

October 27, 2005

Dear _____,

You have asked a very important question, "What is the meaning of life?", which lots of people ask, but you are asking with some depth and real feeling. What I write below will also say something about what you are going through right now, and it relates to your fellow beings around you.

For me this is a simple question. Human beings are designed to question what we are and the world around us--we do this all the time. Most of the dialogues in our minds are about how we are doing in relation to self and others. "How am I doing?" So we are really questioning all the time. We have self awareness, our minds are like that. For some of us self-awareness is not well developed nor is it encouraged by our society--the training is not there from a young age. So self-awareness is quite low amongst most people.

For me, the most worthwhile and wonderful exploration is to develop and fulfill the ability of self-awareness that we were born with. This self-awareness, when well practiced and developed, clearly leads to freedom from suffering and the awareness of life, love and compassion.

Self-awareness leads to abiding awareness of the non-permanent self (essence of mind and phenomena realization), that is, awareness and unity of the natural innate mind. This naturally leads to more compassion for all beings and experiencing how all life is interconnected and dependant on each other. To do this, it will take real dedication and training, but it is a joyous and extraordinary path.

Everyday we are reborn. We go to sleep at night, go unconscious, have dreams then re-awaken in the morning. Over and over again. Everyday is another series of opportunities for waking up and becoming more alive! The day dreams are about us. We dream through each day. But if we break this cycle of fantasy and day dream, we can come to the clear mind of self/mind-awareness. We have the opportunity to break the chain of blind, unconscious re-birth during this life time. Re-birth is happening right now. If you can see how it occurs everyday and every night, then conscious rebirth is possible. Conscious rebirth needs to be discovered now, not in some other life. We need to see how suffering is caused, first with us, how our mind states create a world of illusion, a fantasy world. The suffering caused by blind wandering, being pulled by our fantasies, thoughts, this and that need, conditioning and inflated ideals is horrific for millions of people. This leads to terrible physical suffering as well as emotional turmoil. It causes war, famine, disease and agony amongst billions of people and creatures. So few people really wake up to the connection between their mental states and thoughts and how the world is experienced, what they go through everyday.

The "meaning of life", which I would call the purpose of life, is to wake up fully, as fully

as one can in a life time. This does not mean you must become a Buddhist or Christian or Sufi (though for some that might be just what they need), but it does require that you be a very fully alive and an enriched human being. In the Buddhist tradition this is called Bodhicitta, the mind of enlightenment. That means we must study/explore life, love, awareness, compassion and mind. This is a life time study, both with direct awareness and intellectually, with feelings and intuition, senses alive and intellect working--an integrated being. It does take lots of training and practice. For now, let us not even consider other life times. That consideration can be a side track, a distraction from developing awakening right now. This life time is extraordinary, an excellent opportunity for becoming richly aware and a loving person. What else would be more worthy to do? Who knows what wondrous things a person with excellent awareness and compassion will do for this planet and the beings living on it? I have great confidence that an awake loving being will manifest many fine gifts, wealthy human traits and abilities to share with our fellow creatures and environments, for how could they not? A great gift would be the ability to knowingly guide people out of their mental suffering. Can you conceive of a better meaning and purpose for a human life?

All my warmest wishes to you,
May your excellent desires blossom quickly,

Keep in touch, always nice to hear from you,

All the best,
Mark