

We usually think that it is admirable for a person to work toward a goal of some kind. It seems, for work to be worthwhile, we must always think in terms of the finished product. In addition, most of us are often thinking ahead to the next task we have to do, or even the next several tasks.

I read a book recently that suggested that this is perhaps not always the best way in which to view our work. This book put forth the idea that it is also the work itself that is important and interesting, not just the anticipation of success. Our devastation because of the failure of a project would also be less, since we had assigned its success less importance in the beginning.

Perhaps we have become too goal-oriented. Maybe we do need to step back, survey what we are doing, and pat ourselves on the backs for being diligent workers instead of just 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" probably have no more importance than the ones we 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 certain tasks.

I like to write these essays. I don't write for praise from others. In fact, writing "into the void" as one does on a web site like this, I'm not even sure if anyone reads what I write. Sometimes, I do get some indication from a friend or acquaintance that they have read a particular essay, but mostly, I have no idea who reads what I write and who does not.

It is the actual work of putting words down on paper or even on a computer screen that is satisfying. I like the clean, uncluttered lines of printing that appear from the movement of my fingers. I enjoy the sensation of thinking a thought and then seeing it appear in black and white. It seems a miracle that I can make these little marks and squiggles, and someone can actually understand what they mean.

I like to make wool yarn on the spinning wheel. The finished product is nice, and I enjoy winding the soft yarn to make a nice ball I can use later for weaving or knitting. But, it is the act itself that makes spinning so fascinating. I like the cadence, the rhythm, the subtle whirrs and clicks that accompany the spinning of yarn. I enjoy the feeling of the soft wool as I pull it out to make springy yarn. I enjoy the sameness of the action as meter after meter of yarn fill the bobbin. And, I also find pleasure in the differences that are evident in the fleeces of the various ewes.

I like to milk a cow by hand. I'm not constantly moving in my mind to the next job on my list. I have no goal when I'm 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 pail. I enjoy seeing the pail fill and the foam build. I actively feel my forearms and hands building muscle and strength in every motion. 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 solidly and unmoving, are no threat. While I'm

milking, the thoughts of fresh butter or whipped cream seldom enter my mind. It's the job itself that matters.

This has all come to mind because I just finished a weaving project. After the fabric—mostly kitchen towels—came off the loom, I was suddenly without that job. I realized that what I miss is the banging of the loom and the attention to details of the pattern I note as I beat each row of thread that makes a fabric, rug, or table runner. Even though the house badly needs a thorough cleaning, even though not quite all the garden is planted, even though the flower beds need weeding and flowers need to be planted, I want to get warp on the loom again and begin weaving the next project.

Perhaps we need to invest all of our work with that sense of timelessness that exists when we are 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. Whether it is washing dishes (I like that job, too) or teaching a class in philosophy, or hanging laundry on a line, or selling ice cream—we need to enjoy the work itself.