

MY LIFE DOES NOT HAVE TO BE UNHAPPY

Why this book?

Humans are living longer and becoming more and more intelligent with time. Based on alarming increases in the rate of mental illnesses, such as depression, and suicide, we don't seem to be becoming happier, or any wiser, with time. Many young intelligent people, in their pursuit of knowing everything, lose the core objective of living the life itself. Alarmingly, many fall in love with artificial intelligence and live in a virtual world. Thanks to the internet and the social media, the actual face-to-face inter-human interaction is dwindling at a considerable rate.

This book is, therefore, targeted towards all present age scientific minded people, especially the young adults, who:

- Suffer from unhappiness; are disposed to depression; or have suicidal tendencies;
- Believe in atheism or scientism, albeit living with an unhappy state of mind, and challenge the existence of God and the validity of religions;
- Are addicted to, or are suffering from the ill-effects of over-reliance on the artificial intelligence, internet and social media; or
- Are trying to seek answers to the age-old core questions, such as, "What is this world all about? Why am I here? What is the purpose of my life?"

This book presents an evidence based approach to dealing with the subject matter, founded on the results of various important scientific studies intertwined with (a) precious thoughts from various well known philosophers and spiritual leaders; (b) a number of well-known rich

and famous personalities; and (c) some new perspectives about the subject matter from the eyes of the author about the following:

- Acceptance of unhappiness as a way of life and the way forward.
- Mental depression and how to handle it.
- Importance of meditation and physical exercise.
- The concept of God and the validity of religions, targeted towards atheism and scientism.
- Myth of love—useful thoughts about marriage and children—an appraisal and a realistic approach to dealing with these common sources of major human grief.
- Importance of socialisation and how to socialise for remaining happy.
- How to minimise tears from a misuse of the social media?
- Importance of hardening up and desensitising young people in their early years against the usual stresses and strains of the adult life.
- How the availability of multiple options in this day and age actually undermines an efficient and focussed use of time by our youth as well as their happiness.
- Why it is important not to be selfish in order to live a more fulfilled and satisfied life?

This book is about living life with purpose, and not drifting unnecessarily. It tries to explain why it is important that we live fully through each human breath, which averages just four seconds, instead of brooding about the past unnecessarily, or worrying too much about the future. Life will take care of itself; it always does. Avail this opportunity to live and enjoy the journey of life. The book starts with a commentary on the origin of life on the earth.

This book has five chapters.

- Chapter 1 provides a brief introduction to life on the earth, how it possibly started and what it is all about.

- Chapter 2 decodes unhappiness and provides an argument about why it is acceptable to be unhappy. This chapter also provides an overview of common life struggles and how the human mind attracts unnecessary miseries.
- Chapter 3 decodes happiness and how it has been defined by various poets and philosophers, spiritual gurus, politicians and rich people. It also includes quotes from a number of well-known people in the world, both past and present.
- Chapter 4 deals with the topic of happiness based on the findings of scientific and medical research and how one can find more fulfilment and happiness in life.
- Chapter 5 provides an overview of 'purpose in life' according to a number of leading proponents and philosophers of happiness, as well as what some of the major religions say about the purpose of life.

The readers must note that the author is a practising professional engineer, and not an expert on religions, or a professional psychologist, psychiatrist or a social scientist. Due to his technical background, the author has tried to use a practical, evidence based approach to understand the (complex) matters of life and followed the "KISS" rule (acronym used in the engineering industry for '*Keep It Simple and Stupid*'). It is possible that because for of his personal understanding, the author may have oversimplified certain complex human psychological and social issues.

The contents of this book are the result of the author's personal quest to find the answers to his questions. The readers are, however, free to disagree with the author's understanding and interpretation based on their own individual experiences and understanding of such matters.

Chapter 1

Where was I before I was Born?

Where was I before I was born?

Very early in my life, before I was nine years old, this question frequently confronted me. At that time, my home was shrouded with unhappiness. Growing up as an only child in an unhappy home was never easy.

In Kashmir, days are much shorter during the three to four months of winter. On days when it would snow or rain, the kids' outdoor activities, such as playing cricket or marbles, were not possible. In the late sixties and early seventies, when there was no internet and not much television during the day time, kids had to rely mainly on story books, comics and indoor board games to entertain themselves on wet and murky wintry days. In the absence of other kids in the family, I had to rely mainly upon myself to keep entertained, which was not always easy. Being the only child in the family, I would frequently find myself alone and quite lonely as a result.

Generally, in such situations, for consolation and inspiration, grown-ups tend to take refuge in the past, which has happened with certainty as compared to the future, which is uncertain. However, with only a few years behind me, I did not have much (happier) space to manoeuvre in my past where I would find refuge. With a rather corrosive environment prevalent at home, I had to dig deep into my own pockets and delve into myself to search for some happier space, which led me to the question, "*Where was I before I was born?*" Perhaps, I was thinking about my mother's womb where I had lived a relatively much cosier life for nine months since my inception. Very often, I also pondered, "*Why was my world so unhappy?*"

As the circumstances at my home suddenly changed for the better, when my age was getting closer to the first double digit mark, my mind stopped pondering over this nagging question; instead, I focussed on more mundane and day-to-day matters, as life moved ahead steadily for a few years.

At university, these questions returned to me occasionally, especially when life got disturbed. I would then contemplate the possible answers and sometimes ask other people. To make things complicated, their answers differed based on their educational background, gender, age and religion. Most answers were vague and unsatisfactory. Some elders would rebuff me and some admonished me that I was too young to think about these things. A common advice nonetheless was that I should focus more on my studies and professional career ahead of me. As soon as I realised that there was no one answer to these questions, I gave up asking other people; I had to fend for myself. Based on my high school science lessons about the laws of Conservation of Matter and Conservation of Energy, I started reconciling my questions, albeit still with lots of doubts. I realised that I was beyond my physical form, which was subject to the law of Conservation of Matter, and associated myself more with the energy in my body, which, in my opinion, could not have come from nowhere. I concluded that I must have been definitely somewhere before I was born.

Later in my life, in a contextual sense, I coupled this realisation with the spiritual Law of Karma i.e. as you sow so shall you reap.

Towards the fag end of my teen years and thereafter in my early twenties, as life revealed its deeper and stark colours, and sometimes its ugly façade, my questions returned with a vengeance and a much greater intensity, bringing along another question—“*What am I supposed to be doing here?*”

In my early to mid-thirties, during my days at Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia, I noticed for the first time that most professionals would become highly elated and joyful on Friday afternoons and remain in that joyous state mostly all day on Saturdays, but become relatively subdued and sombre from midday onwards on Sundays. This cyclic pattern of happiness and unhappiness, associated with coming and going of weekends, puzzled me. Why does the anticipation of a weekend and its first half bring so much joy to the people, transitioning gradually to unhappiness as it ends?

What changes between weekdays and weekends, except that people do not have to go to work on the weekend? Do people really dislike going to work? Would they become happier if they were told that they did not have any workplace to go to on Monday? Obviously not, because they needed money to look after themselves and their family!

So, if they were told that they would be paid while staying at home and, thereby, convert their weekdays into weekends, would they become happier? At a first glance, perhaps some people may become happier (especially those who did not like their workplace or the nature of their work itself) but most people may not become happier!

The reason could be that, generally, people like to remain busy with some work or an activity (or hobby) of their choice, which works as a therapy for their mind. It may be concluded, therefore, that work does not bring unhappiness; it is the general attitude that most people have towards their work that may bring them some unhappiness.

In search of answers to my questions, I had a look through the available literature to gain some understanding of the origins of life and our human evolution on the planet.

The following sections provide an overview of my understanding about who we humans are; why we generally struggle to achieve absolute

happiness in our lives; and what should we do to live our full biological lives with purpose.

Being a professional engineer by training and practice and, thus, a scientific minded person, to the extent possible, I have tried to follow the path of science to get my answers. However, interestingly, I have also tried to rationalise my thoughts and understanding based on philosophy and some dominant religions, in particular how religions could be used to help us to live relatively more fulfilling lives.

1.1 Life

Life does not mean just existence, consumption and procreation—it is much beyond that.

We are over 7.4 billion people on the planet and no two human beings think alike; each one of us sees this world differently and tries to make some sense out of it, albeit to the extent possible and reasonable. Life has a different meaning for a biologist and a different meaning for a philosopher. Practically, it is a challenge for scientists and philosophers to provide one definition of life, partly because life is a process and not an object.

For a common person, the definition of life is individual specific. For a scientist, life may mean unlocking the secrets of Nature. For a religious preacher though, life may mean having to preach his/her faith to the world, using a range of methods—coercion, exploitation, subjugation where possible, etc.

For a poor person, life may mean to become rich and possess all known comforts of the world—house, car, gadgets, clothes, good food and plenty of cash. For a rich person, however, life may mean

becoming richer and owning everything out there—land, people and become (or control) God, if possible.

For a spiritual person, life may mean pursuit of the truth and promoting oneness, peace and harmony amongst various life forms on the planet. For a philosopher, life may mean to contemplate and try to decipher what it is all about.

As such, there is no one definition of life. The answer depends on who is asking. In the words of Thoreau:

“Most of the luxuries and many of the so-called comforts of life are not only not indispensable, but positive hindrances to the elevation of mankind.”

Is then life an opportunity for us for our inner (spiritual) elevation?

Following his two year-long experiment at Walden Pond, about living a simple life in the woods, Thoreau wrote the following words in his book *Walden*:

“I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.

I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practise resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion.”

1.1.1 The Seed of Life

Do you know how big or small (depends if you are an optimist or a pessimist), you were when you were conceived? At the time of our inception in our mother's womb, we were as big as the thickness of a human hair strand or a grain of sand i.e. one tenth of a millimetre. Interestingly, this humbling realisation does not contain our ego and pride.

A healthy adult male releases between 40 million and 1.2 billion sperm cells during a single ejaculation. In contrast, although women are born with an average of 2 million egg follicles, a majority of those follicles close up by puberty and only about 450 release mature eggs for fertilization. It takes only one sperm and one egg to meet and create a baby.

The egg cell or ovum is the female reproductive cell and is fertilized inside the female body. It grows from primitive germ cells that are embedded in the ovaries. The human egg has a diameter of about 100 microns, which is roughly the thickness of a strand of human hair, as mentioned above, and can be seen with the naked eye. It is about 16 times bigger than a sperm and about four times bigger than a skin cell.

The human sperm cell is the reproductive cell in males. It consists of a flat, disc shaped head 5.1 micron⁴ by 3.1 micron and a tail 50 micron long. The tail flagellates, which propels the sperm cell (at about 1 to 3 mm/minute in humans) by whipping in an elliptical cone. Sperm cells come in two types, female and male. Sperm cells that give rise to female (XX) offspring after fertilization differ in that they carry an X-chromosome, while sperm cells that give rise to male (XY) offspring carry a Y-chromosome.

DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid) is the material that carries all the information about how a living thing will look and function. It is shaped like a curved ladder, called a double helix. The letters of the DNA alphabet (called bases) make up the rungs while special sugars and other atoms make up the handrail. DNA is a record of instructions that provide cells their respective job descriptions. For example, in humans, DNA determines the colour of our eyes and how our heart works. Each piece of information is carried on a different section of the DNA, called genes.

Every time I look at my face in the mirror, I feel my mother is looking at me through my eyes; she had similar eyes. With age, I am also discovering that my balding pattern increasingly resembles my maternal uncle's. In many other aspects, I look more and more like my father now.

1.1.2 Human Baby

It is amazing to see how a foetus grows in size and weight over a period of about 9 months within a mother's womb, thanks mainly to its human mother and the Mother Earth who feeds all living beings. In the medical context, a newborn means an infant (or simply a baby) in the first 28 days after birth. In the first world nations, the average total body length of newborns ranges roughly between 35 cm and 51 cm; and the average birth weight ranges between about 2.7 kg and 4.6 kg. After the first week, the rate of normal weight gain of a baby is understood to be about 10 to 20 grams/day.

Interestingly, a newborn's head is very large in proportion to its body; cranium being much bigger relative to the face. While the adult human

skull is about one-seventh of the total body length, the newborn's skull is relatively much bigger, about one-fourth. Does it indicate a human baby is supposed to make use of its head much more than other parts of the body to understand the new world outside and quickly learn to adapt? Why do then some humans stop using their head as they grow?

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