

Four Questions for Graduation Day

by Sara Debbie Gutfreund – May 24, 2014
<http://www.aish.com/sp/pg/Four-Questions-for-Graduation-Day.html>

Here's what you expect to happen the first time you reach the finish line after 26.2 miles of running. You throw your arms above your head. You leap across the finish line. You hear applause all around you as you bask in the glory of your accomplishment. You did it! You feel like you can take on the world.

But here's what really happens. You stumble across that finish line and stare up at the digital clock above you and then at the sports watch on your wrist. *How can that be?* you ask yourself. *I ran so much faster in training. How can that time be right? You wonder why you didn't run faster, breathe better, maintain stronger form.* You can barely catch your breath. You're doubled over in pain, but for some reason you feel like the race isn't over. *Did you really cross the finish line? Is that it?...*

DEAR GRADUATES of [Year], you're at the finish line. Now what? You finish school to wait for a job. Now what? You find a job and wait to find your future spouse. You find your spouse and wait for children. You have your children and wait for them to grow up. They grow up, and then you wait to live. But you don't know what that means, to live, so you look back up at the clock and then at the watch on your wrist. And you wonder why you couldn't have been happier, dug deeper, reached higher? You can barely catch your breath, you are doubled over in pain, but you feel like you should keep going. Because you are waiting for that feeling of accomplishment to encircle you. You are waiting for someone else to let you know that you have arrived.

But here's the thing: No one is going to tell you that you have arrived. Not now. Not later. No medal is ever going to make you feel like you are done. No diploma is going to crown your life with lasting achievement. Because that sense of accomplishment and arrival is created only by you and lies within you. It depends on how close you are to living, day to day, the kind of life that you want. It depends on how intricately you are aligned with your goals and your direction.

Here are four questions to ask yourself today to bring you closer to that alignment.

- 1. Have I made the world a better place today?** It doesn't matter what your job is or even whether you have one – have you done something kind for someone today?...Have I made the world a better place today?
- 2. Do I know what I'm living for?** Do I know why I'm running? Why I'm working? Where I'm going? Do I know who I am and what is meaningful to me? Ask yourself this question every day because sometimes the answers change and sometimes the answers are hard, but without the question, we will feel like we are running in circles.
- 3. Did I do something today that was hard for me?** It may be hard to maintain a perfect GPA at an elite university, but it is far harder to say I'm sorry when I make a mistake. It may be hard to excel at my profession, but it is far harder to stay patient when things don't work out the way I thought they would or should or could. It may be hard to run a marathon, but it's far harder to stay still when someone else has insulted me. Have I overcome something today that was hard for me? Have I passed through an inner limit, however subtle and invisible it may appear to be?
- 4. Did I say thank you?** After I held my diploma in my hands, did I turn around to the people who brought me to this moment and *say thank you*? Did I acknowledge the teachers who spent years giving over their wisdom to me? Did I thank my parents for all that they have done? After I crossed the finish line, did I turn to the One who gives me life and thank Him for every breath that brought me to this moment? Did I say thank You today?

It's okay to be out of breath at the finish line. It's okay to check our watches and wonder if we could have done better. Because the accomplishment that we feel lies within us is a dynamic, constant process of pushing against our limits. And there are no easy answers, no hidden short cuts, no final arrivals in life. But there are hard questions and there are answers that change as we grow.

Take your gifts today. Run with them. This is it. You are crossing a finish line, and may there be many more yet to come.