

The Purpose of Life

What is the purpose of life? It's a question rarely thought about much less reflected upon. And yet for those who do reflect upon it, the conclusions are almost always related to worldly ambitions: acquisition of wealth and power, attainment of status and societal recognition, and personal desires— 'living life to its fullest.' The purpose of life, however, is not about worldly aspirations related to our present and personal life. It is about the purpose of *life itself*.

In discussing this topic, questions regarding the existence of God and the origins of life need to be addressed. As this article will attempt to demonstrate, the question of whether there is a purpose and meaning to life relies solely on whether there is a God who has created humankind and the universe.

The advocates of atheism have always argued that there is no proof for the existence of "God" or Creator of the Universe. Instead, they claim that the Universe "naturally" emerged. And in explaining its vast and intricate formation, they argue it was as a result of sheer random circumstances and seemingly incredible coincidences. Moreover, they deem life void of any real or definite purpose. Stephen Jay Gould, a prominent evolutionary biologist, contends "we are the accidental result of unplanned process ... the fragile result of an enormous concatenation of improbabilities, not the predictable product of any definite process."¹ Richard Dawkins, perhaps the most vocal advocate of atheism today, writes that "natural selection, the blind, unconscious, automatic process which Darwin discovered, and which we now know is the explanation for the existence and apparently purposeful form of all life, *has no purpose in mind.*"²

Thus to them, our sole reason for living is merely to procreate. As Gould tells us, "Darwin argues that evolution has no purpose. Individuals struggle to increase the representation of their genes in future generations, and that is all."³ Dawkins is even more explicit in asserting this view, saying, "We are machines built by DNA whose purpose is to make more copies of the same DNA ... That is exactly what we are for. We are machines for propagating DNA, and the propagation of DNA is a self-sustaining process. *It is every living object's sole reason for living*."⁴

The claims made above can be summarised as follows (note how each claim leads to asserting the next):

- 1) The existence of God “cannot scientifically be proven.”
- 2) The universe “naturally emerged” (from nothing), and human beings “naturally evolved” (i.e., accidentally and by chance).
- 3) The universe is meaningless—that is, there is no purpose or meaning to its existence.
- 4) There is no meaningful reason to the existence of human beings. We exist simply to increase the representation of our genes in future generations. Hence, there is no higher purpose or meaning to life.

Thus, it becomes obvious that belief in the existence of God and acknowledging a purpose and meaning to life go hand in hand.

Proofs for the Existence of God

From the most obvious and direct proofs for the existence of God is the simple fact that we exist. That is to say, our existence necessitates an originator.

Suppose you are walking through a desert accompanied by a group of Bedouins. Your cellular phone drops to the ground and as you pick it up, you realise you’ve startled your companions who have never been exposed to products of modern technology. So you begin to tell them about how the phone works and even give them a demonstration by calling your parents back home. The Bedouins are awe-struck and ask you about the origin of this device. You happen to know a little bit about its history and relate how it was invented and how such devices are made by teams of engineers and programmers. They are still astonished and remark how if it hadn’t been for your explanation, they would have thought it was sent down by God from heaven. You laugh and reply, “I don’t believe in God.” Your statement further astonishes them and they respond saying, “If that device was designed and assembled by intelligent human beings, then how about the human body and the elements of nature? Does it not also have an intelligent originator?”

Consider the mind and how we use it to think, reason, comprehend, and acquire knowledge. Consider its impeccable ability to consistently store, retrieve, categorize, and distinguish information—all in a millionth of a second. It is this mind that we use to skilfully design and assemble the cellular phone and every other mechanism, machinery, or infrastructure. Moreover, it is our mind that distinguishes and elevates us over other living creatures. Yet, no man can create anything remotely similar to the mind, likewise

any other part of the human body. Could something so inimitable in its design, complexity, functionality, and substance be the result of spontaneous evolution? Consider also our earth and solar system, the sun and its purpose in our solar system, the stars and galaxies in the splendid universe and ask yourself the same question—as the Quran⁵ enquires:

Were they created by nothing, or were they themselves the creators? Or did they create the heavens and the earth? Rather, they are not certain. (Tur 52:35-36)

It is undeniable that the universe, with all its cosmological, physical, geological, chemical, and biological properties, is governed by innumerable laws and ultra-precise physical constants perfectly tailored for our existence. It is these laws and physical constants that illustrate to us the fact this Universe has been designed and fine-tuned, pointing to the obvious conclusion that the Universe has a Creator, Planner, and Sustainer—The One Almighty God. In light of these facts, the “natural” emergence of a universe with all the features necessary for life is wildly improbable; rather it is impossible any way you look at it.

The Evident Signs of God

The Quran in many verses calls on humanity to reflect upon the evident Signs for the existence of God:

And it is He who placed for you the stars that you may be guided by them through the darkness of the land and sea. We have detailed Our signs for a people who know. (An'am 6:97)

And We have appointed the night and the day as two signs. Then, We have made dark the sign of the night while We have made the sign of day illuminating, that you may seek bounty from your Lord, and that you may know the number of the years and the reckoning. And We have explained everything (in detail) with full explanation. (Isra 17:12)

And it is He who sends down rain from the sky, and We produce thereby the growth of all things. We produce from it greenery from which We produce grains arranged in layers. And from the palm tree—of its emerging fruit are clusters hanging low. And [We produce] gardens of grapevines and olives and pomegranates, similar yet varied. Look at [each of] its fruit when it yields and [at] its ripening. Indeed in that are signs for a people who believe. (An'am 6:99)

And among His signs is that He created for you spouses from among yourselves, that you may find tranquility in them, and He has put between you affection and mercy. Verily, in that are indeed signs for a people who reflect. (Rum 30:21)

And the Quran also calls on humanity to reflect upon the blessings of God:

*We have created you, so why do you not believe? Have you seen that which you emit (i.e., semen which contains the potential for human life)? Is it you who creates it, or are We the Creator? We have decreed death among you, and We are not unable, to transfigure you and create you in [forms] that you do not know. And you already know the first creation (i.e. the creation of Adam), so will you not remember? And have you seen that [seed] which you sow? Is it you who makes it grow, or are We the grower? If We willed, We could make it [dry] debris, and you would be regretful (or left in wonderment), [Saying], “Indeed, we are [now] in debt; Rather, we have been deprived.” And have you seen the water that you drink? Is it you who brought it down from the clouds, or is it We who bring it down? If We willed, We could make it bitter (and undrinkable), **why then are you not grateful (to God)?** (Waqi'ah 56:57-70)*

Whenever we receive a gift or any other kind gesture from others, the least we say is thank you. So how about God, who created us and continuously showers us with abundant favours and blessings?

If you would count the blessings of God you would not be able to reckon them. (Ibrahim 14:34)

The Purpose of Life

Regardless of how many years we may enjoy life, death is an eminent reality. The troubling fact about death is that it can strike at a moment when we least expect it. Yet, the vast majority of us seem all too attached to life's beauty, glamour, joy, and amusement, as if we will be able to take all of that with us to our grave. The Quran puts forth an example to us on what this life is really like:

*And put forward to them the example of the life of this world, [its being] like rain which We send down from the sky, and the vegetation of the earth mingles with it (i.e. absorbs it, growing lush and thick). **But [then] it becomes dry remnants,***

scattered by the winds. And God is ever, over all things, Perfect in Ability.
(Kahf 18:45)

The reality of life is such that no matter how long it may last, how many joys we experience, or how much riches we accumulate, death will eventually overtake us. For this reason, it becomes ever more important we realize our true purpose in life before that inevitable day catches up to us. The means to realizing our purpose in life is by remembering the One who created us and reflecting deeply over His countless signs. As the Quran says:

*Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alteration of the night and the day are signs for those of understanding. Those who remember God (always, and in prayers) while standing or sitting or [lying] on their sides, and think deeply about the creation of the heavens and the earth, [saying], “**Our Lord, You did not create [all] this without purpose; exalted are You [above such a thing]; then protect us from the punishment of the Fire.**” (Al 'Imran 3: 190-191)*

God, through His perfect wisdom, created us for a purpose. And it is those who believe in God, remember Him always, and show thankfulness to Him for all His blessings that realise life's true purpose and meaning. And the purpose of life is simple:

*And I (God) did not create the jinn and humankind except to **worship Me.***
(Dharyat 51:56)

God created us to test us, to see who would choose belief in Him over disbelief; to see who would devote his life to praising and showing thanks to Him over being negligent and arrogant towards Him; to see who would choose a life of righteousness over evil; and to see who would choose guidance over misguidance. Moreover, God would not leave His creation without guidance, so upon us is to seek the truth and find the guidance of God before death should overtake us.

One might ask why God would not just show everyone a clear sign that would force all people to believe in Him and follow His guidance. The Quran answers this question in the following verse:

*Do they [then] wait for anything except that the angels should come to them, or your Lord should come, or that there come some of the signs of your Lord (i.e. signs of the Last Hour, e.g. the rising of the sun from the west)? The Day that some of the signs of your Lord will come, **no good will it do to a person to believe then, if he believed not before, nor earned good (by performing deeds of***

righteousness) through his Faith. Say, “*Wait. Indeed, we [also] are waiting.*” (An'am 6:158)

Faith is precious because it requires diligence and effort. And those who pass the test of life do so because of their faith. They believe in and worship God even though they do not see him. They seek out and follow His guidance and perform righteousness even though their whims and desires may persuade them to do otherwise. And God has promised an eventual benefit and reward for faith and righteous deeds, as the Quran says:

Indeed, they who have believed and done righteous deeds and humbled themselves to their Lord, those are the companions of Paradise; they will abide eternally therein.
(Hud 11:23)

This benefit is not restricted to the Afterlife. Rather, realizing our purpose in life is a means to eradicating the sense of emptiness and disarray we may suffer from in life, thereby instilling inner peace and contentment in our lives. And only faith in God supplies us with the hope and spiritual strength we require to overcome all of life's adversities, the greatest of them being death. Thus, the fruits and benefits of faith are experienced both in our present life and in our eventual life to come.

Those who have believed and whose hearts are assured by the remembrance of God. Unquestionably, by the remembrance of God hearts are assured. (Ra'd 13:28)
Whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while he is a believer – We will surely cause him to live a good life, and We will surely give them their reward [in the Hereafter] according to the best of what they used to do. (Nahl 16:97)

Faith however requires that we following the guidance God sent down for humanity to follow, since how can one know the requirements of faith, worship, and obedience to God if one does not know His guidance? So upon us is to seek the true guidance.

In closing, we hope what you have read has been an inspiration and enlightenment for you, as well as an encouragement to learn more about the Quran, the teachings of Islam, and the life of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Should you have any questions or comments, e-mail us at .

¹ Stephen Jay Gould, “Extemporaneous Comments on Evolutionary Hope and Realities,” in *Darwin's Legacy: Nobel Conference XVIII*, ed. Charles L. Hamrum (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983), 101-102.

² Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1986), 5.

³ Stephen Jay Gould, *Ever Since Darwin* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), 12.

⁴ Richard Dawkins, “Growing Up in the Universe” (The Royal Institution Christmas Lectures, London, England. 1991-92).

⁵ The Quran is believed by Muslims to be the last revealed Word of God and is the basic source of Islamic teachings and law. It was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) through the Angel Gabriel fourteen-hundred years ago. The Quran describes itself in the following verse: *This [Quran] is a Message for humanity, in order that they may be warned thereby, and that they may know that He is but one God, and that those of understanding may take heed.* (Ibrahim 14:52)