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## Finding Meaning: The Cycle of Self-Improvement

*Joan F Marques*

***Finding meaning in your life sounds beautiful, but it's not always easy to know where to start. Here is a 6-step self-reflection exercise that's almost as simple as walking or breathing, but that can help you establish the difference between remaining a social zombie and regaining meaning in your life.***

It cannot be stressed enough how vital it is to find meaning in your life. Finding meaning in what you do can determine the difference between contentment and dissatisfaction; between optimism and depression; between vigor and lethargy; and between getting up and staying down.

In these times, when mass media instigate within us an increased awareness about multiple cultures and lifestyles, and therewith about multiple perspectives toward living, we cannot escape the realization that there must be more to the things we do than just going at them mechanically, solely because that is what's expected from us.

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Particularly with regard to our work environment, we find that many new-age gurus are spending tremendous time and effort to help us understand that we have choices; that losing a job is not the end of the world; that we should keep ourselves updated on our marketability and keep learning; and that we should shift our paradigms from perceiving ourselves as victims of society to thinking of ourselves as interconnected beings who deserve equal treatment, and who should have the freedom to choose their standards, their work- and living-environments, their friends, partners, preferences, and the like.

Remember *Anthony's Song* from Billy Joel? An oldie, but oh! so goody if you want to set your priorities straight! Anthony looks at his life, considers his eternal dreary attempts of saving his pennies for "someday," and realizes that there's only so much you can get for your money. Now, if you also came to the conclusion, just like Anthony in Joel's song, that *moving up* is not all there is to life, and that *moving out* is a very viable alternative, then the following may be something you can use. It's a 6-step self-reflection exercise that's almost as simple as walking or breathing, but that can help you establish the difference between remaining a social zombie and regaining meaning in your life.

In this article, we'll project the steps upon the workplace, since work is what most of us do for a large part of our time, but it works just as well for all other types of circumstances. Here it goes:

*Step 1* – Ask yourself: What is my purpose here?

*Step 2* – Am I content with this purpose?

- If yes, proceed to step 3.
- If no, start working on a change of direction immediately, be it through obtaining additional education, networking, applying for new jobs – anything to get yourself out of the current slump.

*Step 3* – Is the purpose that I ascribe to my being here the same as the purpose others see for me (particularly employers, supervisors and other key individuals)?

- If yes, proceed to step 4.
- If no, you should ask the conscious questions: Do I care about this disconnect between perspectives? Is the purpose I see for myself still

rewarding to me in spite of the incongruence? Remember, there can be dissimilarity in perceived purposes while everyone is still okay with it. In that case, you can also proceed to step 4. However, if you sense that this incongruence can lead to future troubles, start looking for alternatives.

*Step 4* – Would I still want to do this if I earned half of what I earn now? Am I proud enough of what I do, to the point that I would also feel great if it were to be printed in tomorrow's newspaper?

- If yes, proceed to step 5.
- If no, you might still decide to stay in this situation for a while, but you should start working on your options, because you are clearly not all that content with where you are. Also, keep in mind that even if you are entirely satisfied now, circumstances may change in the future.

*Step 5* – How can I improve the gratification of my purpose for myself, my colleagues, my employer, the customers I serve and the planet? As a consequence to this probing analysis, you should wonder: Is there a feasible way to serve all constituents, even if not through one single act?

- If yes: That's great and you can proceed immediately to step 6.
- If no, are you still satisfied with the improvements you can bring about? If satisfied, proceed to the next step; if not entirely satisfied, you should wonder what matters more to you: Staying with a relative dissatisfaction, or moving on. You may not be able to keep all the people happy all the time, even if that's your intention.

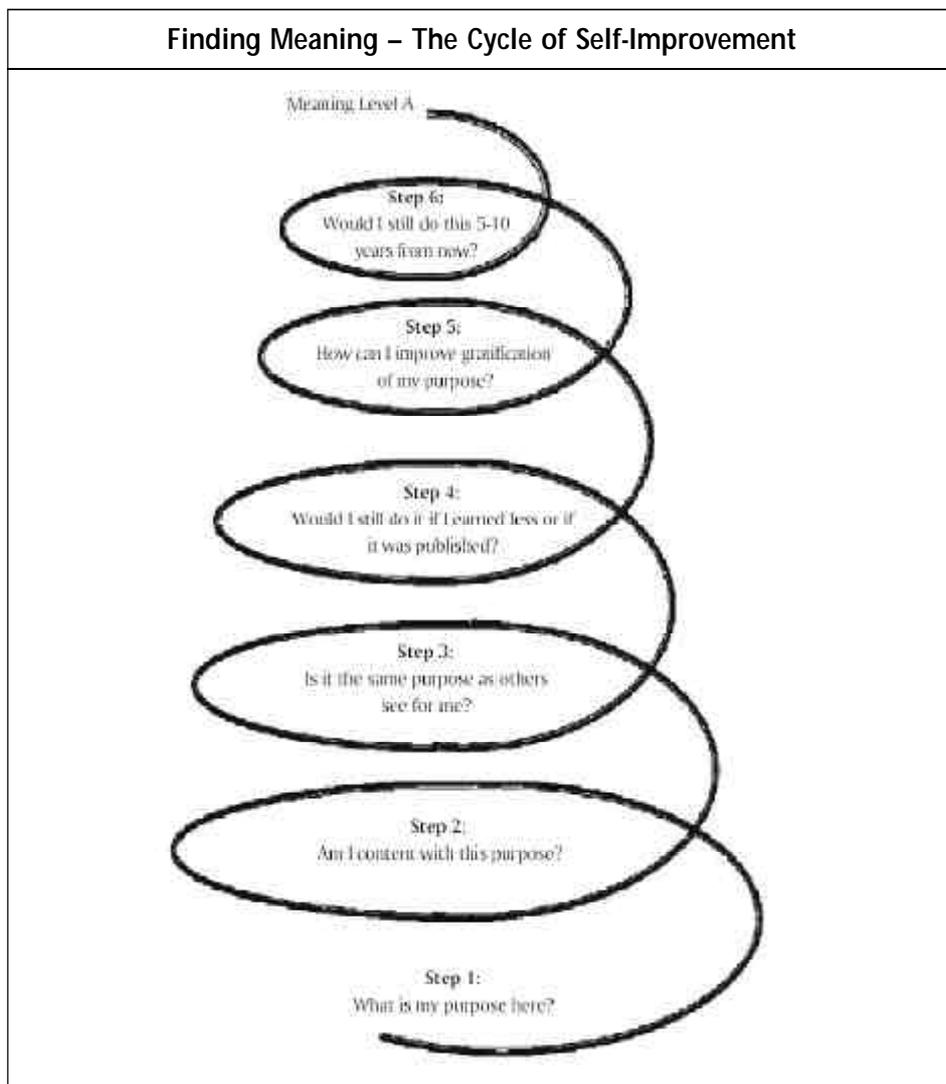
*Step 6* – As things seem now, would I still want to do this five or ten years from now?

- If yes, then meaning at level A is achieved, and you're on the right track.
- If no, continue looking for alternatives: Educate yourself, read, network, surf the net, keep your eyes and ears wide open to explore potential future purposes.

As mentioned earlier, this 6-step self-reflection exercise (see figure) can be applied in any setting: To your personal life, your circle of friends, the social clubs you frequent, etc.

And one more thing: Even if you achieve level A meaning today, you should redo this little meaning exercise at least twice a year, in order to verify for yourself if you're still at the right place, and if your current life still matters to you. After all, whom should it matter to, if not you?

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### **Towards Self-Improvement**

An individual's behavior should be supported by a rationale that brings about an alignment with the Soul's and Destiny's vision by moulding his perception, which takes the individual closer to perfection. Hence, an individual's approach towards life should be principle-centered rather than practice-centered. The general behavioral tendencies of a human being can be broadly divided into two types-practice-centered and principle-centered approaches. Many of us understand these as two exclusive concepts and adopt any one. However, we should realize that the practice-centered approach of doing things is a mere peripheral activity that addresses to the short-term and momentary needs, whereas, principle-centered approach is based on a reason for every activity, and executes the practice with a convincing rationale. The difference between the practice-centered approach and principle-centered approach towards life is as good as the difference between simply following the "Whats" of an activity and being bothered about the "Whys" behind the "Whats" of the activity respectively. To put it simply, principle-centered approach operates in obedience to natural laws, regardless of conditions, whereas practice-centered is based on certain created values, beliefs etc. for one's convenience. Principle-centered approach is a long-term, inside-out approach to developing people and organizations. To sum up, the purpose of the chapter is to communicate an appeal to the mankind to view life with a meaning, and extrapolate the reason of the physical beyond birth and death, which will align the individual's proposals with the Divine's disposals. Hence, lead a life based on principle-centered approach than practice-centered and build certain agile values and disciplines in life, which would result in the alignment of the Individual's vision with that of the Divine's through the Soul's and hence, culminates in a happy and successful living.

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