

BUILDING CHARACTER

The True Meaning of Our Lives

By MICHAEL JOSEPHSON

I saw a cartoon of an old king checking in at the gates of heaven. The gatekeeper, with a large book in front of him, said, "Edward the Good, huh? Well, Eddie, we will be the judge of that." The point is that, in the end, generous self-appraisals won't matter. Our epitaphs will be written and eulogies delivered by the people who knew how we lived. The real meaning of our lives may be defined by how we are remembered.

When a Swedish newspaper printed Alfred Nobel's obituary by mistake, he had the rare opportunity to see how others saw him. It changed his life dramatically. Though the article was complimentary, describing Mr. Nobel as a brilliant chemist who made a great fortune as the inventor of dynamite, he was horrified to be memorialized in such materialistic terms. Determined to leave a more positive legacy, he bequeathed his considerable wealth to the establishment of the Nobel Prizes to acknowledge great human

achievements. Few of us can create something as momentous as the Nobel Prizes, but we can all live lives that earn a eulogy our children and parents would be proud of.

In the hurly-burly of everyday living, it's hard to keep perspective. Money, position, pride and power seem so important—until they're not. At the end of their lives, no one says, "I wish I spent more time at the office." It's a matter of priorities.

So, if you want to know how to live your life, just think about what you want people to say about you after you die—and live backward. ■

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