

Supplement IV - Identifying Your Inner Resources

Everything you require to live your highest purposes in life is available to you. All you need to do is identify your inner resources and discover how to get them working together for a common aim. It takes some self-study and a lot of self-affirmation. What about self-affirmation? Is it all right to build your self-esteem when you're on the spiritual path, or is humility the better way? Maybe the answer is that these two qualities — self-affirmation and humility — aren't mutually exclusive. The Cayce readings frequently encouraged people to be more humble; but just as often, they instructed spiritual seekers to honor themselves.

A distinction, though, must be made between "honoring yourself" and "glorifying yourself." One way to understand self-glorification is to see it in terms of the personality (as described previously). If you glorify yourself, you identify with your personality and see yourself as better than others. And, in fact, there may be parts of yourself that are especially skilled and capable — far beyond the abilities of most everyone else. However, what part of you is glorified? It's always an aspect of personality. It's not the deeper, more authentic side called individuality. At the level of individuality we are equally special. Of course, even though we share a fundamental spiritual core, differences exist from one soul to another. For example, some souls have greater spiritual maturity than others, but that doesn't make them better. In the same way, we could hardly say a teenager is somehow better than a preschooler or a full-grown tree is superior to a sapling.

Something remarkable happens whenever you remember your true identity as individuality. Suddenly there is no compulsion to compare yourself to others. There is no need to feel better about yourself at the expense of someone else. In fact, to know your true nature, to identify with your Higher Self, is to "honor yourself" in the sense intended by the Cayce readings. It means to recognize, respect, and commit yourself to the values and world view of your individuality self. It means to believe your life counts — just as every life does — and to accept the reality of a Higher Power or God.

In essence, this way of honoring yourself is harmonious with humility. Both qualities recognize the individual self is important, but only in relationship to something bigger. This fact is a starting point for finding the exact nature of your purposes in life. Living within you amidst all the diverse, contradictory features of your personality is what one modern mystic has called "an imprisoned splendor." This Higher Self is something of tremendous beauty and power, but left to itself it has no purpose or meaning. Purpose and meaning are in relationship — relationship to other souls and to your Creator. That is the heart of humility; it's also the basis of honoring yourself.

GETTING IN TOUCH WITH YOUR INDIVIDUALITY

Is your individuality self real to you, a part of your direct experience? Or, does all this talk of a Higher Self, Real "I," or "imprisoned splendor" sound nice but remain

abstract theory? If it's only speculation you wish were true, then doubts will always creep in.

Maybe you know your individuality better than you think you do. Most likely you have caught glimpses of your Higher Ego on a fairly regular basis and may never have realized exactly what it was you were experiencing. It's probably safe to assume almost everyone has had direct encounters, however fleeting, with the Higher Self. Two methods are most common: seeing the qualities of your own individuality mirrored in other people whom you admire, and experiencing peak spiritual moments.

Perhaps it sounds strange that we could recognize our own spiritual nature in someone else. Doesn't the emphasis on "going within" and "exploring our own inner depths" deny the value of looking to other people? Maybe not. Could it be that we are psychologically built in such a way that the outer world often reflects the inner one?

You're probably familiar with this concept in regard to character faults. It's often been said that the shortcomings in other people that irritate you most are ones you have within yourself. This is called **projection**: you notice in the world around you those things that are in your own makeup. The notion probably makes you uncomfortable. You might try to squirm out of it by thinking of exceptions to the rule, but it's inescapably true.

If we'll admit projection happens, we can claim the good news too. Not only do we unconsciously project our faults onto others; we do the same thing with our good qualities. The excellence and virtue we see in those whom we admire are qualities of our own Higher Self.

Take a minute to think about this in a personal way. Make a note of two people whom you hold in great esteem. Pick one man and one woman. Then for each person you've selected, write down the positive qualities you see in that individual. Wait to read on until you've finished this task.

Now look at your list of qualities. It's impressive, isn't it? Perhaps there is no one person living today who actively expresses all those attributes. Nevertheless, all those qualities exist within you as potentials, otherwise you wouldn't be able to recognize them in other people. Admittedly, in a single lifetime you may not ever get around to developing all the potentials of your individuality self. However it's inspiring and hopeful just to imagine these virtues live in you.

The insights that come once you accept and work with positive projection provide one kind of clue about the nature of your Higher Self. Equally important is the revelation that comes from peak experiences. The word "revelation" is appropriate here, even though you may have never thought of yourself as a visionary or spiritual seer. Yet with a careful review of your life, you're sure to remember some extraordinary moments in which you caught the bigger picture of the meaning of life.

What are your peak spiritual experiences? Some of these moments may have come in childhood, others in adolescence and adulthood. When have you felt intensely your Real "I"? One hint comes from the five aspects of the individuality self that were described earlier. Remember that each one ends with the letters i-t-y. Unity knows the oneness of all life. Continuity means that your essence is still developing, but it will live forever. Sensitivity perceives the visible and invisible realms. Creativity sees life with fresh, imaginative eyes. And activity means your Higher Self is involved with your daily life, whether you consciously experience it or not.

Peak spiritual moments that reflect the qualities of the Higher Self come in both ordinary and exceptional ways. Walking in nature, weeding a garden, or taking a quiet moment to love someone can suddenly turn into a revelation. Unexpectedly the familiar personality patterns of thinking and feeling disappear, and you reconnect with another side of yourself. Other times, a revelation of your individuality self can come in an extraordinarily encouraging dream that stays with you for weeks afterward. Or, on another occasion, a profound prayer and meditation experience can be the source of a peak moment.

The new identity is totally positive and uplifting; and yet paradoxically, it feels both foreign and completely familiar. You're largely unacquainted with this mysterious part of yourself because you're in touch with it so rarely. However, it gives you the feeling of coming home to your true identity.

Take a moment now to think about your own peak moments. Spend some time reviewing your life from earliest childhood memories right up to the present. What are the experiences that stand out as spiritual high points? Some of these moments probably came in ordinary settings, but you perceived or understood what was going on in an exceptional way. Other times you may have been in an altered state of consciousness, such as a dream, hypnosis, or meditation. Many of these experiences will feel like they came as a gift to you — they can't be explained by anything you did to make them happen.

As you review your life and remember glimpses of your individuality self, recreate the experiences within yourself. Don't just remember what happened; let yourself relive in your imagination some of those moments with the same feelings, thoughts, and understandings. Wait to read on until you've finished this life review.

Now you're ready to summarize what you've seen about your Higher Self. Combine the understanding that comes from identifying with your positive projections and from reliving peak spiritual moments. Get as clear an image as you can of this place within yourself that is removed from your personality wheel. It's another center of personal identity. Even though you may have been in touch with it only on rare occasions, you know it's real. You may not know how to go back to it whenever you want, but there's no doubt in your mind it's authentic.

Next, give it a name or a label. Choose words that define or describe that place within yourself, as you best know it so far. Create a phrase that is personally meaningful

because it captures the essence of your individuality center as you have experienced it. Here are some examples others have written:

- oneness of all life;
- servant of Jesus;
- boundless energy and love;
- joyful trust.

They aren't the "right answer" because there is no right or wrong in something like this. The words that ring true for you are the best ones.

Take some time now to formulate your own wording. Keep in mind that what you create is a temporary description. In the months and years ahead you will have further experiences of your individuality. As you do, your understanding will deepen and a different descriptive label may occur to you.

Once you've finished this task you may wonder what you've actually done. Have you defined the way you ought to be all the time? Have you specified your mission in life? Neither is true. No one can expect to be constantly in touch with his or her individuality center. Perhaps you can come to know it so clearly that it can guide important decision making and provide daily inspiration. However, it's foolish to put unrealistic pressure on yourself. You won't always measure up to the very best; but at the same time, it's important to define just what is the best you know.

The Cayce readings called such a personal standard the spiritual ideal. You have, in effect, set a personal spiritual ideal by choosing words to describe your individuality identity. This step is so vital that it was recommended in most of Cayce's more than nineteen hundred life readings. In helping people find purpose in life, he wisely counseled them in a systematic program for self-discovery. Often in the opening passages of a life reading, Cayce placed great emphasis on the importance of setting a spiritual ideal. In one reading this process of identifying and labeling the individuality self is called the "most important experience" that a soul can have in material life. The point of choosing a spiritual ideal is not to create a source of guilt for continual shortcomings. Instead it's a method of claiming the truth about yourself and aiming you in the right direction.

How does the wording of your spiritual ideal relate to your mission in life? The two are not identical because your spiritual mission for this lifetime involves specific tasks and service. However, the knowledge of your highest purpose in life resides in your individuality self. And the actual living of your mission — as distinct from merely knowing what it is — requires that your Real "I" harness the talents of your personality and direct its many "I's." The clearer you are about the qualities of your Real Self, the more likely you are to be successful. In other words, when you choose a descriptive label for your individuality — when you set a spiritual ideal — you recognize the place in yourself that can guide all the further steps for finding and living your mission.

WHAT ARE YOUR TALENTS AND STRENGTHS?

Each soul is born with an array of skills, strengths, and aptitudes. You, like everyone, have special talents that equip you for a creative, fulfilling life. You came into this lifetime with the assets you would need to be a success. Some of your talents have emerged naturally — abilities that simply are second nature for you. However, many other strong points have required some work or training in order to develop and mature. They have been like seeds that you were given at birth, but they sprout and grow only if you carefully nurture them.

Sometimes it may be hard for you to accept the fact that you are truly a talented person. Modern society gives extraordinary attention and publicity to just a few artists, athletes, entertainers, scholars, and politicians who excel. Sometimes it may be easy to catch yourself making comparisons and saying to yourself, "Do I really have any strong points? Isn't someone always better than I?"

In moments like these you need another way of evaluating yourself. The issue is not if you are the very best at some task. It's a question of what abilities you can draw upon to create and serve in the world. The Cayce readings redefined what it actually means to be the best at some talent. For your specific mission in life, with the people whose lives you were born to touch, you are the very best with your talents and skills. No one can live your spiritual purpose as well as you can.

One of the most fascinating parts of a Cayce life reading was its description of an individual's talents. Even the most common person was portrayed as gifted. For example, a seventy-year-old housewife was told in her reading that she had a strong will, was a good conversationalist, had a love of beauty, and was a good judge of people. A forty-year-old engineer received this portrait of his talents: skill with mechanical things, the perception of details, intelligence, and a mystical bent. A two-year-old boy was told in his life reading that he brought with him into this lifetime these five assets: an aptitude for political and economic affairs, little fear of anything, communication skills, an ability to influence people, and a natural understanding of legal matters.

What is a talent or aptitude? It's a special ability that makes something come easily or naturally. It's a way that the soul and spiritual forces touch material life, a window through which creative energy and spiritual sensitivity flow into physical experience. Imagine that your Higher Self is not yet able to express itself fully in your conscious, physical life. However, a few of its qualities shine through. Your talents and aptitudes are similar to windows that let the light radiate in.

Talents might include assets that you exercise in your profession. Every job requires certain types of aptitude and skill. If your occupation demands talents that you don't have, the job is probably a strain on you. If you have abilities that aren't demanded by your profession, you may feel bored or thwarted.

Talents are just as much an issue outside a formal occupation. You draw upon your special abilities every hour of the day. These strengths and skills of your soul want

to be used. In fact, you'll feel frustrated unless you make them a part of your interactions with other people.

But talents and aptitudes can be misunderstood. Some people mistakenly assume they aren't very talented because they score low on tests of intelligence. Psychologists use tests that indicate certain kinds of talent — for example, mathematical knowledge, verbal skills, or an aptitude for spatial relations — but many talents go unmeasured this way. Typical, standardized exams for intelligence are not an accurate description of your talents and aptitudes. In fact, two people with a genius-level IQ of 160 might very well have entirely different talents, just as surely as two people with IQ scores of 80.

Another mistaken notion of talents is to equate them with interests. The two can be related, but they aren't the same. Sometimes you may be interested in things that directly make use of your talents, but just as often the two may not match. Without a doubt, interests are important. They show where you're inclined to put your attention and energy. They may even indicate talents that you'd like to develop in the future.

How aware are you of the exact talents that equip you to fulfill your mission in life? Are they hidden assets buried within your soul and long forgotten? Or are they the same strong points you already know about yourself? Probably the answer is they are a mixture of both. For most people, key talents and strengths fall into these four categories: unused ones of which you are unconscious, unused ones that you know you have, active ones that are distorted into faults, and active ones that you use regularly. Let's look more closely at each category.

1. Discovering hidden talents. Have you ever thought of your soul-mind as a locked treasure chest? In many ways it is, because you have within yourself forgotten and unclaimed knowledge and abilities. A few of those talents may be important ingredients that you'll use for living your spiritual purposes. How do you get in touch with these treasures?

One method is to remove the barriers that have gotten in the way. Perhaps an experience earlier in life convinced you that you were awkward or untalented in some area. Often this happens in childhood. That unpleasant experience may still live — either as a conscious memory or as an unconscious block — and keep you from claiming the real ability that is yours. But removing these barriers is easier said than done. It may require you to forgive someone — yourself or a person who criticized you. Or it may necessitate that you encourage other people who are trying to overcome a similar obstacle. It's an amazing fact of personal development that helping someone else often stimulates healing within yourself.

Another method for connecting with forgotten talents is to listen to your unconscious. In meditation or dreams you may catch a glimpse of a hidden ability. As you quiet your personality self in the silence of meditation and become receptive to your individuality, you may get in touch with a particular strength of your soul. This is exactly what happened to some people who joined a prayer study group founded by Edgar Cayce.

In meditation a few members of the group obtained intuitive impressions of certain healing talents. Later during psychic readings given by Cayce, they asked about the validity of what they had received. They were told that these were authentic abilities ready to be claimed and developed.

In a dream you may find yourself skillfully doing something that has never been part of your self-image. For example, a man who received many Cayce readings worked as a New York City stockbroker. He had all the necessary skills for that and was very successful. Then he started to notice his dreams. Frequently he had dreams that portrayed him using a different kind of ability than he used in his job. Recurrently he dreamed that he was lecturing before large audiences on the subject of spiritual truth. In most of the experiences he was eloquent and impassioned. However in some of the dreams he was presented with the opportunity to share his philosophy but was unsure of himself, remembering his lack of academic credentials. Readings were given to decipher these dreams. Cayce's interpretation was that the man's mission in life involved the creative use of this talent for verbal expression of spiritual truth. The readings urged him to claim this ability and not limit himself merely because of missing college degrees.

A third method is to be adventuresome. Try activities for which you don't think you have a natural talent. You may surprise yourself. You may not paint like Rembrandt or Picasso the first time you pick up a brush or write poetry like Whitman the first time you scribble down a verse, but an adventuresome spirit could produce great rewards. Even though some experiments will only confirm suspicions that you lack certain talents, one or two surprises may await you. When you uncover a promising ability, next comes a willingness to invest time in training and practice so that the natural talent can emerge. Aptitudes and strengths of the soul sometimes blossom on their own with little or no effort on our part. On the other hand, a talent that has remained unconscious well into adulthood is likely to need some work to coax it forth and polish it up.

2. Reclaiming strengths hidden in faults . Ironically a second category of talents involves a careful look at faults and weaknesses. This probably seems like an unlikely place to find abilities and aptitudes, but it's right where the Cayce readings suggested you might find some.

This concept is based on Cayce's somewhat radical view of good and evil. Obviously this is a profound issue that extends far beyond questions of how you can identify your talents. Theologians and philosophers have wrestled with the problem of good and evil for centuries. Could the Cayce readings have had anything new to offer? Maybe so.

This material proposed that evil is real. Forces exist in the universe that can lead you away from your true purpose and destiny. Those forces exist both outside of you and within you. But what is evil? What is the essential nature of something you call "bad" in yourself or in the world around you? According to the Cayce readings, "bad is good gone wrong." For example, what you might call a fault in yourself or someone else could be

seen in a different way. It's a strength or asset that unfortunately has been distorted, overdone, or misused. The basic goodness has been hidden, but it's still there.

In what may well be the most challenging statement made in any Cayce reading, the following idea was presented: the essence of pure goodness can be found even in the most despicable behavior. Perhaps that sounds incredible to you. Your mind may race to find an exception to the rule, some action so bad that surely nothing admirable could be buried there like a seed. Why is it such a natural response to resist this idea? Shouldn't we find it hopeful? Certainly this principle says we should be more patient and tolerant of other people and their faults; but it also shows a new way of seeing our own weaknesses.

Suppose one of your faults is being judgmental. You're aware of this trait and you call it bad. You can't deny this characteristic needs to be changed. It causes unnecessary problems for yourself and everyone around you. What does Cayce's challenging idea say about this fault? There is the seed of something good in your judgmental nature. A talent or strength of your soul has been distorted, overdone, or misused, and it comes out looking this way. Even though this fault needs to be corrected, it indicates there is an important asset you can reclaim. Maybe that hidden strength is discernment. Perhaps you have a talent for clearly evaluating things, but it's distorted by a tendency to measure other people by your own values and standards. In this example, the ability to discern might have an important role to play in fulfilling your purposes in life. You don't want to overlook this ability merely because you have distorted it or misused it in the past. The fault needs to be lovingly corrected but in such a way that you recapture something very valuable for yourself.

3. Getting talents into the thick of action. *No* athlete wants to be a bench warmer. It's frustrating to have ability and not get into the game. In a similar way, you are "coach of a team" that is made up of your talents and abilities, and you often keep some of them on the bench. You know you have certain abilities, but you never get around to using them. Why? Lots of excuses come to mind. "I'm too busy" and "I'm not sure I'm good enough" are two frequent reasons why a talent stays out of action.

These "benchwarmer" talents are often ones that no one knows you have. They represent secrets you've kept to yourself. An analytical research scientist may know she has a gift for dance, but never seems to find the time or the self-confidence to let that ability shine. A sophisticated businessman may suspect that he has a knack for being playful and fun-loving with children but somehow that talent never gets a chance to prove itself.

Another excuse often relegates a strength to bench warmer status: the fear it might take your life in a new direction. The research scientist may fear she would find dance so enjoyable she would want to abandon her current job. The businessman might worry that spending time with children would make him lose his tough, competitive edge.

It's unfortunate when you cut yourself off in this way. Any talent with which you were born has a place in your life. It's role isn't to be disruptive and force you to change,

unless the patterns of your life are out of sync with your real purposes. These bench warmers deserve a chance to be recognized and to get into the game occasionally.

4. Liberating your familiar talents from ruts. Most of your talents and aptitudes are ones that you use at least occasionally. Significant ones are indispensable to the way you run your life. These skills, abilities, and aptitudes are so much a part of you that friends immediately think of these characteristics when your name is mentioned. It's safe to say that such talents have some important role to play in your spiritual mission.

A problem may arise however. Familiar abilities can easily slip into routine ways of being used. Returning to the analogy of the personality wheel, imagine how many of your most prominent strengths exist as spokes on your wheel. They have become closely linked with particular subpersonalities, and they usually function on automatic pilot. Even though they still have the potential to be great strengths, their potency is diminished as soon as they get captured in the mechanical routines of personality.

Try to observe this process in yourself. Think of one of your more positive "I's" and identify its strengths and talents. What do you see? Does that sub-personality possess a gift for organization, dependability, or wit? Maybe it exhibits spontaneity, empathy, or logic. Whatever features you recognize, they are probably some of your best points—characteristics you are proud to have. And yet, if those traits have become routine and predictable, they have lost much of their power. The wheel of personality can drain them of their vitality. They may lose their spiritual force for helping you fulfill your purposes in life.

To understand the significance of this problem, try the following exercise. Take a piece of paper and a pencil and record some self-observations. Begin by writing at the top of the page "My greatest strengths." Then make a list of the most obvious talents and abilities of the "I's" on your personality wheel. Don't read on until your list is complete. Now cross out the word "strengths" at the top of that paper and replace it with the word "obstacles." Think of this list as your greatest obstacles to growth.

How did you react to this shift in perspective? Have you ever thought of your strengths and talents as hindrances? This exercise may exaggerate, but it makes a compelling point. You can get so locked in to the habits of your personality self—even your positive habits—that they become a barrier. They can make you deaf to the inspirational promptings of your individuality self. Your familiar strengths can become so fixed in routine that they lose their ability to respond to a higher, spiritual direction. Instead of talents serving a mission in life, they can actually resist it.

The answer to this dilemma is to bring the wheel of personality under the direction of the Higher Self. As you become more and more conscious of your individuality self, your talents have a new source of purpose and direction. They are liberated from the wheel of routine and habit. By reclaiming the talents and aptitudes you already know you have, by bringing them under the direction of your more authentic self, you take a big step toward your mission in life.

These talents are especially important to fulfill your calling. For most people this fourth category accounts for 80 to 90 percent of the skills they need to draw upon in living their missions in life. Most of the ingredients you need to express your highest purpose probably are abilities already known to you. The trick is to regain mastery of them, to rescue them from familiar routines, habits, and ruts.

IDENTIFYING YOUR TALENTS AND STRENGTHS

Every soul shares a common purpose: to express the infinite in the finite. Imagine as a playful analogy that the purpose of life — yours and everyone else's — is to bake bread. We are all here in the physical world with a mission to be bakers. However, our mutual calling to be bakers of bread doesn't end with such a generality. Each one of us is here to specialize and become a master baker of one particular type of bread — whole wheat, rye, cinnamon raisin, sourdough, pumpernickel, and so forth. We each have a specialized mission within the context of the shared purpose of life.

What kind of bread are you called to bake? Before you decide, it might be a good idea to check the cupboard in your kitchen and see what ingredients you have available. If you speculate that your expertise will be in baking cinnamon raisin bread, only to discover your cupboard lacks those two key elements, then your chances of success are nil. This is a simple metaphor, but it illustrates the usefulness of taking an inventory of your talents and strengths before trying to formulate a statement of your life's purpose. Your aptitudes provide invaluable clues.

The next step is going to be compiling a list of your most prominent abilities. As you work on these exercises, avoid false modesty. This is not the time for selling yourself short. Humility is a virtue, but it's artificial if it denies the essence of your spiritual nature, your talents.

Try each of the four steps described below. You may get good results from all four, or you may find only one or two of the approaches feel right for you. Use your own good judgment in evaluating what you get. At the end of the fourth step, write down a composite result of these exercises. It will be a list of your talents, abilities, aptitudes, skills, and strengths. Most people find they end up with a list comprised of **eight to fifteen entries**. Any less than that and you're probably not giving yourself enough credit. Any more than that and you're probably not staying focused on your most significant abilities.

1. Review previous successes. What are your most significant achievements? Think back to your childhood and adolescence as well as adulthood. In what activities have you been a success? Some of the experiences that come to mind may be noteworthy because you were recognized for what you accomplished. Maybe you won an award, earned a certificate, or received praise. Other experiences that are just as important may have gone unrecognized by other people. Only you know about those successful accomplishments.

For each achievement that you recall, analyze your formula for success. What talents, strengths, and abilities did it take to accomplish the task? For example, earning a college degree may have required persistence and writing skills; raising a child may have demanded love and tolerance; overcoming a phobia may have necessitated courage and good humor.

2. Examine three categories of talent. One system of thought — described in Richard Nelson Bolles's classic book on career guidance, *What Color Is Your Parachute?*— proposes virtually all talents fit into one of three categories: skills with people, things, or information.

Abilities for dealing with people start with basic ingredients such as taking instruction or serving. More advanced abilities demand greater interaction — talents such as communication, persuasion, and supervision. The highest type of aptitudes for dealing with people include skills such as negotiating, leading, counseling, and training.

Talents for dealing with things must be viewed broadly to include machines, nature, and the physical body. The fundamental skills in this category include handling objects, bodily strength or agility, working the earth, and monitoring or tending machines. More advanced abilities are operating machines, using tools, and repairing mechanical devices.

Aptitudes for information start with observing, comparing, copying, and computing. More sophisticated skills in this category include researching, analyzing, organizing, and evaluating. The most advanced type of information skills are visualizing, creating, and designing.

Although this is just a sketch of an elaborate theory, it may get you started on some new insights about your own talents. Think about each of these three categories. What are your strengths when it comes to dealing with other people? With objects and physical things? With information? You might find it useful to take a piece of paper and make three columns. At the top of the page put a label for each category, and then write down your skills and abilities under the appropriate headings.

3. Reclaim strengths within faults. Remember one of the four categories of talent described earlier is hidden strengths embedded in personality faults. Sometimes it's not easy to see the essential goodness buried in one of your weaknesses, but it's worth the search.

Make a brief list of just a few of your faults. For each one try to experience a new point of view about that shortcoming. Get beyond guilt, self-condemnation, or defensiveness. Objectively look at each fault and ask yourself, "What talent or strength is here, although it's distorted, misused, or overdone?" For example, you might discover idealism buried in your impatience with others, or passion hiding in your worrisome nature, or spontaneity buried in disorganization.

Don't be concerned if you can't find a strength in every weakness. Occasionally it takes a long time before you can catch a new perspective on some fault. The buried talent may be very distorted. Even though you may reclaim just a few talents with this technique, it's a valuable method that shouldn't be ignored.

4. Survey a list of sample talents. Some possibilities may stimulate your thinking. Scan these two collections of sample talents, strengths, aptitudes, and skills. Notice which ones jump out at you. Keep in mind these inventory lists are incomplete and contain only examples of assets you possess. One entry may remind you of another talent that isn't on the list. The first list contains adjectives that may describe you; the second list describes specific skills.

Now make a list that summarizes your best answers to these four exercises. If one exercise was especially useful, you may find the majority of items on your final inventory come from that one approach. Remember you are trying to create a list with at least eight but probably no more than fifteen entries.

PRIORITIZING YOUR LIST OF TALENTS

Take another look at your list of abilities. It's impressive, isn't it? Don't feel as if you're bragging, but admit you're a pretty talented person, whether the world around you realizes it yet or not.

The items on your list are the ingredients within your soul that have an important role to play in living your highest purpose and mission. However, some of the talents are more crucial than others to success. A few of them are particularly significant because they play such a big part in shaping the nature of your calling, your spiritual vocation.

The fact that just a few talents have a special priority doesn't diminish the value of the others. It simply means a few of your abilities are particularly influential in shaping your calling in life. This point can be illustrated with an example from sports. The 1927 New York Yankees baseball team is one of the most famous of all time. Some people believe it was the greatest baseball team ever assembled. Two of its star players were Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig, both of whom were elected later to the Hall of Fame.

Those two extraordinary players shaped the character of the team with their nearly unstoppable hitting. But they couldn't have won the World Series that year by themselves. Every player on the team had a role to play. Some players made a small contribution, but it was a total team effort that made the 1927 Yankees a success.

In exactly the same way, you have certain talents that are more important than others to your mission in life. They shape the basic character of what you were born to do. Other strengths and abilities have a job too, but they assume a supplementary function in living your purposes.

How many **key talents** do you have? A good guess is four. This is the average count of strengths and abilities described in a Cayce life reading. In some readings there were just three; in other cases, five or six. However, when we look at the hundreds of life readings as a whole, four is about the norm.

What does this suggest about the way your soul came into physical life? You brought with you a few critical assets for success in your mission. You can think of those talents as gifts from God or as abilities developed in previous lives. If you had been fortunate enough to receive a Cayce life reading, it would have described about four distinctive strengths—key ingredients you can use throughout your life to fulfill certain purposes. Of course those four abilities aren't the limit of your assets. As you've already seen by compiling a list of talents and strengths, you have far more resources to draw upon than just four. Soon after birth you started learning new abilities to complement the ones with which you were born.

How can you recognize the four most significant strengths from among the others on your list of eight to fifteen talents? Several approaches may be effective for you. First, look back at your childhood. Presumably your most essential character as a soul was close to the surface when you were young. As you grew older your personality developed more and more fully; the imitative side of you began to assert greater control—both the negative habits you picked up as well as the strengths you acquired through learning.

What were you like as a young child, especially in the years before you started school? If you don't remember very well, perhaps you can collect memories from your parents or older siblings. Sometimes one or more of your key talents were evident during earliest childhood. They may have appeared as a strong interest or a natural aptitude for some activity. For example, did you have an artistic flair as a youngster, or a knack for mechanical things? Did you love music or have a vivid imagination?

Second, reconsider your longer list of eight to fifteen talents. Ask yourself, "Do any of these abilities seem to be right at the core of my being? Are any of them so essential that it's hard to imagine being me without that talent?" When one of your personal assets feels that important to you, it's likely to be one of the key strengths that is crucial to your life's mission.

Third, try another questioning approach. Often the talents that are most significant to your purposes will have a feeling of "unfinished business" until they are being fully utilized. Once again look at your list of eight to fifteen talents. Do any of them seem almost to speak to you about unfinished business together? Is there one that gives you a feeling of unrealized possibilities, saying "I'm not through with you yet, and you're not through with me"?

All three approaches are likely to give you some clues. One of the exercises may work especially well for you, but be sure to take a little time for each one. When you've had a chance to speculate about your four most important abilities, make a tentative choice. With a feeling of playful experimentation, circle four of the items on your longer

list. Imagine these are the four that Edgar Cayce would have mentioned in a life reading given for you. You'll build upon these four later, as you start clarifying the exact nature of your calling in life.

Let's examine the insights of the three individuals introduced earlier. They followed the same steps, trying to recognize their own most important talents.

Kate, the twenty-four-year-old beautician, compiled a list of ten talents and strengths by completing the four exercises. Next, she narrowed it down to the four that were most likely to influence the nature of her mission in life. The four she chose were sensitivity, a sense of humor, a friendly nature, and an eye for beauty.

Sensitivity made it to her original list of ten abilities because she recognized it as a strength within a fault. She was the sort of person who easily got her feelings hurt—a constant problem to her friends, family, and herself. However, when she looked at this shortcoming in a new way, she saw a strength that was being misapplied. She was a highly sensitive person and that sensitivity didn't have to be distorted by a lack of self-esteem. This newly recognized ability was chosen for her final list of four because it felt like it was right at the core of her being, an essential part of her individuality.

A sense of humor was an entry on the personal skills list. It stood out for her as she scanned the list. When it came time to narrow her compilation of talents from ten to four, this one had the feeling of unfinished business. It felt to Kate as if her sense of humor was a resource she was just beginning to tap.

She wrote down "a friendly nature" on her original list when she reviewed the three categories of talents. When she considered people skills, this one immediately seemed prominent. Later she selected it as one of the most important four because of childhood recollections. Her earliest memories were overtures to strangers who visited her home. As a preschooler she was invariably outgoing and quick to make friends.

An eye for beauty was already a source of accomplishments in her life. It had led her to successful training as a beautician. For example, even though she wasn't born knowing how to cut and style hair, a natural aptitude made the skills come easily. Later this ability made possible some achievements and recognition in the first years of her professional career. She chose this particular talent as one of her final four because it had a feeling of unfinished business. It seemed her eye for beauty could be used to enrich her own life and that of others in ways she hadn't discovered yet.

Rudy, the physician, narrowed his more lengthy list of talents down to these four: leadership, teaching, planning, and courage. Leadership made it onto his original, more lengthy list of abilities because of previous accomplishments. He had a history of taking the initiative for causes in which he believed. In the early 1960s he led a small group of professional people concerned about the unrecognized hazards of fluoridation in drinking water. His leadership helped bring the issue to a public vote in his home city, one of the ten largest in America. Several years later he demonstrated his leadership abilities by

founding a private school for children based on a curriculum that recognizes the spiritual dimension of each student. This particular talent seemed to be so much at the core of his being that it warranted a place among the final four.

Teaching also appeared on his longer list of skills because of previous successes. For nearly twenty years he taught part-time at a nearby medical school. Using that ability had always given him a great deal of pleasure, and he had received several commendations for excellence. He selected teaching as one of his most important talents because it had the feeling of unfinished business. As successful as he had already been teaching medical students, he still had the intuition that his teaching could reach other types of people and focus on new subjects.

As Rudy reviewed the three fundamental areas in which skills find expression—with people, things, and information—one that stood out was his ability to organize information for planning purposes. He saw how this was a natural aptitude that came in handy in parts of his life ranging from a business plan for his medical clinic to designing a vacation trip. This skill seemed like a worthy candidate to be one of his four most important ones because it seemed to be so clearly at the core of his being. Virtually all of his friends and family members tended to think of this ability if they were asked to describe his character.

Just as quickly those same friends and family would have added that one of Rudy's faults was to be pushy and demanding, of himself and others. He readily admitted to that shortcoming but was able to see that it also contained the seed of a great strength which he was able to express in purer form on a regular basis. Since his youth Rudy had exhibited his courage. He repeatedly demonstrated a willingness to face his fears and push himself to go beyond them, sometimes picking a task for himself simply because he knew it would be difficult. In relationships he often slipped into expecting the same from those around him. Sometimes it proved to bring out the best in someone; other times, the individual backed off, feeling pushed. Yet despite that in the past this talent had not always been used in the best ways, it still deserved a place as one of his four more significant abilities.

Carol, "the creative, spontaneous country woman," selected these four talents as most significant: writing, sensitivity to feelings, creativity, and an ability to see the big picture. Writing had been a frequent source of accomplishment in both professional and avocational settings. She saw it both as a way of communicating clearly and as therapy for herself. At the same time she felt ways still remained for her to make optimal use of that skill. There was unfinished business between her and this aptitude for writing.

One of her abilities in dealing with people was an innate sensitivity to what is going on under the surface. She used this skill as a child to help her win prizes selling items door-to-door in the neighborhood. She could immediately sense a customer's personality and needs, allowing her to say just the right thing to make a sale. This talent was further sharpened by graduate school training and job experience in nonverbal behavior, game theory, communications, and theater directing. This talent seemed to be

right at the core of her being. Often she observed this sensitivity to unspoken feelings and how it led her to say just the right thing at the right time, guided intuitively rather than by logically figuring out what ought to be said.

Since her youth Carol has had a tremendous creative impulse. Occasionally this strength came out as a weakness in her temperament: a tendency to get bored easily. However, on occasion both she and others recognize her creative spark for what it is: a great ability for making something new out of old situations and resources. This talent has come forth in theatrical work, college teaching, and relationships. For her it is obviously one of her most important assets.

Perhaps related to her creativity is another talent that she listed as one of her final four: the capacity to see the whole picture. Once again she was able to identify a critical skill because of previous accomplishments with it. Some of her most satisfying interactions with friends—relationships in which she felt like she had truly been able to help—were those in which she could see how the fragments of someone's life could be put together in a meaningful way. In her theater work, what made her good as a director was this capacity to keep the big picture in view all the time. This talent is indisputably a versatile one and bound to be an asset in most any kind of career or interest. For this reason it had the feeling of unfinished business: opportunities still remained for it to be used in new ways.

Like these three people, you have formulated your own inventory of talents and strengths. You've narrowed your longer list of eight to fifteen skills and abilities down to about four that probably have the greatest role to play in shaping the character of your soul's purpose. In the next section, several exercises will help lead you from that short list of talents to a succinct statement of your mission in life. However, before you leave this section on abilities and strengths, keep in mind that all of your talents will have some role to play in how you bring your mission to life. The situations and opportunities you encounter are so varied that every asset within your soul has a creative place to be used.

For, each soul enters with a mission.... We all have a mission to perform. (3003-1)

