

Light and Life

The Search for Meaning

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The greatest challenge we face in our lives is the Search for Meaning. What is life really about? What are we really here to do?

These are big questions. Nobody can pretend to have the answers for anyone else. As Viktor Frankl once said, it is like asking a Chess Grandmaster what THE best move in the game of Chess is. The answer is - it depends. It depends on the specifics of who is playing whom, the situation on the board, and a myriad other factors. Likewise, the answers to these questions depend upon the person who is asking them.

Nevertheless, it's vital that you seek the specific answers for your individual life. Without true meaning to your life, anything you do or become is ultimately hollow and without any depth of satisfaction. However long it takes, the answers must be found.

The esteemed psychiatrist, Dr. Viktor Frankl, founded an entire school of psychotherapy, Logotherapy, based on this idea. Its fundamental principle is that the many and profound psychological problems people face in our modern world - including severe neuroses - arise from a lack of true life meaning. The pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain are NOT the only motivators of human activity. Rather, the Search for Meaning is vitally important to healthy human life.

The Modern Dilemma - A Meaningless Existence

Of course, a lack of meaning is very easy to develop. We live in an ever-growing population where competition for jobs, life partners, wealth and social status is the norm. The sheer multitudes of people overwhelm us and make us feel small. The countless numbers who suffer and die in horrific wars around the globe teach us subliminally that the value of human life is not as high as we had hoped. The myriad ways in which we are treated like statistics by our governments lead us to believe that we are unimportant and don't count. Instead of developing our unique talents to the unbelievable levels we are truly capable of, we prefer to continually compare ourselves to others. Thus, we don't even bother to begin the works that could bring us so much joy.

The majority of people don't know why they are alive, nor do they trouble to give it much thought. Yet, a life without meaning is surely unbearable in the final analysis. This is why so many people die within a few short years of retirement. It's why the unemployed feel

dreadfully depressed and worthless. It's also why some fabulously wealthy and famous individuals are desperately unhappy.

The Subtle Trap of Counterfeit Meaning

The Search For Meaning is vital precisely because without it, you fall prey to the lure of "counterfeit" meanings. If you make no effort to discover the meaning of your individual life, you thereby play host to an existential vacuum at the very core of your being. You exist, but you really don't know why. Whilst every member of the Animal Kingdom knows and fulfils its purpose perfectly, nobody can tell you what the purpose of your own human existence is, let alone how to perfectly fulfil it.

A vacuum is always filled. This is where the problem of counterfeit meaning comes in. In the absence of the true meaning and purpose of our lives, the vacuum will be filled with something else. By doing so, you quiet that tiny voice that entreats you to search your soul. Instead, you busy yourself with this counterfeit meaning and expand it until it fills your life. In this way, you need not be troubled anymore or concern yourself with why you exist in the first place. You feel more comfortable; at least for a while.

What are these counterfeits? They are many and varied; as various as there are people in the world. One person creates meaning through making the sole pursuit of Wealth a worthwhile objective. A career is then commenced that gives little satisfaction, does not resonate with the inner core of that individual, and leads to unhappiness, and even neurosis. Another person fills the vacuum with relationships, and all the consequent obligations and responsibilities. Although the relationships may be frustrating or even abusive, that person will move from one such cycle of suffering to another precisely because they appear to fill the vacuum of meaning and purpose. Yet another may convert to a fundamentalist religion which, through representing daily life as a war of Light against Darkness, gives instant validity, meaning and purpose to the life of the new zealot.

In fact, almost every major project we take on could potentially generate "counterfeit meaning" if we refuse to face the essential questions of our basic existence FIRST. The job you worked so hard at failed to deliver. The relationship you really believed in broke your heart, despite your very best efforts. The major business investment you made deflated your hopes. You are left depressed, broken, and wondering what life is even about. In many instances, it is less important to wonder what went wrong with these projects, as to ask why you ever engaged in them in the first place, and what you had hoped to achieve by doing so.

It is only when all the activities of our lives are integrated into a Master Plan that they can hope to operate coherently and make any overall sense. Without the existence of such a Master Plan, our activities actually become the Master Plan itself! They appear to give meaning to our lives but in fact do not. Instead, they give partial meaning. They occupy our thoughts and actions. They answer the needs of parts of our psyche at the expense of others.

This is often the true source of self-sabotage - having goals that do not satisfy the whole of our being at the deepest level. When we sacrifice one part of our inner psyche's legitimate desires for the sake of another, we create internal frustration and even repression. This manifests in lack of internal coherence. When every part of us is not working harmoniously to achieve our conscious objective, and some parts may actively be working against it, internal chaos will eventually result. Even if we do attain the goal, it will not satisfy us.

The Quest For Meaning

What can we do? The search for authentic meaning in our lives is a huge task, but the sooner it is begun the better. It means truly believing that you manifested in the world for a purpose; a purpose only you can truly achieve. You must dedicate yourself to finding that purpose. You may have to accept that the cause for your present sufferings and disappointments may be that you accepted a cheap substitute - a counterfeit meaning - and made this the primary focus of your life. It may mean unraveling years or even decades of activity that once seemed so central to your existence. You may need to make some big sacrifices - the end of a relationship or a job.

Whatever it means, the creation of a Master Plan is essential. Each of us needs to know what our life is about. Our activities and projects then naturally emerge from that and are coherent with it. All too often, it is the other way around. We seek our meaning from our external activities, and then wonder why the consequences of this strategy turns out so badly.

Ultimately, the Search for Meaning is about taking responsibility for your life. It is about becoming a master of life rather than a passive participant. It is about acknowledging that you are a creator of your existence, and realizing that you are here for a specific and unique purpose. You can then actively direct the whole of your life to manifesting that purpose in your everyday reality. This is where meaning comes from. This is what happiness is all about.

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Dr. Asoka Selvarajah is an active writer/researcher on personal development and esoteric spirituality. Asoka's work helps people achieve their full potential, deepen their understanding of mystical truth, and find joy in their true soul's purpose.

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