

Searching for the Meaning of Life

By Dennis Knight

What is the meaning of life? So far, I have been up to just about any challenge my fellow writers come up with, but the meaning of life? Where to start? Like any modern fellow, I Googled it and got a long answer that started with Plato and meandered through the philosophies, western and eastern, from cynicism to hedonism to nirvana.

A lot of thinkers have told us how to live, to chase and live our dreams, to matter, to count for something, and of course to impart life to others and pass along what wisdom we manage to acquire. The meaning of life is also central to the world's religions. Pope Benedict in 2009 told us, "Life is not just a succession of events or experiences: it is a search for the true, the good and the beautiful." Buddhists say life has meaning only if it is understood as a stepping stone to an enlightenment in which the self escapes from worldly concerns.

Philosophers and religions tell us how to live, but never get to a point blank definition of the meaning of life, so I moved on from Google to ask Siri about it. Siri is a feature on the newest iPhone. It's a digital personal assistant that can take instructions and answer queries in a pleasant female voice. Siri will lead you to the nearest drug store, put an appointment on your calendar or take you to lunch.

Siri has already and often been asked for the meaning of life, and she responds in various ways. Once she said, "I can't answer it now, but give me time to write a very long play in which nothing happens.", and another time, "Try to be nice to people, avoid eating fat, read a good book every now and then, get some walking in, and try to live in peace and harmony...". Her most definitive answer is "all evidence to date suggests it's chocolate". I guess Siri didn't find Google helpful either.

What I have figured out so far about the meaning of life is that nobody has figured it out. That is, except maybe Fred the Barber. I took my straggly mane and beard to Fred hoping for a trim and an answer. "What'll it be, Mack," was the preamble as he massaged my neck and proceeded to whack to his own design. Indeed, it was Fred's bull headed autonomy, or what I took to be a clear view of the world that led me to his chair. "Want me to get them nose hairs?"

Then I propounded the question. "What the hell? The meaning of life?" Scissors and comb punctuated the space around him and he levitated to the challenge. "The meaning of life? There ain't no meaning of life, Mack. What's the name again? Life is what happens when you're sweeping up the cuttings. Maybe a tip if you're lucky. The meaning of life? Hell, people been telling us that for a thousand years and they ain't got it right. I ain't never been asked and I ain't got an answer. Meaning of life? Better take that one somewhere else Mack, er, uh Derwin."

And thus it was Fred the Barber who helped me figure it out. The meaning of life is to search for the meaning of life. I gave him a ten dollar tip.