A Problem in Human Nature

We have a problem in human nature. All of us act in ways that serve our self-interest. The physical laws of nature are rigidly fixed compared to the less predictable theories in the social and behavioral world. These are universal and theories indicate that human beings have different desires, interests and motivations. If your interests match up with others, then you needs will be satisfied. From an economic, psychological perspective, we must realize that resources are limited. Given this reality we create strategies to achieve the things we desire; nice cars, fancy homes, expensive vacations and devices to enhance quality of life.

Aristotle the stoic early on reminded us that we innately desired to embrace truth, to behave morally so we can taste the good life. Activating virtues are a central, vital component of experiencing happiness and possessing the capacity to make the right ethical choices when encountering an ethical or moral dilemma. For Aristotle, virtues include bravery, wisdom, justice, honesty, and generosity. Similarly, Plato believed human beings were rational social animals, needing others to have our needs met.

Taming Insatiable Desires for Attention

Human beings desire things to fulfill their needs and this is healthy and adaptive. I purchase dental floss to maintain my oral hygiene and healthy gums. I need the dental floss but not the newest $10,000 triathlon bike. The triathlon bike I ride is just fine for now. To temper desires, one needs to cultivate an attitude of having a good enough number of things. Practicing good enough thinking will help tame the desire to overreach and live big. Otherwise one is at risk for purchasing unnecessary devices and goods that increase debt. Our consumerist history has capitalized on our vulnerabilities and persuasive ads and marketing strategies has us believing it will produce enduring happiness. Genuine, enduring happiness results from doing our fitting, true work and meaningful relationships. The expensive car, cell phone or expensive piece of jewelry will not add to my genuine, enduring happiness because they’re objects of illusory happiness outside of myself. However, we are lured by society that we can impress others by what we have; the glamorous, expensive accessories of life most people cannot afford.

Undoubtedly, our culture and society has an embedded system that glamorizes and admires individuals possessing positional goods and fame. Our hunger for incessant adulation must be fed, along with thirst for showing our unlimited success, prestigious job titles, power and fame. Our culture conditions us to define success by financial prosperity, power and possessing objects of high value. Greed is the unlimited pursuit of all these things and it fills one with the illusion of securing lasting happiness. In the end -- one is left with an insatiable appetite for overconsumption, power and excessive need for attention. In sum, the more you are aware of the good you have in your life, the less susceptible you’ll be to hunger for materialism, attention and overconsumption.

The Meaning of Life

I’ve collected what some of the greatest thinkers have to say about this complicated subject—the meaning of life.

Abraham Maslow – Meaning is experienced by the self-actualized, growth motivated person who delights in using his creative powers for their own sake, and who can affirm himself and simultaneously transcend himself through peak experiences.

Paul Tillich – Man can choose to make his life meaningful by surrendering in faith and love to Jesus. By opening to Jesus and experiencing His acceptance and forgiveness, one experiences the joy and freedom of new being and the courage to be oneself.

Abraham Joshua Heschel – Man experiences his life as meaningful when he lives in G-d’s presence—not simply by encountering G-d in the world, but primarily by serving G-d in everyday life, infusing every moment with the spirit of G-d and by dedicating himself to ends outside himself.

Rollo May – Meaning is experienced by a person centered in himself, who is able to live by his highest values, who knows his own intentionality, feels the power of his will to choose, and is able to love.

What is my Purpose in Life?

I’m sorry for having to nudge you to examine your purpose and meaning in life. If you’d like, you can conclude the meaning of life is ineffable, inexpressible and too profound to define.

What is the purpose of your life? I’ll comfort you by reminding you there’s no universally accepted response because it varies by culture and society. Undeniably – we’re all products of our culture and we’ve been culturally and socially programmed or conditioned to embrace a set of ideas, values and beliefs embedded in your faith (religion/spirituality). So – you’re free to explore a range of ideas reflecting your faith and culture. If you’re a spiritual person, you’d claim my purpose in life is to fulfill G-d's expectations of me by being kind, accepting and an ethical human being. Further, you might assert my faith helps me discover meaning in the world through being a steward and taking care of others. One might say my purpose and meaning in life is to pursue happiness. Yet another individual says my purpose and meaning in life is to become the ideal version of me. I think one can pursue all of these interpretations simultaneously by simply being a good, just human being whether you’re spiritual or not.

I believe purpose and meaning in life involves discovering the hero in you. The hero lays dormant in you until you activate the desire to discover the genuine, true self. Aren’t you curious about who you can become if you set challenging goals to achieve with a purpose? Are you confident that the quality of your life would improve if you identified your meaningful, fitting work, hobbies and …….? The desire to discover your true self may require you take a risk because pursuing challenging goals may reveal a weakness, deficiency and leave you vulnerable.

To discover your meaning in life will generate additional insight and self-awareness which will fulfill your social, psychological, spiritual, emotional and physical needs. One of our

most banal, human needs is to determine how we fit into the world. You are not just an object of value in the world, but a sacred, …. object in nature that is substance of this sacred earth. Experiencing life fully; fulfilling your needs mentioned above will elevate your self-esteem and self-confidence. Knowing you can empower yourself; be self-determined and steering your own rudder through this voyage called life will also generate self-efficacy. Self-efficacy means faith and belief in self; strong belief in your abilities and skills to achieve goals that matter to you. Once you generate self-awareness you’ll be confident that how you perceive the world and your space in it, and what you’re pursuing is in alignment with your true self. You’ll be less uncertain ….