

## BEGINNINGS

I'm not much of a cook. Neither was my mother. And that's how it all began. When I was twenty-two and about to get married, she gave me a recipe book, the kind with blank pages to write down or paste in all your best recipes. Mom had written down hers to get things started, but she only had two: roast beef and chicken. Like I said, she wasn't much of a cook. Still, she made a great roast, and here were her notes on just how to do it: *Set oven at 450. Season roast with salt and garlic. Sear for 30 min., lower temp to 350, cook for 1 hour.*

That was it. Nice and simple. The chicken recipe was pretty much the same.

So I got married, made roast beef and chicken, and if a friend ever cooked something tasty, I found out how and wrote it down in the book.

It was several pages in and one month later that I found more notes from Mom: *Wash your delicacies with Ivory Snow in cold water.*

That's no recipe, I thought. Then I thought, Why not? Mom was passing on whatever she hoped would prepare me for a good marriage, a good life.

Well, both marriage and life turned out to be much harder than I ever imagined. I didn't know that after eight years and two children I'd be getting divorced. Or that the existential

angst that looked so cool in French movies would be painful, not fun. Or that moments of great happiness and meaning could be swallowed by moments of fear. I didn't know that outside of movies and books, this was life, and I often wished I had recipes telling me what to do, how to live, which path to take.

Meanwhile, my own path became one of exploring: a little this, a little that, whatever seemed to work. It could be whatever lowered the pain or anxiety I sometimes found in living, or whatever brought the greatest joy and lifted me to a higher level. I studied yoga and meditation, tried therapy and drugs, went to rallies and retreats. And my spiritual path became a smorgasbord that merged Eastern and Western religions, Native traditions, and my mom.

I also, over time, grew up, met and married my beloved John, and moved to the foothills of Boulder, Colorado.

It was many years later—after my children were married, after I'd sat and held hands with a friend who was dying, and after my highs and lows had somewhat smoothed out—that I saw an intriguing exercise in a book. It was titled "Find Your Highest Purpose." Now, I'm a real patsy for these kinds of quizzes. They're the esoteric version of the "What Kind of Guy Is Right for You?" quizzes I took endlessly as a teen.

So I closed my eyes as the book suggested, recalled three times when I felt passionate about something I did, looked for the common threads—the essence of my passion—opened my eyes, and wrote down "My highest purpose is . . ." And something inside me let me fill in the rest: ". . . to live a sacred life."

*Well that was a surprise.* But then I wrote more, as I imagined what it would look like and how it would feel:

A simple life, filled with love, awe, and a deep sense of

connection. A happy life, touched with grace and blessings. A life in which I know what I'm here to do—and do it.

And finally, as the book directed, I summed it all up in a way I'd remember:

*My highest purpose is to live a sacred life, connected to others, nature, and the divine through love, gratefulness, and acts of service.*

It wasn't long after I did this that I got a call from Carol, the editor of a magazine I sometimes wrote for. She asked me if I'd write an article on creating a sacred space in your home. Well, sure, I said, hearing the drum roll of synchronicity.

My research began with friends who had shrines or meditation rooms and ended with a Native American Feng Shui master who happened to live nearby. We sat by a fountain in her living room—painted the colors of earth and sky and enriched with carvings of wood and stone—while she spoke about the power of color and the four elements and how they can bring magic and nature into your house and your life.

Her words touched me, and so did her home. Walking back to my street, I felt lighter, in a way I remembered but hadn't been for some time. I began to write the article in my head—"How to Create a Sacred Space"—when suddenly I had an inspiration, a voice from above: *Rivvy, write a book—How to Create a Sacred LIFE!* Of course, I responded. Will do. And it was soon after then that I began to remember and encounter all the people and experiences that make up this book.

That's how it works. The first step toward any goal is setting the intention; it's your prayer and personal GPS.

I remember being startled the first time my son's car spoke. Tony entered his destination and *presto!* This strange

but knowing voice told him how to reach it. “Turn left at the light and go straight for three miles . . .” If I needed more proof, this was it: Let the universe know your intention, and you’ll be guided all the way there.

### **Why me? Why you?**

**And you don’t have to be perfect to live sacred.**

*Why me?* Well, my English friend Helen, who served faithfully as my first reader, seemed to nail it. She stopped by one day when I was in a Jewish mood, worrying about everything I could think of, from getting a new bed to dying. “Rivvy,” Helen said, “read your book!” Then she added, with blunt British humor, “If anyone needs to be writing this, it’s you!”

*Why you?* Why not? Life is sacred—for everyone, not just monks and mystics. But to feel it and see it, there are things you can do, things that bring out the wonder and connectedness of everything in life. It begins with your intention, looking in. And it’s furthered by your attention, looking out.

One of the gurus I went to hear in the seventies was a man known simply as Stephen, who started a commune known as “The Farm.” His teaching I remember most was this: Attention is energy. What you put your attention into, you get more of. He meant it literally too, giving a whole new meaning to “What you see is what you get.”

At the same time, attention requires openness: open eyes, open mind. Being open to the sacred allows you to recognize it when it appears.

And finally, attention means pay attention. On Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, a ram’s horn called the shofar is blown for all to hear. Its piercing sound is meant to wake us up—to life, to who we are, to how we want to be.

And so, with intention and attention, I started writing this

book. And the more I wrote, the more recipes I found, and the happier and more radiant my life and I became. What I didn't become was much of a cook. Like Mom, I'm the roast-a-chicken type, and the recipes I've written are that simple, with most of them passed on through stories.

**So here they are . . .**

So here they are, my recipes for a sacred life: some from family and friends, some from teachers and writers, some made up along the way . . . but all tested, tried, and true. They lift me up when I'm feeling down, help me look out when I'm focused within, and lead me back to my center, the moment, and the joy of a sacred life.

I'm sure there are many here that you already know and just needed to be reminded of (writing them down helped remind me). Some are old-fashioned things your parents did or you once did and then forgot. Some will seem just right, while others you might not like at all, and that's okay (if you don't like fish, don't make fish for dinner). But what I hope is this: that you find a few that will add to the wonder, love, and sacredness of your life.

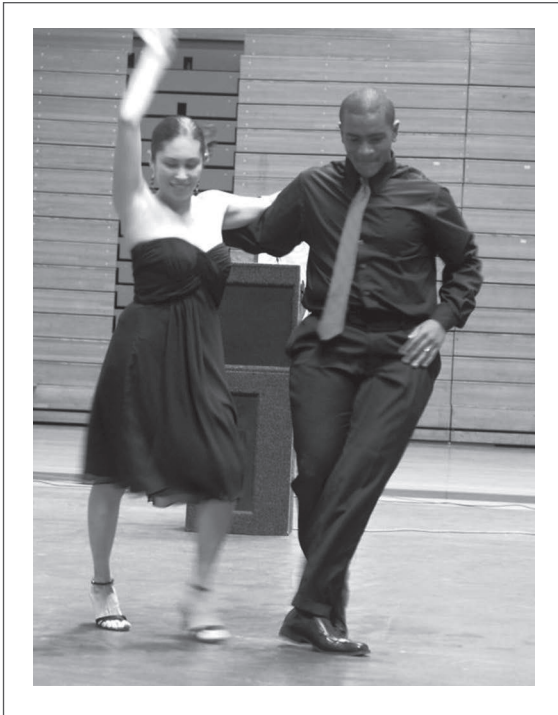
Those are the ones to follow. Those are the ones to keep.



## Part One

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# BASIC INGREDIENTS



*It's the basics, the footwork,  
the where to begin . . .*





## A GOOD DAY TO DIE . . . OR NOT

Our culture is not too keen on death and dying. Truth is, neither am I. Perhaps I'd be more open if we could end our days by just fading into the night—after a great dinner with folks we love. I also find death much more acceptable on days when I'm feeling immortal than on days when I'm wondering, with anxiety, why I still have that peculiar pain.

This lapse of faith leads me to read many books about the cycles of life and death. Then I study other cultures that seem to have a deeper awareness of this sacred circle, like the Native Americans. When Chief Crazy Horse went into battle, he proclaimed, "It's a good day to die!" Some American Indians still say it, every day, to be ready for death and to live their best life.

So I started saying it myself in my morning salutations, after blessing the sun, the earth, and all around me. And when I open my arms wide and look out at the sky and mountains, I often feel it: It is a good day. A good day to die. To merge with the universe and see what comes next. I especially feel it on blue-sky days when the crows are squawking and the trees are in bloom. Yes, I think, if I have to die, this would be a good day for it. (Notice I'm still using the "if"?)

Then, one morning, while my eighty-something mother was visiting from Philadelphia, she came out on the patio and

sat down nearby, just as I was doing my morning “hellos” to the world. She regards my diverse spiritual practices with some bemusement, but tries not to intrude when I’m at it. Still, she’s also curious, which spurred her to move closer to hear.

“Hello to the birds and the deer,” I said, arms open wide.

“Don’t forget the squirrels,” Mom interrupted.

“Hello to the flowers, bushes, and trees.”

“You have some beautiful trees,” Mom said. “Really.”

Finally, I spread my arms even wider and announced,

“It’s a good day to die!”

“Well,” Mom chirped in, “it’s not a bad day to live either.”

She had a point. So now I end my blessings like this:

“It’s a good day to die!” I say.

And then, with gusto, “It’s a good day to live!”

## THE WHERE TO BEGIN

Deepak Chopra is known for his many books of guidance. The one I like best and keep at my bedside is *The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success*. It's a small book with short chapters that tell it like it is: Do this and you'll get that. And if you follow his advice, what you'll get is "harmony with nature," "success in every endeavor," and "an experience of the miraculous." Not bad.

In chapter 1, Chopra presents the first law, "The Law of Pure Potentiality." Here, he shows us how to create the openness that can lead to fulfillment. It's a simple recipe—only four things to do daily—and when I first read it, it seemed easy:

1. Have a time of silence and stillness when you do nothing at all. (Sounds good!)
2. Meditate. (Check!)
3. Spend some time in nature—say, watching the moon rise—and feel the beauty and perfection of the universe. (Got it!)
4. Practice non-judgment throughout the day, beginning with an intention like "Today, I will not judge." (Right!)

Ready to go, I began meditating on a daily basis, even if only for five minutes. I also remembered to sit still a bit and

not even read. Then I'd walk outside to stare at a flower or the sky. And finally, I began to notice when I would judge.

What I noticed was I judge almost always, and I didn't know how to stop. I judge myself, I judge others, I judge myself for judging others. I judge friends, strangers, events. I judge neighbors, politicians, the weather . . . I'm an all-inclusive judge!

This was not good news. I wanted to move on to the second law, and the third, and fourth . . . and live a life of Harmony, Success, and Miracles. But I felt I couldn't read further until I had the first law down cold. Otherwise, it would feel like cheating. Besides, it probably wouldn't work.

So I kept rereading chapter I. Then I would meditate, be silent, look at the birds . . . and watch myself judge. It was hopeless, and so was I.

It reminded me of the salsa class John and I took one winter. Our teacher, Carmen, made the lessons so easy that within a few weeks we were moving our hips, getting the rhythm, and feeling, hey, we can do this. But in the last two sessions, Carmen taught turns, and try as we would, this was not meant to be. John would turn one way, I would turn the other, and we'd never end up in the same place at the same time.

The next month, Carmen offered Level 2 classes, but knowing our problem with turns, we signed up for another go at Level I. This worked out well. We got even better at the basics. So good, in fact, that Carmen said "Watch John and Rivvy" and made us dance at the front of the room. Our classmates were impressed with our style and savvy—until session five, when Carmen again taught turns. Well, I thought, we could just keep signing up for Level I and have a few weeks of glory.

With that same reasoning, I decided I could make Deepak's

first law my life's practice. And then, one day, while yet again reading chapter 1, I noticed something he wrote that I must have skimmed over before. If a whole day of non-judging seems too daunting, he says, start smaller. Say something like "For the next two hours, I won't judge at all." Or lower the bar even more: "Just this hour, I will not judge."

This sounded doable, and indeed, I could do it! For one hour, I would notice my judging, let it go, and move on. And as I stopped judging, I began to feel a wonderful lightness, a sense that everything, including myself, was okay.

At last, I was ready to move on to chapter 2, "The Law of Giving," and step up my spiritual life. But the funny thing is, I'm still reading chapter 1, over and over, and practicing "The Law of Pure Potentiality." It's the basics, the footwork, the where to begin—just like Carmen's first class got us out there and dancing.