

A Meaningful Life

We are born into this earth for a purpose and with a purpose, but rarely we make time to reflect on what that purpose is. I see people living by desires and wants, writing their own script or following a script based on social or family norms.

Today people are working hard, putting in long work hours, striving for success in life. But what is success? I have observed very few sincerely asking themselves the big questions – “Who am I?”, “What is my purpose?”, “What do I want for my life?”, or even, “How am I?”. To achieve a good and successful life most people need only good health, happiness, joy and blessings. A few are born to achieve a higher state of consciousness. So many people are sleepwalking their way through life, never stopping to check where they are at, what is working, not working, what strengths and weaknesses they have, or what bad habits they have developed. A lot of our values, belief systems and behaviours are habitual, and we should examine whether they serve our purpose. Self-examination is imperative and self-correction equally so. Do your ideals and ethics match? Are you living according to right values? Are you living life in service or in self-service? Correcting these things is necessary for a meaningful life. Without self-examination and self-correction how can you move forward in life? Many years ago I came across a book called “As a Man Thinketh” by an Englishman, James Allen. This quote is as relevant now as it was when it was written in 1903: *“Many people are anxious to improve their circumstances but are unwilling to improve themselves....therefore they remain bound.”*

Self-examination is like a service. If your car is leaking oil, or burning excess diesel, you bring it to the garage to be serviced. If the washing machine leaking you call the service man. Self-examination is taking time to identify where the leaks of your energy are, and why they are there. Examine yourself on all levels- *physical, occupational, intellectual, emotional, social and spiritual*. All require your attention if you truly wish to achieve and fulfil a good life.

- *Physical* – Imagine your body is a car. The heart is the engine, the brain is the computer system, the spine is the chassis, the lungs are the A/C system, and the stomach is the fuel tank that turns what you put into it into energy for the body. How are you looking after it? Remember you are a Soul in a human body, here to

experience, grow and progress on your spiritual journey. God has given you your breath, your limbs, your sound, mind and intellect to evolve and grow. So many problems of the body and mind can be solved through practices like Yoga, Breathing techniques, Yoga Nidra, Tai Chi and specific Mudras.

- *Occupational* – Work is necessary not just to pay your bills, but to give you purpose and connection also. So many people are unhappy in their work- the hours are too long, the job is boring, or they feel unfulfilled, not paid enough, etc. Correcting this is very important. Examine your thoughts and feelings about the work you do. Make the changes you have to make, but the most important correction might be to your attitude. Whatever work you do, do your best. I feel the proper spirit of work is explained in the Bhagwat Gita: *“You have a right to perform your prescribed duties, but you are not entitled to the fruits of your actions. Never consider yourself to be the cause of the results of your activities, nor be attached to inaction.”* (Chpt 2:47).
- *Intellectual* –You know that studying, reading, taking on challenges, are good for the mind, but don’t confuse knowledge with intellect. Wisdom comes when you apply intellect to knowledge. Developing intellect requires three things – thought, reason and judgement. The Buddha teaches that nothing should be accepted as truth without careful enquiry – *“Do not accept any of my words on faith, believing them because I said them. Be like an analyst buying gold, who cuts, burns, and critically examines his product for authenticity.”* Examine yourself and do an honest assessment of how much you accept as truth without proper enquiry.
- *Emotional* : More and more I see how few people are connected to themselves. When you are not connected to yourself you cannot be present. When you are not present you can’t correctly identify feelings and emotions. This is why meditation practices are important. If you live in your mind how can you connect to anything? Emotions and feelings are neither good nor bad, it is your response or reaction to them that can be negative. Taking time to tune into and identify your emotions allows you to change your thinking and actions when it’s appropriate, the first step to emotional intelligence.

- *Social* – As humans we are, by nature, social beings. Urbanisation has led to major changes in our social fabric. It is well known that loneliness and feelings of isolation have a significant impact on health, both physical and mental. Everyone needs to feel they belong somewhere and are loved. Do you actively invest in relationships, with family, in friendships, and create a circle of like-minded people around you? Isolation kills the body, mind and soul.
- *Spiritual* – There is a Buddhist saying: *“Just as a candle cannot burn without fire, men cannot live without a spiritual life.”* It is what gives life meaning. When you see yourself in service, mindful of the needs of others you are living a spiritual life. If you are awake to the beauty of life and being alive, you are connected to spirituality. Nature is innately spiritual, the beauty of a sunset, budding leaves, birdsong, new life, all these things touch some sacred part of us. If you have peace in your heart and mind and have gratitude for the blessings in your life, you are honouring the spiritual aspect of yourself. As I said earlier, you are a Soul having a human experience. For those who understand this, spirituality is a way of living in the world, managing to live an everyday life and attending to the Soul’s yearning. In the words of Caroline Myss, self-examination is *“the process of accountability to your soul. It is far better to become your truth than to speak your truth. Self-examination is the process of becoming your truth.”* (*Entering the Castle: Finding the Inner Path to God and your Soul’s Purpose.*)

Self-examination and self correction require self-control, self-regulation, discipline and willpower. Why do we find it so difficult to cultivate and live by these qualities? The main enemies are doubt, time and procrastination. Of these, doubt is the greatest poison, and is also a substantial part of why we don’t use time wisely and procrastinate. There is always a reason not to do something, but if you are sincere in your wish to understand the meaning of your life don’t hesitate. Take on the challenge. Never forget, we come into the world with an appointment with Death, so embrace the life you have been gifted every day. Never stop growing your body, mind and soul. A lifetime is no time – live it meaningfully and ethically.