

The Purpose of Life in 950 Words by Shawn Nevins

Perhaps we are the deepest dreamers, the least evolved form of life on the planet.

"What is my purpose?" is a deeply puzzling, though not at all troubling question for me. What follows are a few paragraphs that trace the chain of thought regarding purpose.

Is the purpose of a hammer to drive nails? To pry shingles? To break a window? To punch holes in the soil? To kill? Every object seemingly has an ideal/highest purpose—a task for which it was designed.

A human uses a hammer for many purposes. A chimpanzee might use a hammer to open a nut. Even a dog might use a hammer for a few seconds of chewing before leaving it for a more enjoyable snack. Humans clearly use one another in the quest to survive and other organisms, like bacteria and fungi, use humans. Biologists coin words to describe these relationships: mutualism, commensalism, and parasitism. We are using (other living and non-living objects) and being used. According to the cat, my purpose is to feed it and entertain it (children may think the same). All of this using and being used is not particularly glamorous for our self-image. We prefer far more edifying reasons for our existence.

From the Pope to the plumber, people are full of opinions on purpose: we're here to help others, to be happy, we are a stage in the spiritual evolution of the universe, we are the eyes of God, a cog in a biological machine, a battery supply for other creatures, or we have no purpose at all. Whether using or being used, this is all speculation. How would one truly know their purpose? Some say they have a "calling." Is it a higher authority they hear or is purpose equivalent to our wants? In other words do we create a purpose that justifies our psychological and physical needs?

What do I know for certain? Fifteen years ago the answer would have been "nothing." It took some time to realize I really knew nothing. That, in fact, is a large part of the spiritual path—uncovering the depth of our unknowing. Nothing, not even death and taxes, is certain. The rational response to that unknowing was to seek certainty.

Today, I find there is one certainty within me, but it is described only peripherally—with simile and metaphor. I am a tree that feels its roots deep inside, as if I am connected to the bedrock of existence. Where I came from and where I'm going... yes, I know this. But why am I here? No clue; no care either. Imagine a tree that believes it forces fruit to appear—what an unnecessary burden. The tree is a door through which fruit manifests.

I am here. A thought arises to write; I write. I wonder what my purpose is; I wonder. Bacteria consume me, a stranger sells me groceries, a woman asks me for seventy-five cents, a tiny bird is struck by my car, an unkind word spoken to my mate, and a kind word to a harried clerk. A great river of action is unfolding, with feeder streams trickling in from a watershed as vast as

existence. It is both a playground and a killing ground—arousing fear and swallowing lives, yet providing endless opportunities for discovery and joy.

The river flows through the life of the tree and downward to the essence.

For me, the question of purpose lost its emotional heat. I find that purpose is a product of the human mind. The augury of tea leaves or goat entrails is no different than the augury of our thoughts.

Is the purpose of a fruit tree to produce fruit, or to have a branch torn and shaped into a club which beats a young man to death? And if that young man were beaten to death on a bright morning five thousand six hundred and seventy-two years ago, what would it mean? What purpose would the tree, the man, and the one who beat him serve? Does the river and its accompanying drama have a purpose, or does it simply exist? Is there no grand purpose, but only purpose from the viewpoint of the individual?

The river is... the tree is... and we are. As long as there is "verbing" there will exist the seeming of purpose. As long as we exist we will have purpose. What are we to do? Nothing and everything. Can the hammer choose who holds it? Can the hammer of my self choose its hand? I believe so. I act as so. Even the hammer will protest its misuse by hurting the user or showing signs of damage. We have a choice between greater and lesser dreams; between light and dark. We are always being called to, by greater and lesser goods (gods?). I would not call it evil, but there are seemingly forces that would use us in ways that bind us deeper to illusion.

I am a tree that dreams. I lose my way in little worlds inside my head; in the whispers of my leaves that I turn into words. Now and then I must remember, remember where I rest and in doing that I choose the hand that guides me; choose the whisper that I hear. Is there a burden there? I think so, but not a heavy, Biblical one. I listen as best as I can to my heart and interpret that feeling into words that cause action. Let every word serve my highest light, and in that light is revealed the truth of my purpose: to be used, consumed by that which pulls my heart.