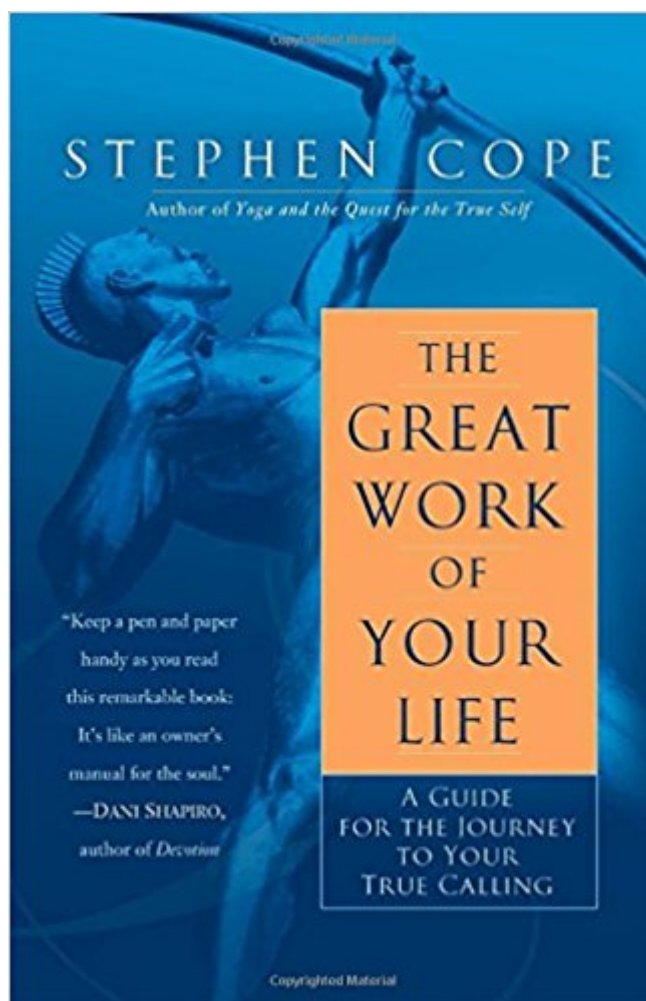


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# The Great Work Of Your Life: A Guide For The Journey To Your True Calling



## Synopsis

From the Senior Scholar-in-residence and Ambassador for the famed Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health comes an incisive and inspiring meditation on living the life you were born to live. In this fast-paced age, the often overwhelming realities of daily life may leave you feeling uncertain about how to realize your life's true purpose—what spiritual teachers call dharma. But yoga master Stephen Cope says that in order to have a fulfilling life you must, in fact, discover the deep purpose hidden at the very core of your self. In *The Great Work of Your Life*, Cope describes the process of unlocking the unique possibility harbored within every human soul. The secret, he asserts, can be found in the pages of a two-thousand-year-old spiritual classic called the *Bhagavad Gita*—an ancient allegory about the path to dharma, told through a timeless dialogue between the fabled archer, Arjuna, and his divine mentor, Krishna. Cope takes readers on a step-by-step tour of this revered tale, and in order to make it relevant to contemporary readers, he highlights well-known Western lives that embody its central principles—including such luminaries as Jane Goodall, whose life trajectory shows us the power of honoring The Gift; Walt Whitman, who listened for the call of the times; Susan B. Anthony, whose example demonstrates the power of focused energy; John Keats, who was able to let his desire give birth to aspiration; and Harriet Tubman, whose life was nothing if not a lesson in learning to walk by faith. This essential guide also includes everyday stories about following the path to dharma, which illustrate the astonishingly contemporary relevance and practicality of this classic yogic story. If you're feeling lost in your own life's journey, *The Great Work of Your Life* may provide you with answers to the questions you most urgently need addressed—and may help you to find and to embrace your true calling.

**Praise for *The Great Work of Your Life***

“Keep a pen and paper handy as you read this remarkable book: It's like an owner's manual for the soul.” —Dani Shapiro, author of *Devotion*

“A masterwork . . . You'll find inspiration in these pages. You'll gain a better appreciation of divine guidance and perhaps even understand how you might better hear it in your own life.” —*Yoga Journal*

“I am moved and inspired by this book, the clarity and beauty of the lives lived in it, and the timeless dharma it teaches.” —Jack Kornfield, author of *A Path with Heart*

“A rich source of contemplation and inspiration [that] encourages readers . . . to discover and fully pursue their inner self's calling.” —*Publishers Weekly*

“Fabulous . . . If you have ever wondered what your purpose is, this book is a great guide to help you on your path.” —*YogaHara*

From the Hardcover edition.

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## Customer Reviews

Praise for *The Great Work of Your Life*—“Cope layers biographical teaching stories between the lessons offered by what might be the greatest teaching story of all: the Bhagavad Gita, in which Krishna teaches Arjuna about finding and manifesting your life’s divine purpose, or dharma. Cope, while examining the life struggles faced by such visionaries as Jane Goodall, Harriet Tubman, and Mohandas Gandhi, encourages readers to reject the modern idea that ‘we can be anyone we want to be’ and instead to discover and fully pursue their inner self’s calling.” The historical portraits make interesting reading in their own right. •Cope is a skilled storyteller—but in the service of illustrating a well-organized thesis about achieving true fulfillment, they offer a rich source of contemplation and inspiration. •Publisher—“*cs Weekly*” The director of the Institute for Extraordinary Living at the Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health inquires into the dharma--vocation or calling--of a selection of both illustrious and ordinary individuals. ‘Yogis insist that every single human being has a unique vocation,’ writes Cope. Turning to the *Bhagavad Gita* for guidance, the author realized the difficulty in penetrating even the first piece of advice: ‘Discern, name, and then embrace your own dharma.’ For some, their dharma is a ready and apparent gift, but others struggle long and hard to hear that piece of inner music, that passion. So Cope illustrates this fact of life through example, drawing smooth portraits of important historical characters and twining them with glimpses into the lives of everyday people he knows. For example, he weds Henry David Thoreau—“*cs* courage to follow his muse in front of an entire

town. His disapprobation with the story of a psychiatric nurse with a magical caregiving hand who needed help in recognizing and using her talent. Cope also tells the stories of Robert Frost finding a voice word by word, Walt Whitman's wartime nursing, 'a calling for which he didn't even know he was searching,' and Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot breaking the rules to understand the connection between seeing and painting. With ringing clarity, Cope gets his main point across: that seeking is all and that dharma will allow you to bear life's suffering. 'You only get yourself when you lose yourself to some great work,' he writes. An engaging exploration into living fully."

•Kirkus "You'll find inspiration in these pages. You'll gain a better appreciation of divine guidance and perhaps even understand how you might better hear it in your own life. With this masterwork of a book, Stephen Cope shows us once again that great yoga writing need not be esoteric, complicated, or full of Sanskrit to point the way to liberation."

•Yoga Journal "Stephen Cope is a national treasure. He is an incredibly rare combination of brilliant spiritual thinker, elegant prose stylist, and empathic, grounded teacher. The dharma stories threaded throughout *The Great Work of Your Life* are moving and instructive. Keep a pen and paper handy as you read this remarkable book: It's like an owner's manual for the soul."

•Dani Shapiro, author of *Devotion* "I am moved and inspired by *The Great Work of Your Life*, the clarity and beauty of the lives lived in it, and the timeless dharma it teaches."

•Jack Kornfield, author of *A Path with Heart* "I was spellbound and inspired by this book from beginning to end. I thought, How is he going to bring together the message of the Gita, the enduringly compelling lives of so many amazing people, the quest for passionate expression in the lives of his friends—how will he keep so many balls juggling at the same time without dropping any—and end by making it all relevant to me right now in my life? And he has! One rarely thinks of a dharma book as a page-turner, but this one is indeed that. This is a great read and a great revitalizing breath of fresh air."

•Sylvia Boorstein, author of *Happiness Is an Inside Job* "Stephen Cope has taken great Western figures—poets, painters, freedom fighters, a composer—and shows how the dharma of fierce determination played through their lives and how it can inspire all of us today. Tears came to my eyes as I read how Walt Whitman found himself. This is an important book—West and East informing each other. It was a joy to read."

•Natalie Goldberg, author of *Old Friend from Far Away* "Consistently well-written and get-up-and-go inspirational, this book should go right to the top of your reading list. This valuable book should help you bring 'the great work of your own life' into sharper focus."

—Yoga International From the Hardcover edition.

Stephen Cope has been for many years the Senior Scholar in Residence at Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health in the Berkshire Hills of Western Massachusetts. He is the author of a number of bestselling books, including *Yoga and the Quest for the True Self* and *The Wisdom of Yoga*. From the Hardcover edition.

I recently finished this book and I do admit that it is inspirational and makes a lot of good points. Definately worthwhile reading. However, I was disappointed that none of Mr. Cope's examples of people who found their dharma included people with real family or financial obligations. Most of us cannot walk in the woods or near a pond for a couple years (while our mother brings us cookies) and just write poetry and reflect on nature. We must also support and care for our families. I would very much like to find inspiration from people who were able to meet their obligations and still find a way to find their dharma tat does not make anyone else suffer. I became an engineer solely for the reason that it was a secure way to provide for my family. For a long time my dharma was simply just that, to support and care for my family. Being able to do so made me very happy. Now that my children are grown or gone (one died in a car accident) I understand that life is very short and I want to grow as a person before it's my time to go as well. Yet I still have an obligation to my husband and don't want him to feel like he has to bear the complete burden of maintaining our life just so I can "find myself". It wouldn't be fair to him. I would have also liked more examples of people who didn't know what their calling was. Most of Mr. Cope's examples were people that always knew they wanted to be a poet or a writer or had a very strong drive to do something very specific. I, on the other hand, am not so clear. I have lots of interests, many of which I obsess over,,,,, for a very brief period of time. Then another interest catches my eye. Perhaps the journey is part of the process and the mere act of looking is teaching me what I need to know. Still, it would be nice to find something that makes me feel like I'm not just treading water waiting out the second half of my life.

I LOVED this book! I came across it serendipitous-ly... at a time when I am looking for what has been calling me. Stephen Cope is an excellent author and I hated to see the book end! We traveled through both the 'ordinary' and exemplar examples of what "seats" us in the work that we were meant to do on this earth. A practical guide to navigate from that initial stirring/discontent to finding one's purpose. I have already begun to share with others and highly recommend this book

I read a lot. I've written a couple of bestsellers. This book was recommended to me by a friend who

went through a rough time and this helped him through it. "It's reminds me of your books," he said. Which, of course, made me curious. I picked it up. This book is simply amazing. I've bought copies as gifts for friends and recommend it highly every chance I get. I hope you buy this book. It is one of those experiences that will truly change your life for the better.

It's a very good guidance to find purpose and your own dharma in life. It will not tell you what is your dharma or purpose or what to do, because that is very personal for each one, but this book is for sure a very good start. I got many great ideas for my life and my own search: 1.) One of those ideas is that one needs to search actively for his/her dharma.. sometime we just wait that things get clear to us by themselves, we have to look for clarity actively, 2.) we have qualities that can fit in more than one dharma, I have never thought about it..3. ) Another idea that I liked is that the right size for dharma is 'not too big, not too small'. 4.) And the thing about 'dharma' or 'duty', no matter who can be disappointed one should never betrayed him/her trueself in order to meet others expectations. 5.) Life experiences ara soulmakers and beauty can also be revealed by sorrow and life losses. 6.) Sometimes we do need to take ourselves to zero 7.) You only get yourself when you lose yourself to something greater, do not wait the fruits for your dharma, just put it on service to others and to the world. I really did love this book by Stephen Cope, it was a very warm lecture for me.

We are currently reading this book (The Great Work of Your Life) in our Yoga book club. We had just finished a year long study of the Bhagavad Gita which is about finding and living your dharma. So this was a perfect follow up to that. I especially liked the mini bios he put in about famous people who have outstandingly lived their dharma (the great work of their life) as examples of lessons given in the Gita. It is a helpful book if you have a desire to find your true calling and a comforting one if you have no such desire. My favorite quote: "Our understanding of dharma is obscured by the narcissism of our time." Worth reading, this book is thoroughly researched and well written.

I truly enjoyed this book. Learning about the lives of others is always inspiring. I usually read and then give away most books but not this one, it went onto the bookshelf, I liked it that much.

I thoroughly enjoyed this book. It was thought provoking and provided insights on individuals that I had previously given little thought to. Thank you.

Love Stephen Cope's writings. I got so much out of this book that I'm reading it again to digest it a

bit deeper. It speaks to my life, my heart, and my soul. I've shared this title with friends as well. I highly recommend it.

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