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Meaning of life

In the season of Thanksgiving and holiday cheer, I am reminded of Victor Frankl's words in "Man's Search For Meaning" in which he wrote, "the meaning of life is to give life meaning." One's search for meaning is of utmost importance when facing a problem or seeking help. You hear it everyday in the form of "Why?"

Why me? Why did this have to happen? Why this? Why can't that? All in the name of meaning. It's sometimes overshadowed by blame, sarcasm, or defensiveness but it's always there. We can't help but long for understanding of why and for hundreds of years, if not thousands, medical and mental health professionals have sought to understand how to help people find answers to that type of question.

Ultimately, we are all learning to navigate through life and adapting to relationships and circumstances which leave us scratching our heads at times asking how we are to live as a result of X, Y, or Z happening.

I read recently that the meaning of life is found in how you spend your time. I'm hung up on that simple direction, however. How we spend our time is intimately personal and deeply psychological. For instance, how one spends his/her day helping others versus how another pursues his/her own interests is rooted in a complex and integrated set of cognitive, behavioral, and emotional responses – responses closely tied to intuition and conditioned learning over one's lifetime beginning at infancy onto the present moment of one's life. As a result, what, when, why, and how we navigate through life's roller coaster is both a conscious and subconscious assortment of neurological recordings and assumptions gathered over our lifetime.

Meaning of one's life, in other words, is progressive. It evolves over our lifetime. Call it spiritual awakenings or wisdom or simply knowledge. However you relate to the concept of meaning, one thing that never ceases is how meaning grows, expands, collapses, rejuvenates, and collects – just like a garden or field of crops. Sometimes its fed appropriately with just the right balance of nutrients. Sometimes its flooded and can drown out the root. And sometimes it can dry up.

What phase is your pursuit of meaning in? What parasites are attacking your ability to grow?

Regardless of what meaning looks like for you at this moment, fortunately, just like a garden, we have each new year to learn from what we've experienced, to recondition our roots, to weed out the unwanted, and sometimes even replant all in the name of maintaining some level of routine while developing new experiences and creating meaning.

I find it immensely appropriate that we end the year with festive celebrations joining family and friends. At the end of the year, despite the roller coaster of life, despite the joys and the sorrows, the successes and failures, we end the ride together with a sense that "Shew! What a ride! We survived another year!"

We do so with thanksgiving and joy because there is *security* in traditions as well as in creating new norms, *inspiration* in reflection and the thirst for progress, *contribution* in our giving and a real sense of reward for doing so, *connection* in our joining together as a larger unit of "one," and, ultimately, *growth* in our search for and attainment of purpose and meaning.

Let those last points be a guide to your survival and revival over the holidays and entrance into the new year. Perhaps, even, in this order:

Safety/Security

Safeguard your mind. Break free, as free as you can, from negativity. Exercise. Be proactive about your physical and emotional long-term well-being. It's never too late. Return to the basics sometimes. Create routines, boundaries, and balance. Routine may be redundant but going back to the basics in life sometimes can free us from the limitations we often place on ourselves and ourselves alone. Let go of expectations. Sometimes in life we must forget what we know to know more. Security is the soil from which your meaning grows.

Stimulation/Inspiration

What makes you move? What drives you? Forget how much money you can make or what position you can reach. Concentrate on what you ache for, what your body and your mind silently long for. Seek out the adventure in being alive. Learn something new and as if you're going to teach someone. Watch videos. Read or listen to books. Gather yourself around people that have what you want. Don't be inferior or envious, be courageous in doing what others that have what you want are doing. Inspiration is the nutrient for living a meaningful life.

Contribution

We all long to be cared about but it is often in caring for others that we find our greatest sense of empowerment, worthiness, and personal achievement. Find yourself through giving yourself. If you're not sure how you can contribute, engage in activities you are passionate about and start there. We are often at your best when we contribute. When we contribute, we connect. Contribution is what drives the "me" into MEaning. It is the pathway toward the fruit of your labor.

Connection

Surround yourself with people like and unlike you. Diversify your relationships. Examine your top 5 people and places you connect with and recognize the Law of Averages in those relationships (you will be the average of that combination). Don't forget the people that have helped you along the way. Follow the "reach one, bring one" mantra: reach a mountaintop and bring someone up with you. Connections are the sweet tasting fruits of our efforts that produce seeds, simple pleasures, and a variety of experiences that last a lifetime.

Growth

Learn from your mistakes. Do this by recognizing we are limited biologically, logically, and spiritually. None of us are truly self-actualized, enlightened persons. Let go of perfection. Life is literally a constant karma of lessons which will be repeated until learned and/or repeated to reinforce. Forgive yourself. Forgive others. Recognize your strengths and successes. Identify and challenge the thoughts, emotions, and behaviors that get in the way of striving, reaching, and even surpassing your potential. Meaning stems from purpose and purpose is meant to grow, thrive, and replenish!

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