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Islamic Codification of Meaningful Life and Mental Well-being

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ABSTRACT

Deep within each one of us, there is an inner longing to live a life of purpose and contribution. What is the purpose of life? is one of the most essential questions. The same question is asked in many ways. What is the ultimate goal of human existence? What is my destiny? What am I supposed to do with my potential? What is the relationship between religion and the meaning of life? The question of the purpose in life has been pondered by thinkers, philosophers, and theologians for centuries but there is no one answer that fits all aspects of life. There are different aspects, contexts, and perspectives about the meaning and purpose of life. From a philosophical standpoint, the purpose of life may be to seek happiness, self-fulfilment, or find meaning in existence. From a biological perspective, the purpose of life is to survive, reproduce, and pass on our genes to the next generation. From a religious view, the purpose of life is to serve a higher power or to alleviate spiritually and have a divine experience. This article seeks to find the answer to the question of purpose in light of Islamic teachings. This study defines ways to explore the purpose in life, unleash the power of personal potential, set SMART goals, and write plausible personal mission statements to live meaningful lives. The author has reviewed the literature analytically and employed the deductive method of research to draw conclusions and develop further suggestions for the pursuit of a meaningful life.

Key Words: Pursuit of Happiness, Meaning in Life, Mission Statement, Core Values

Introduction:

Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E.) defined humans as “rational” animals whose biggest quest is the pursuit of happiness,¹ while some believe that we are “spiritual beings having physical experience”² whose purpose is to reach limitless possibilities by actualizing their potential.³ Human beings are unique and different from other creatures because they seek meaning in life and make efforts to live a purposeful life. Exploration of the purpose of life is more essential to your well-being and happiness than knowing about what career you should choose or what to achieve in life. Even Bertrand Russell, despite his deviation from traditional religious thinking, speaks of human longing for meaning and purpose which leads humans to religious and spiritual goals. He writes “*From that awful encounter of the soul with the outer world, renunciation, wisdom, and charity are born, and with their birth, a new life begins.*”⁴ Humans have gone through great challenges and tribulations in search of meaning and purpose as Siddhartha Gautama (563-480 B.C.E) did by leaving his palace in search of truth and meaning. Man has always been in search of meaning and purpose within and without. There is a deep drive and longing in the human heart or soul to seek something great beyond our physical world. An Islamic Sufi, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Rūmī (1207-1273) said:

Empty the glass of your desire
so that you won't be disgraced.
Stop looking for something out there
and begin seeing within.⁵

Life may not have a predetermined and fixed meaning, but it must be given some direction and purpose which could keep us motivated and alive till the last moment of life. Clarity of purpose refers to having a clear and focused understanding of one's goals, values, and motivations. It involves having a clear vision of what we want to achieve and why we want to achieve it. Clarity of purpose helps individuals to stay focused and motivated, and to make informed decisions that align with their goals. When we have clarity of purpose, we are better able to prioritize our daily

activities and tasks and we are less likely to get distracted by things that are not important to us. It also helps us organize our time and energy in a better way. A clear purpose in life improves our resilience in the face of setbacks and challenges because we have a clear understanding of what we are working towards and why it matters to us.

Significance of Purpose in Life

A happy and fulfilling life is not necessarily a life of comfort, convenience, fame, power, or plenty of resources. It is a life of higher purpose, meaning, positive impact, and legacy. Happiness does not come from passiveness; it comes from pursuing a higher purpose in life.

The general purpose of everything is to actualize its potential to achieve the highest state of being and express it to the best possible way. For an awesome life, both the process and the purpose are important. Setting the right purpose and following the right process is the secret of a joyful life. Those who enjoy both the process and the purpose are successful. For instance, offering prayer with full attention and consciousness is the process of experiencing God which is the end goal.

The importance of purpose in life cannot be overstated. A sense of purpose gives direction and meaning to your endeavours, and can help you feel more fulfilled, motivated, and satisfied. It can also help you navigate life's challenges and setbacks and give you a sense of resilience and inner strength.

People who have a purpose tend to be happier and more fulfilled than those who do not. This is because having a sense of purpose can help individuals feel like they are contributing to something larger than themselves.

The purpose of life is a philosophical and existential question that has been debated and contemplated by humans for centuries. There is no one definitive answer to this

question, as it largely depends on an individual's personal beliefs, values, and experience.

The Challenge of Finding Purpose in Life

People may struggle with finding purpose in their lives for various reasons. Some of the common reasons may include but not limited to:

First, we are used to making decisions based on a limited range of options because of cultural conditioning. We are not trained and used to making visionary decisions in life. *Second*, we lack visualization. Visualization is an important and essential muscle for the creation of a desired future. Many of us are not capable of doing creative visualization. Now, it feels uncomfortable to try to visualize our future. *The third* reason is the fear of failure which makes people hesitant to take risks and dare steps in life. People are afraid that they may not succeed. *Fourth*, some people are perfectionists. They think they must have the perfect vision to make the best decision for their life. Naturally, this doesn't reflect reality. *Fifth*, is external pressure. Some people may feel pressure from society or their families to pursue a certain career or lifestyle, which can cause them to ignore their own passions and interests.

Islamic View on the Meaning and Purpose of Life

Religion is the best source to define the meaning of life. Religion interprets life from higher and deeper levels, which is not possible otherwise. Someone may live a meaningful life without religion, but religions offer the highest possible value of a human life which gives more sense of purpose.⁶

Islam has put a lot of emphasis on the meaning and purpose of life. According to the Islamic standpoint, the whole existence is meaningful and behind this creation, there is the Wise and Intelligent Creator. Allah has created us and the universe with some purpose. Allah says:

أَفَحَسِبْتُمْ أَنَّمَا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ عَبَثًا وَأَنَّكُمْ إِلَيْنَا لَا تُرْجَعُونَ⁷

“Did you think that We created you in vain and that to Us you will not be returned?”

Not only human existence but the universe also has some meaning. To know the meaning is the biggest quest. Those who contemplate the creation of the universe exclaim with wonder!

رَبَّنَا مَا خَلَقْتَ هَذَا بَاطِلًا⁸

“Our Lord, You did not create this in vain!”

While the ultimate aim of life is to actualize its potential to the highest possibility through the recognition of Truth and total submission to the will of Allah,⁹ it is also imperative to identify a specific field, social mission, or course of action to reach the ultimate goal of life. Allah gives everyone a unique potential to perform a unique role in life. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, *“Every one of you is a shepherd and is responsible for his flock.”*¹⁰ One’s responsibility is to select a suitable field of activity to actualize the potential within for the realization of one’s top goal in life.

Life without a purpose is trivial, petty, and pointless. You would be just drifting and rushing without any goal or destination. Such a lifestyle may take you to the point where you do not want to end up. Life is never made unbearable by circumstances, but only by lack of meaning and purpose. Who would believe there could be such a difference in results between following a plan and just drifting along? A life lived by choice is a life of conscious action. A life lived by chance is a life of unconscious action. By following a purpose, you live the kind of life you feel you were meant to live. And what's more, you will be satisfied, happy, and fulfilled.

Drifting without the definiteness of purpose is a sin because it wastes resources, and brings misery, and suffering. In a hadith, Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, “*Leave that which makes you doubt for that which does not make you doubt.*”

دَعْ مَا يُرِيكَ إِلَى مَا لَا يُرِيكَ¹¹

The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) also said, “*Part of the perfection of one’s Islam is his leaving that which does not concern him.*”

“مِنْ حُسْنِ إِسْلَامِ الْمَرْءِ تَرْكُهُ مَا لَا يَغْنِيهِ”¹²

Contemplation on the fundamental questions about life and truth is the Sunnah of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). He used to go to cave **Hira** at Jabal al-Nour for many years for worship and deep thinking before he started his mission and message with great clarity, faith, and focus. Contemplation brings clarity, clarity develops commitment, and commitment leads to accomplishment.

There is a beautiful hadith about the importance of the end purpose (intention):

إنما الأعمال بالنيات، وإنما لكل امرئ ما نوى¹³

“*Deeds are but by intentions and each man will have what he intended.*”

We are directed by our religion to have a clear and pious intention because our actions are rewarded on the basis of our intention.

How to Explore Purpose in Life

Finding a purpose is a process that can take time and effort. It may also require exploring different interests, aspects, skills, and training or expertise. Allah gives everyone the four bits of intelligence and capacities with unique calling and competitive edge over others. potential. Some are better at physical potential which is referred to as PQ, some have sharper minds which is referred to as IQ, some are more intelligent emotionally which is known as EQ, and some could be better

intuitively and spiritually which is called SQ. You need to identify your distinctive potential, your edge over others, your passion, and your strengths through a rigorous process. You also need to explore a field in which you can employ your distinctive potential to make a positive impact.¹⁴

The Holy Qur'an guides us on how to find purpose in life. Sometimes you make a careful and informed choice, yet it proves wrong. Is there a better way to make your choices? Yes, there is. It is to pray to Allah and seek His divine guidance. The Holy Qur'an teaches us two important prayers:

أَهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ¹⁵

“(O God!) Guide us to the straight path; the path of those on whom You have bestowed Your Grace.”

Allah has blessed us with senses and intellect to make decisions on the basis of our own experience and judgement, but human wisdom has its limits. We cannot know all aspects of a situation. Allah says:

وَعَسَى أَنْ تَكْرَهُ شَيْئًا وَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ وَعَسَى أَنْ تُحِبُّوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ شَرٌّ لَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ¹⁶

“But perhaps you hate a thing, and it is good for you, and perhaps you love a thing, and it is bad for you. And Allah Knows, while you know not.”

Apart from our own wisdom, we must seek guidance from Allah in our decisions. Consciousness of God and His fear in the best basis of life decisions. The prophet of Islam said:

رَأْسُ الْحِكْمَةِ مَخَافَةُ اللَّهِ¹⁷

“The fear of Allah is the head of wisdom.”

The bottom line is, that when you choose something, choose it with faith, pure intention, passion, reflection, contemplation, and supplication. Don't be faint-hearted. Be determined, persistent, and passionate. Confusion, illusion, delusion, and drifting are the enemies of success. The Holy Qur'an guides us in this regard. *Decide clearly what you want;¹⁸ have faith in your mission;¹⁹ act persistently on your plan;²⁰ put trust in Allah;²¹ and, if you believe, you will definitely succeed.²²*

The best way to explore purpose in life is to develop a personal *Mission Statement*. Strategic thinking and forward-looking approach with a technical instrument design can help us live a highly meaningful and purposeful life. Before you write your mission statement, consider these four important questions more deeply and reflectively:

- What is your **PASSION**? Identify what keeps you all the time motivated.
- What is your **VISION**? Visualize what you ultimately want to achieve.
- What is your **MISSION**? Specify the product or service you intend to give to people.
- What is your **PROFESSION**? Identify your competitive edge, skill, or competence.

The *intersection* of passion, vision, mission, and profession is the best purpose of your life. Japanese call it IKIGAI- the secret of longevity and happiness.²³

You can't simply say, "I want." and expect it to happen. You need to write a clear and compelling *Mission Statement*, which should work for you as your compass of life. A well-crafted *Mission Statement* is a basic document that explains *what*, *why*, and *how* of your life. It explains your reason for being and helps you to shed all the

stuff that holds you back. More specifically your *Mission Statement* answers three basic questions:

1. ***What are you doing (MISSION)?*** (*Business/product/service/job*)
2. ***Why are you doing (VISION)?*** (*Ultimate Purpose/Aim/Meaning*)
3. ***How are you doing (VALUES)?*** (*Principles/Values/Standards*)

The basic template of a *Mission Statement* consists of three essential elements: vision, mission, and values. One should have clarity about his/her vision, mission, and values to live a life of meaning.

Vision

Despite having great potential many people remain unsuccessful and unfulfilled because their visions are obscured, smudged, blurred, and their lives are stuck in a rut. Puffery and unguided passions create more chaos and people become more confused and distorted. Helen Keller²⁴ was asked “*What would be worse than being born blind?*” She replied, “*The only thing worse than being blind is to have sight without vision.*”

An enormously important verse of Qur'an advises us to develop forward-looking approach and set aim for tomorrow:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَلْتَنْظُرْ نَفْسٌ مَّا قَدَّمَتْ لِغَدٍ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ²⁵

“*O believers be conscious of Allah! And let every soul look to what it has put forth for tomorrow - and fear Allah. Indeed, Allah is Aware of what you do*”.

The human mind has the ability to envision an ideal future. You need to evoke in your mind the images of your desired future. A clear and definite ideal is like the grain of sand which exists at the center of every pearl, and about which the pearly

material gathers. In the same way your vision is that ‘big idea’ around which your constructive imagination builds, deposits, and accumulates its material.

This is an established principle that everything is created twice: first in the image of the mind and then physically. *Mental creation precedes physical creation* is the Law of Creation.²⁶ When we look around, we see huge buildings, automobiles, computers, cell phones, and all manners of wonder. Where did they come from? We owe their creation to humanity’s imagination and vision.

Vision is a clear mental picture of one’s aim in life as if it has already been achieved. Under the title of “my vision” a person describes his end goal, definite purpose, and ultimate target. The best purpose in the light of Islamic teachings is to live a balanced life to be successful here and hereafter. Allah appreciates those who pray for success in this world as well as in the next life:

رَبَّنَا آتِنَا فِي الدُّنْيَا حَسَنَةً وَفِي الْآخِرَةِ حَسَنَةً²⁷

"Our Lord, give us in this world [that which is] good and in the Hereafter [that which is] good."

Allah has given humans the great potential and ability to create their own destiny. For the art of living, we are both the artist and the object of our art; we are the sculptor and the marble; we are the architect and the blueprint; you’re the performer and the director. Our life is a ‘*Masterpiece*’ of our own creative imagination and proactive planning.

وَأَنْ لَّيْسَ لِلْإِنْسَانِ إِلَّا مَا سَعَى²⁸

"And that man shall have nothing but what he has striven."

When we sow a seed in the soil, all forces of nature turn to cultivate it as a plant. In the same way when we sow a thought in the mind, the entire universe conspires in

helping to transmit it into its physical equivalent. If you are truly on a purpose, the people, the resources, and the opportunities naturally gravitate towards you.

Mission

A vision without a mission remains an illusion. Vision is the ultimate result of your efforts, whereas mission is what you do NOW to reach your ultimate goal. Under the category of “my mission” we define the activity, service, or product that we want to provide to society. The mission is the means to reach the ultimate purpose. While working on the *Mission* we need to set SMART²⁹ and plausible goals to transmute our vision into results. Success is sequential and gradual, not simultaneous. The metaphors, “How can you eat an elephant? – One bite at a time” and “A journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step”, fit well in regard to achieving your high aims and long-term goals. Big thinking if not followed by strategic and practical measures does not bring results. Small but practical measures are more important than merely thinking big. Your vision must have a mission, and the mission must be achieved through SMART goals. Each goal should have its objectives and tactics to create the bite-size pieces and manageable stepping-stones to reach the ultimate purpose.

Values

Last but not least is the selection of fundamental principles and ethical standards for one’s life. It explains the principles that guide your behaviour --- your ***Core Values***. Core values lead the vision, support the mission, anticipate the result, and reflect what people or organizations value the most. Core values provide the bounds or limits of how you conduct your activities while carrying out your purpose, mission, and vision.

Core values work like a lighthouse to show the right direction. They have a decisive impact on the choices you make. When you come across a difficult decision, your values help you make the right call and values save you from becoming the victim of emotions, unreasonable desires, impulsiveness, and distractions. Without values,

people are likely to drift and may lose their direction, especially in difficult situations.

You can select values as many as you like but three to six values are most common. While selecting values, make sure your values are compatible with your vision, mission, culture, and religion. Values are not for wall hangings; they must be internalized as your personal traits.

For instance, justice is one of the Core Principles of Islam which must be upheld in all situations. The Holy Qur'an guides us thus:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ بِالْقِسْطِ شُهَدَاءَ لِلَّهِ وَلَوْ عَلَىٰ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَوِ الْوَالِدِينَ وَالْأَقْرَبِينَ ۚ إِنَّ يَكُنْ غَنِيًّا أَوْ فَقِيرًا فَاللَّهُ أَوْلَىٰ بِهِمَا فَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا الْهَوَىٰ أَنْ تَعْدِلُوا وَإِنْ تَلَّوْا أَوْ تُعْرَضُوا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرًا³⁰

“Believers! Be upholders of justice, and bearers of witness to truth for the sake of Allah, even though it may either be against yourselves or against your parents and kinsmen, or the rich or the poor, for Allah is more concerned with their well-being than you are.”

Conclusion

A life without purpose cannot be a life of success, happiness, fulfilment, and contribution. Islam explains that life has meaning, and we must seek Allah's guidance to explore our purpose in life. There is no predestined purpose in our individual lives. We have been granted wisdom to give direction to our endeavours in the light of Islamic teachings. The purpose of life can be found through study, prayer, reflection, contemplation, and self-examination. While everyone's personal mission will vary, there is one spiritual purpose common to us all: to make the most of what we've got and use our limited time on earth to become our best selves.

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²⁹ Stands for “Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timebound”

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