

**Session 10: Purpose**

Years ago, Dionne Warwick sang the song, “What’s it all about, Alfie” The first verse went like this:

What's it all about Alfie

Is it just for the moment we live

What's it all about

When you sort it out, Alfie

Are we meant to take more than we give

Or are we meant to be kind?

The lyrics of the song ask the listener to think about their purpose, the existential question, why are we here? It was a hit song because it resonated with what we all struggle with, from time to time. As Peggy Lee lamented in her hit song, “Is that all there is?”

We all need some sense of purpose. When we have a purpose, we feel alive, clear, and authentic. Ed Diener’s extensive research on the science of wellbeing has found that people with a strong sense of purpose are better able to handle the ups and downs of life. Purpose can offer a psychological buffer against obstacles—thus, a person with a strong sense of purpose remains satisfied with life even while experiencing a difficult day. According to Barbara Fredrickson, this kind of long-term resilience can lead to better cardiovascular health, less worry, and greater happiness over time.

Purpose consists of the central motivating aims of your life—the reason or reasons you get up in the morning. Purpose can guide life decisions, influence behavior, shape goals, offer a sense of direction, and create meaning.

For some people, purpose is connected to vocation—meaningful, satisfying work. For others, their purpose lies in their responsibilities to their family or friends. Others seek their purpose through spirituality or religious beliefs. For some, their purpose is a combination of all these aspects of life.

What you identify as your purpose will probably be different from others. What’s more*,*your purpose will probably shift and change throughout life in response to the evolving priorities and fluctuations of your own experiences.

How do you find your purpose? It begins with that growth mindset we have discussed in earlier sessions. Constantly growing and becoming a better version of yourself helps you identify your purpose and commit to pursuing it. A growth mindset also allows you to embrace challenges as opportunities; persevere despite setbacks and accept feedback and constructive criticism.

Since your purpose will change over your lifespan, it's a good thing to pause once in awhile and to give some thought to your purpose. A quick internet search will yield a variety of exercises to help with this task. While these exercises can be great tools, and you might want to explore them, there is a simpler way to identify your purpose.

You can begin your thinking about your purpose by creating a vision for your future. The vision of what you want to see in your future allows you to focus on what matters most to you. It serves as a roadmap for making decisions that align with your core values.

The next step is to spend time reflecting on some of the questions below. Writing out your answers will slow your thinking and allow you to carefully contemplate your answers.

* *Who am I?*
* *Where do I belong?*
* *When do I feel fulfilled*?
* *What is my contribution to this world/my community/my family*?

If you struggle with the answers to these questions – and most people do – you can experiment with some activities. In doing so, you might discover something that truly resonates for you.

Giving to others is a good way of finding meaning and purpose in life. You can look for ways to be of service. You might want to volunteer in your local community or donate your money or skills to a cause that matters to you. Or you might try spreading a little happiness by performing random acts of kindness. By engaging in acts of altruism, you are helping to make the world a better place and, for many people, that serves as a good base for their own sense of purpose.

Practicing gratitude, finding value and learning in your setbacks, exploring your passions and interests, spending time with others, contributing to your community, reading, practicing self-compassion, and taking time for self-care are all strategies that can contribute to a sense of purpose.

Practicing mindfulness helps to develop a good sense of being, self-knowledge, and wisdom that allows you to eliminate or see past superficial preoccupations. It directs your attention to the smaller, sometimes more important things in life. Like a compass, it helps you navigate your journey towards a life of meaningfulness and even enlightenment. It is, therefore, no surprise that many people practice mindful meditations to cultivate their purpose in life.