

The Purpose of Life

After losing our jobs, it's not unusual to ask and think: what is my purpose in life? Why does any of this matter? Why should I care when no one else seems to care?

After some thought, I've reached a conclusion. The purpose of our lives is to make the lives of people in our lives better because that's how we build communities: significant relationships, families, friendships, companies, religions, cities, states, countries, and more. We subconsciously do it, we're forced to do it to survive, and we need to do it to be happy.

There are evolutionary roots behind the purpose of life. In the paleolithic era, the homosapiens weren't the only hominid species. We co-existed with the neanderthals. The only difference was that the neanderthals were physically superior. They were able to form smaller communities to survive whereas the fossils of homosapiens are found in groups of 100 or more. We've survived to become the dominant species whereas the neanderthals died off and went extinct.

As people, we live in the pursuit of happiness but happiness is a mindset that's not easily quantifiable. It's often buried in our unconscious minds. A good example of this may be a person that claims to not care about money but when you break it down, it's their entire life. This isn't necessarily a bad thing. Everyone has a unique mindset of happiness because we all live to experience different lives.

Our entire lives, we're simply working to satisfy the chemicals in our brains in pursuit of happiness. People think they're rational and make decisions from their heart. But our hearts don't make decisions, it pumps blood. In reality, all of our decision making happens in the limbic system where emotions are processed.

Interestingly, the limbic system has limited means to communicate with the frontal cortex where we process information. As people, we're very irrational. In fact, there's a lot of evidence to show that we make decisions based on our emotions and then justify it afterwards based on the values and beliefs we've developed from our past life experiences.

These emotions that make us do things are caused by endorphins, dopamine, serotonin, and oxytocin and they're important because in life, your actions define you. The values and beliefs you hold to yourself are just your ego. You are what you do and each chemical has evolutionary roots in why they exist. We live to satisfy these chemical urges.

For example, endorphins mask physical pain. During tribal times, despite spending days and days exerting strenuous physical activity tracking down a deer, we wanted to do it over and over. This is what gives you the runners high.

Dopamine helps people accomplish their goals. When you see a leftover pie sitting on the kitchen counter, your brain gives you a small hit of it to get you interested. From there, you're fed a small stream in an effort to get you to grab the pie and eat it so that you get a big hit. This is the reason why people are visual beings and why it's recommended that you write down your goals. You have to be able to see it to spark the stream of dopamine that'll actually get you to do it.

Endorphins and dopamine are what gives people habits and habits make you feel good. But they don't give you a real sense of happiness or purpose. With habits, we seek it over and over because the feelings never last until we get the next hit. Habits bring our purpose to life and they're important because purpose without action brings nothing. Habits alone, however, bring misery. What gives people a real sense of purpose are serotonin and oxytocin.

Serotonin is what makes people create social hierarchies and we receive serotonin by moving up the ranks. We explicitly do it in our communities through titles. However, we also do it subconsciously in our individual lives with the people we meet and spend time with. In these communities, you cannot move up in the social hierarchy unless you provide value to your community. Your value in life is the value you provide to the people in your lives. Money can fake status but it cannot buy respect.

Last but not least, oxytocin is the chemical of love — it's how we build significant relationships. We can only get oxytocin by doing something for the people in our lives expecting nothing in return and it does not work if we expect something. Being on the receiving end and even witnessing it releases oxytocin which makes you want more of it. It's a virtuously addicting cycle as purpose that inspires purpose brings faith and community.

When you break it down, as people, we are habits and purpose. We form our habits with endorphins and dopamine to bring our purpose to life through serotonin and oxytocin. Therefore, the purpose of our lives is to make the lives of people in our lives better because that's how we build communities: significant relationships, families, friendships, companies, religions, cities, states, countries, and more.

We subconsciously do it to chase brain chemicals in pursuit of happiness like salmon that somehow know to swim upstream. We do it to survive because together, we're able to better face the dangers outside and ensure the survival of our species. We do it to be happy because habits without purpose bring misery.

As people, we have a lot of flaws and weaknesses. We don't have the time, knowledge, or the resources to accomplish everything by ourselves. But by coming together as a community, there's nothing we can't accomplish. We're allowed to have flaws and weaknesses because we can rely on our community for the things we're not and give back our strengths. Based on this, if we don't form bigger and bigger communities where people share similar values and beliefs, we will also go extinct like the neanderthals.

So what is the purpose of life and why does any of this matter? The purpose of our lives is to make the lives of people in our lives better and it matters because the people in our lives matter.