

The Meaning of Life

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Many people believe that there is no purpose to life. Some say that the purpose of life is to search for a purpose in life, and it is our goal to grasp onto that purpose until our life ends. Some say that we live life to achieve a greater salvation. Could we be working our lives for absolutely nothing, or could we be achieving something that we know nothing about? This complicated question deserves a complicated answer; this question is the crux of religion and the catalyst for philosophy. But in order to analyze the significance of life through what we must achieve, we must also analyze the significance of death through what we are rewarded for those achievements.

Imagine the experience of death. Imagine the things that transpire from the deterioration of the human body. As the human body begins to deteriorate, the brain, an organ part of the central nervous system and the controller of the physical, intellectual, chemical, and spiritual characteristics associated with the human mind, is slowly falling apart. So I began to think about a living example of the deterioration of the brain.

Alzheimer's Disease is a common disease found amongst the elderly that consists of the deterioration of the brain. The causes of Alzheimer's are unknown, It's the most common cause of dementia a group of brain disorders that cause progressive loss of intellectual and social skills, severe enough to interfere with day-to-day life my the Mayo Clinic (www.mayoclinic.com) but it has no Cure. However, through observing patients with Alzheimer's disease, we gain a glimpse of what death looks like. The brain belonging to an Alzheimer's patient is often characterized by shrinking. If you were to compare and contrast the brain of a healthy human being to that of an Alzheimer's patient, you would find that the Alzheimer's patient's brain is much smaller. But if you were to observe one still attached to a living being, you will be able to discover one common trait among all who are diagnosed with Alzheimer's is that they all have characteristics of massive memory loss. From this, imagine death to be a similar experience. As the brain deteriorates, the functions that the body once was able to manage are becoming restricted. As the disease begins to increase in severity, the victim will be more and more unable to remember the experiences they have. They will continue to live and gain new experiences from life, but then forget about them soon after.

But imagine yourself now, a healthy human being, waking up every morning smiling determined to discover the new experiences that life has in store for you. Now, take that feeling and combine it with the time you forgot something important, say, your car keys after breakfast. You don't know why you forgot where you had placed them, but you forgot nevertheless. How you forgot the turn off the television, then you forgot your wallet or purse. You forgot that you had placed your cup of coffee on the roof of your car, and so on. You forgot and you continue to forget until you reach a point where you don't remember anything anymore; a state of amnesia. This is a sad experience of fear but a misunderstanding.

As you are dying, your brain disconnects from the other organs. We begin to lose many physical and mental functions in a desperate attempt to preserve the minimum, but necessary for an extended lifespan. So assuming that your eyes no longer function, you cannot see anything. If you would like, you could wave your arms and hands in front of you face for as long as you want, but you would not be able to see them. At this point, you cannot see, you cannot hear, you cannot feel, you cannot even taste the saliva in your mouth. Your conscience lingers helplessly in darkness, but is such an experience all that bad? One would say that this experience is almost like sleeping, but one of those peaceful rests without dreams.

However, there has been a somewhat recent discovery about the naturally occurring psychedelic compound Dimethyltryptamine (DMT) also known to be a strong Hallucinogen that

was abused during the 1960's. But an American doctor by the name of Dr. Rick Strassman, who was conducting research on DMT production in the human mind, hypothesized that DMT is released from the pineal gland in massive quantity prior to death or near death. This is thought to be the cause of the "Near Death Experience" phenomenon (NDE) of audio and visual hallucinations. The fall of death might actually be cushioned by this massive production of DMT in the pineal gland to reduce the pain from the dying experience (From www.rickstrassman.com). So it is possible that instead of lingering in a null void, you are in a vivid trance as you die.

A gloomy and morbid subject matter of course, but out of death, what do you gain? Each individual's life comes with two things, a body and a soul. A body, being the accumulation of flesh and blood, allows for organic function of an animated organism in the universe. And a soul being the spiritual, intellectual and unique characteristics that create a sense of individualism within that person that governs the actions of the body through unique decisions the individual makes. Now, the average human body currently lasts about seventy to eighty years, so the body deteriorates fairly quickly. But as Plato has once said, "the soul never perishes and is immortal. If a person was to believe that their soul is not immortal, then they will live on selfishly attempting to eat up their fill in life. One way to "save" it is by looking to the soul's love of wisdom." But the soul, one's unique individual personality, can last forever.

The soul, as the Oxford dictionary describes it, is the combined intellectual, emotional and spiritual characteristics of a person. But what makes the soul unique? If the soul is in fact these special characteristics, then there must be something that makes these characteristics unique to us. An individual's personal characteristics are governed by the decisions that that individual makes throughout their lifetime. However, in order for that individual to make a decision, he or she must confront a situation that forces him or her to determine an alternative that is most beneficial out of millions of other possible alternatives. Each alternative presents the individual with a new path, each of which then leads to a different set of alternatives. But as we, the individuals continue to choose, question, and learn, we experience... "Experience". Through our experiences, we encounter love, hate, greed, joy, melancholy, courage, and many other emotions that exist within our conscience. The experiences that we come in contact with are a direct result of the decisions that we make, and become part of our memory the collection of which creates our characteristics. In other words, our unique conscience is influenced by the memories we store in our minds from the experiences in our lives, and we use that memory bank to guide our decision-making in our daily life. If our unique conscience *is* our soul, then our soul must be the existence of the series of memories that we have collected.

It's simpler than it seems. You have lived your life and you have collected all of your past experiences in your lifetime and you store them in your brain and that becomes your soul. The way that memory correlates to being your soul is through the fact that the soul, your intellectual, spiritual and emotional conscience, is completely influenced by the memories that you have collected in you mind to assist you in establishing a path for yourself in the future. Take your childhood for example; if you were a boy that loved little toy cars and you played with Hot Wheel cars for a majority of your childhood life, you have a large influence on your future where you are given the experience of enjoying cars. Then from the influence of your childhood on your adult self, you might become a mechanic or a car designer. Or if you were a young girl that loved Barbie dolls, you were given the experience of playing with stylish dresses, skirts, shoes and other clothing. Somewhere in the future you might have the interest of becoming a clothes designer, or at least groom yourself with enough care to make sure you look presentable

everyday. Although people are influenced by their memories in the same way, there are other factors or events that occurred within your memories that cause you to do something different than someone else who loves Barbies. The soul that you possess is what makes you unique from other people.

But how is our soul allowed to continue to live on? We are special individuals that are unique in our own way and will forever be unique apart from everyone else that ever existed. Two individuals will only be similar to each other, but never exactly the same. But since one's soul is a collection of memories, they can be passed around from person to person, passed down from generation to generation, or forgotten. When someone dies, their memories are destroyed within their brain and will never return, but the memories collected from other individuals that the deceased has encountered during their lifetime, or from stories they have heard and learned about the deceased, continue to exist and be distributed and hoarded into the memories of others. Thus, our soul is the existence of a series of memories collected by an individual, or several other individuals, of another individual manifested by their experiences with that individual.

With this, our soul continues to live on as stories that are passed around becoming only small fragments of the memories of other people. One example is the existence of a well-loved great grandparent that has died a long time ago, but your parents told you much about them. The stories and memories that your parents pass down to you are bits and pieces of the soul of your great grandparent. A more universal example is George Washington. George Washington's soul has lasted over two hundred years from the many accomplishments that he is known for, but his body only lasted for the first fifty years of his existence. The soul of George Washington continues to live on as fragments of American history textbooks, as historical books, stone memorials, and landscapes. The soul could be something that can be shared and passed around in forms of encounters, stories, words, and information.

Now that we have established that the soul is the existence of memories stored in the minds of the people you have contacted with, what is the meaning of life? Although there are many variations as to what the actual definition of life may be, the one that I am about to present offers more of a moral aspect of the meaning of life. Like I have said before, Life gives us two things: a body and a soul. The brain, as part of the body, processes information that contributes to the soul. However, once the body deteriorates and becomes nothing, you only have a soul left. Since we only have a soul left of ourselves, we should want to preserve it as much as we can and extend the existence of it as much as possible. But how does one extend the life of one's soul? Since our soul is the existence of a series of memories, we should find ways to preserve our memories, and this can be done through passing on the memories that you have generated from your life to another person or several other people. Thus, one alternate purpose of life is to extend the existence of one's soul by passing it to another person or persons.

There are many ways to extend one's soul. Before writing systems were invented in ancient civilizations, stories and folklore were created to spread the ideas and memories of famous or interesting people. Fairy tales were also a system of wide spread folklore, and they were spread from generation to generation. Some folklore that were passed around in the past were stories like Jack and Jill went up the hill and fractured his cranium, or Humpty Dumpty who sat on that wall and also fractured his cranium. There were also the happily-ever-after fairy tales like Cinderella and Snow white. Before Walt Disney made them into movies, these were stories being passed down from person to person orally. Similarly, in ancient Africa, there were tribal historians who were taught and told the history of the tribe as well as the ancestral histories

of each individual in the tribe through oral stories. So the short fairytales that you have been told as a young toddler are actually the souls of an unknown person somewhere in history.

So what is the meaning of life? Or rather, what is the meaning of the purpose in life? When you die, your bits and parts of your soul are going to be spread from person to person through countless generations. So in our current lives, historians have a tough job preserving the souls of the people that have already lived and perished. But, we must not be forgotten. Through this, our souls will be built upon by other people to grow stronger and stronger. Isaac Newton's studies have been built upon and by doing so, our current society has been able to improve technology through the study of physics and mathematics. We feed the souls of the dead through adding to their thinking and ideas. The purpose in life is to extend the existence of your soul, but the meaning of the purpose of life is to have the souls that we have created effect the people in the future; so that they can build their ideas off of ours and improve.