletters "by hand," later typing them on the computer. But, even when I write directly on the laptop, I enjoy the sensation of thinking a thought and then seeing it appear in front of me in black and white. The idea that I can make these little marks and other people actually understand what I mean is rather profound.

I also like to make wool yarn on my spinning wheel. The finished product is nice, and I enjoy winding the soft yarn to make a neat skein that I can use later to knit or weave into some useful item. But, the act of spinning itself is yet more fascinating. In this case, I think it is the cadence, the rhythm of spinning yarn that makes it appealing. The whirr of the wheel, the click of the treadle, and the coordination that is required to keep everything moving properly are compelling. I enjoy the feel of the soft rolls of combed wool in my hands. I like pulling it out, drafting as it spins, making a yarn that is springy and even. I enjoy the sameness of it as yard after yard, the thread fills up the bobbin. And, just as it remains the same, it is also always different, as wool from each sheep has its own characteristics. And even fleece from the same ewe is affected by temperature, humidity, and the mental state of the spinner. I always regret coming to the end of a fleece, because I am just beginning to "know" that wool. Another year will pass before there will be fleece from the same sheep again.

I like to milk a cow by hand. When I am milking Effie, I am not constantly moving in my mind to the next job on my list. I have no goal when I am milking beyond the next squeeze that brings forth the frothy, rich milk. I like the "ping" the stream of milk makes as it strikes the bottom of the empty stainless steel pail. I feel the strength in my forearms and hands as I milk. And, I like the warmth of the cow. My head is at her flank, and I feel her chewing her cud as she quietly stands and lets me relieve her of her burden. Her stomach makes those noises so natural to a healthy cow, and her feet, planted stolidly and unmoving, are no threat. While I'm milking, the thoughts of whipped cream or fresh butter seldom enter my thoughts. It's the job itself that matters.

Perhaps, we need to invest all of our work with that sense of timelessness that exists when we're doing something we enjoy. Maybe we need to become a little less tied to our goals and a little more connected to the dignity of the work itself. We might then be able to find satisfaction in much more of what we do and have fewer tasks that we accomplish only because we must in order to reach a certain end. Maybe all work is equally important. If we could think a little more

along that line, we could perhaps learn to enjoy the actual living of our lives instead of just looking forward to hoped for results in an uncertain future.