

The Meaning of Life

Everywhere you turn, every person you meet, they all seem to have beliefs. Not just religious beliefs, but some kind of sustaining belief or purpose that keeps them going. For some it's religion, for others it's their families, or their jobs; others turn to alcohol and the other mental tranquilizers to sustain them. It's the "whatever helps you sleep at night" philosophy. This is a philosophy, that despite my best efforts, has never worked for me. For the entire expanse of my memory, I can recall instances when all of my "beliefs" have failed me. Instances when I can't help but lie awake at night envisioning my own decaying corpse and wondering if anything at all happens after we die. Instances where I can't help but wonder why we are here; and how I can dwell on the frivolous happenings in my own life when so many questions about why I am here to begin with remain unanswered.

I first made the discovery that Santa isn't real when I was about seven years old, I had recognized my grandmother's handwriting on a present addressed, "with love from Santa." At the time I was outraged and I had little understanding of why I had been lied to. I made it a point to describe my realization to all of the other children in my school, none of whom believed me. I found this quite puzzling. I had always been a curious child, hungry for knowledge. The saying "ignorance is bliss" was entirely foreign to my ideals. Seeing my classmates, many of whom knew deep down that Santa isn't real, consciously choose to believe in something, for the enjoyment of it was an inconceivable notion for me. Now that I am older, the Santa Claus controversy has morphed to the next level. My adolescent/adult version of Santa is religion. Yet I am no longer the kid on the playground telling my peers that Santa isn't real and coldly breaking it to them that their lives have been lies.

By now I have survived enough sleepless nights to understand that the realm of beliefs is a deep, wide ocean filled with many shades of gray. I have come to discover that ignorance is bliss, that I was a happier child before I discovered the truth about Santa. There is a time when a more naive version of myself might have described religious people as fools. Yet it is impossible for me to make this accusation without taking a long hard look at what religion has done for my family and the people around me. For them religion is a bike helmet, and as they pedal down the line separating sanity from insanity they are much less likely to fall and crack their heads open on the wrong side of the line. But I have lost my helmet; I can pray all I want, but there is no reindeer dust that I can sprinkle to make me believe again.

If I cannot believe in Santa, or God then one might ask what is it that I do believe in, what is it that keeps me from crashing? Sometimes I don't know. Yet there is something that I have devised as a belief system. It is my interpretation that there are four fundamental goals that we are biologically programmed to pursue for reasons that not one person can rightfully claim to

know. The fundamental life goals, in order of importance are listed below. Goal one is self satisfaction (endorphins), goal two is self preservation, goal three is reproduction and goal four is the preservation of other human beings, but only where said preservation does not contradict the other goals.

How exactly can I claim that the thing that we cherish over all others is our own happiness? Quite easily. Though it may be difficult to fathom, it is an inevitable truth that every choice we make, even if we purposely make a choice that denies ourselves happiness, gives us some sort of solace. If you take a bullet for a friend, you are doing so because it makes you feel better about yourself. If you choose to engage in a self destructive behavior you are doing so because in some twisted way it gives you solace. I do agree that the concept is barbaric, but at the same time it is true and important to understand. If we are living in a world where our only true goal is the pursuit of endorphins, and we understand this, then we can live our lives accordingly.

I am not talking about going nuts and doing everything that we know of that can quickly lead to large amounts of endorphins (you can fill in the blanks). My interpretation of life, take it or leave it, is that we must discover what truly makes us happy. It may be helping other people, making a huge pile of money to sit on, or even going nuts and pursuing as many quick sources of endorphins as humanly possible, as I mentioned before.

All my life I have had people tell me that I am crazy, that I work too hard, that I am going to burn out. They don't understand exactly why I wish to pursue the goals that I have chosen for myself when I could aim lower and be "happier." I have been told by many that I am going to get ulcers and die young. Yet if that is the case, then so be it. I want to get a scholarship to Harvard, and become a world renowned surgeon and maybe cure cancer or AIDS or even the common cold, and after I do that I want to do more. If this means some isolation, or having to choose between having a family, and pursuing my goals then I will make that choice. My perspective may change as I age, but right now I am positive that this is what is going to truly make me happy.

I admit that there was a time when my bike teetered on the line between sanity and insanity, when my unprotected brain could easily have been scrambled by the impending hard impact of the ground below. There was a time when I would have wallowed in my own confusion, drowning in questions that can not be answered and refusing to remedy myself on the principal of not understanding why I felt inclined to do so. Yet I have grown from there. I do not believe in Santa but I will still stuff my face with Christmas cookies, I do not have the capacity to believe in religion, but I still pray. I may not always know what the point is of doing so, but I will still believe in my goals. Because that's my meaning of life.