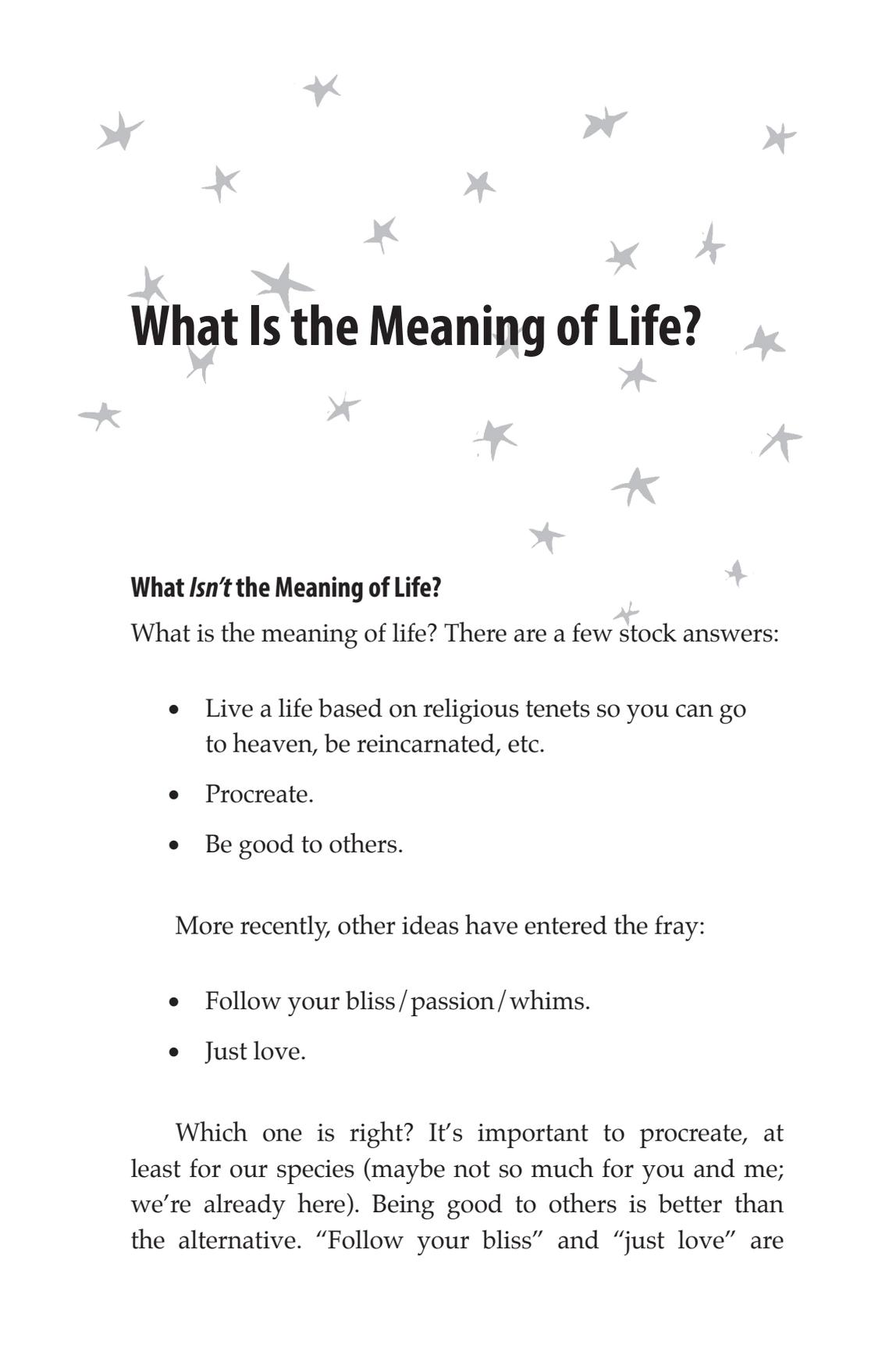




The Meaning of Life

Meaning is not a rudder, a map, or a route. It's not a result or an end. It's a beginning. Determining the meaning of your life builds the foundation for your life. Your actions flow from it. Your decisions are based upon it. Meaning is your singularity.



What Is the Meaning of Life?

What *Isn't* the Meaning of Life?

What is the meaning of life? There are a few stock answers:

- Live a life based on religious tenets so you can go to heaven, be reincarnated, etc.
- Procreate.
- Be good to others.

More recently, other ideas have entered the fray:

- Follow your bliss/passion/whims.
- Just love.

Which one is right? It's important to procreate, at least for our species (maybe not so much for you and me; we're already here). Being good to others is better than the alternative. "Follow your bliss" and "just love" are

wonderful on bumper stickers. Adhering to religious tenets so you can go to heaven could be interpreted as part delusion and part procrastination.

None of the current attempts at defining the meaning of life are good enough. None of the ideas go deep enough. What are we supposed to do with “be good to others” and “just love”? How should we apply that? Should we “pay it forward”? Should we “be mindful” of everything from the food we eat to our every utterance? Should we give out free hugs? Love is one of the most powerful human emotions, but is it a life philosophy? Can loving everyone and everything fulfill you? Bearing and raising children makes no attempt to raise the human experience above the most basic standard, so it’s unlikely you’ll find procreation to be a satisfying meaning of life.

The Achilles’ heel of most pronouncements of life’s meaning is that they are efforts at universal application, and they fail to account for time’s passage, cultural progression, and individual interpretations of life. There are thousands of cheeses. There are thousands of wines. There are millions of songs. If we can’t settle on which *water* tastes best, doesn’t that indicate there are massive differences in how each one of us sees the world? Isn’t there *anything* we can agree upon?

Laws, regulations, and commandments work (some better than others) to establish and maintain an ordered, civil society. They reflect the values of an entire society or at least the leaders’ interpretation of their society’s values.

But laws can’t confer meaning to an individual.

The purpose of law is a peaceful, orderly society. Law doesn't—and can't—define you, what you value, or how you see the world. Are you going to find the meaning of life within tort law? Are there secrets to existence written between the lines of swimming pool regulations?

How about the big three monotheistic holy books? They are so different yet so similar, all in the name of Abraham's god, each demanding that adherents reject the other faiths and take up arms against nonbelievers. Can we find a meaningful life strategy in the belly of the ark's impossibly crowded gopher wood hull? Is there a practical lesson in god demanding that Abraham murder his son?

At best, the world's religions are the creation stories of ancient peoples struggling to make sense of their world. At worst, the major monotheistic religions intentionally devalue the life experience. Blindly following the direction of ancient mystics, books, and charlatans pushes you no closer to a fulfilling life. Basing your life on the superstitions and ravings of people ignorant of the most basic natural laws demonstrates a considerable reluctance to think for yourself.

What /s the Meaning of Life?

The meaning of life is a difficult question with as many answers and subtleties as there are people in the world. Fortunately, there is likely only one answer for you, and for our purposes, it is the only answer that matters. Still, determining the meaning of your life requires deep, considered, ordered thought.

For meaning to *drive* anything, it has to be unique to you. There is no single answer to the question that's satisfying for all, but there is one sure way to get there. Unlike in ancient times, all roads do not lead to Rome. Rather, one road leads to many destinations.

This is one of the most important realizations to embrace. The meaning of life is different for everyone, even close friends or family members. Once you determine the meaning of your life, you shouldn't expect your best friend to exclaim, "Eureka! That is the meaning of life." You're not looking for confirmation from others. You're driving for internal certainty. Defining the meaning of your life is the only way to live a fulfilling life based in reality.

That's not what you usually hear.

Generally, it's assumed the meaning of life is "one size fits all" by design, as if there should be one meaning for everyone. But if we all possess individual consciousness, can the most elemental philosophical aspect of existence be uniform?

It is not *the* meaning of life. It is not *a* meaning of life. It is the meaning of *your* life.

A meaningful life is grounded in reality and the world we see and must live in, not blind hope for something beyond life, something unknown, metaphysical, or spiritual, something for which you have to subsume your goals and desires for empty promises that are nothing more than fragile fortifications against the fear of nonexistence.

To have a direct relationship with a creative force can be comforting, but one of the most important steps you can take is to accept that this life is the beginning and the end and will be your sole experience of reality. This is the only time you will get.

It falls to each of us to find our own meaning and recognize that self-determined meaning is the only valid meaning of life as opposed to blind, unthinking death worship, which is the summation of the religious end game.

To determine the meaning of your life and develop the aspects that flow from that determination, stop *believing* and start *thinking*.

Unfortunately, our culture's priorities don't include individual philosophical examination (at least beyond those put forth by the best minds on Madison Avenue, who daily present compelling cases that my choice of car brand can define me as a human being).

Knowing the meaning of your life simplifies, clarifies, and crystallizes. It makes the right choices obvious and the others superfluous. Understanding the meaning and purpose of your life stills the noise and chatter, leaving internal quiet and certainty.

By first determining meaning and defining purpose, using your inner perspective (self) as opposed to an outer perspective (gods, gurus, friend or family expectations, cultural standards of success), you can unify yourself with a common purpose and live a meaningful life.

That said, the determination of meaning can be difficult and emotional if you're honest with yourself. At times, it can seem as if there is no end to the "yes, but why?" aspect of the process, much like letting your inner five-year-old run roughshod through your mind. But if you agree that a few days or weeks of self-analysis are better than a lifetime of guesswork and frustration, it's easy to see how delving deep to find the meaning of your life, based on your experiences and impressions, is the best and most direct way to achieve fulfillment.