

In terms of understanding and bettering our lives the single best thing we can do is pay attention. That will be a good topic for another day. Today, I wish to discuss the second-best thing we can do, which is to map our life history. If we follow the axiom to know ourselves then this exercise can save anything up to 10 years worth of therapy or similarly 10 years of spiritual seeking.

Many people would find this piece of homework difficult to do. It requires a high level of dedication and commitment. Additionally, it is an exercise that takes many months to complete and requires some serious contemplation. It is by no means a quick fix.

It also requires the person to find ways to remember things that they may not have ready access too or have previously forgotten. Then there is the content itself which can be challenging at times. Despite all these reasons and others, it is one of the most powerful exercises a person can do in terms of understanding themselves. It is well worth the effort in my opinion.

Some of the benefits of engaging and completing an exercise of this nature is that it highlights many of our ingrained patterns. It demonstrates where and how they originated from. It also gives a clearer understanding of what we need to disengage from in our lives. And while it may be construed as negative, it also should highlight people's strengths, capabilities and resilience.

To begin with, a person will need many large pieces of paper with the overall goal of making a large tapestry from them. Eventually, each piece of paper will need to be laid out so that a person can see the progression of their lives.

Starting from this current month put two to four things on a single piece of paper that were significant or critical personal experiences. They can be a crisis, an argument, feeling down or conversely feeling joyous or high. It doesn't matter if the experiences were positive or negative, but make them something that were important to you. It is the key moments or highlights of the month we want to put down. Try and leave enough room on the paper so that things can be added later. In doing this exercise it's not uncommon for people to want to add things as they progress through the exercise.

One piece of paper per month is a good guide to follow. Also it is a good idea to add the

month and year at the top of each piece of paper so that it is easier to follow.

The exercise then requires continue this same process for every month right back to our first childhood memory. Month after month is laid out on pieces of paper.

This is a difficult task because it will involve having to recall memories that have long been forgotten. One of the things that the exercise requires is for the person to tap into under-utilized resources and creativity. Frequently memory alone will not be sufficient to fill all the pieces of paper. This forces the person to begin to think out of the box and attempt to come up with alternate methods of tapping into memory. Looking at old newspapers from that period or asking family and friends to help often can spark an important memory. Finding quiet time, meditations and ways to relax the mind and body also can stimulate recall.

When the task is complete, we then want to lay out the pieces of paper starting from childhood to the present moment. We should already see many patterns and points of stuckness in our lives. It is often an eye opener for people to see how things have manifested in their lives over the years.

There is another important component to add. Once the significant events and experiences have been put onto paper, then emotional and psychological elements are also added. This is part of the reason room was left on the paper. It is important to note how we felt at the time of the experiences and what was going on emotionally and psychologically. If possible, try and remember how the body felt as well as that's very good information to have.

The process can take anywhere between four to eight months or even longer. At the end of the process, we should have a very clear and lucid understanding of why we do the things we do. It is challenging work as it is not meant to be an intellectual or analytic process. The work is experiential where we should engage fully with it at different levels of beings.

In my opinion this exercise is the second-best thing we can do in terms of getting to know ourselves.