

What is the purpose of life? The Aim

*One sees clearly only with the heart.
What is essential is invisible to the eye.*

To Aim means to have a sense of discrimination, and to know what is essential and what is not essential in our lives. An Aim imparts a sense of incorruptibility of purpose. Focus on your aim without deviating – without being attracted to or deceived by cheaper aims. Remember your aim especially under very difficult circumstances. The higher your aim, the richer your life.

Before writing this article and addressing you, my Tempo readers, dear friends of mine, kindly and patiently following me now for two years, I posed this question – What is the purpose of life? – to anyone from whom I could expect a deep and wise answer. I questioned all of the remarkable people I have met in my life: Nobel Prize winners, great scholars, tycoons and eminent politicians; I even asked it of the Pope, in a private papal hearing together with my friend John Kenneth Galbraith. I can assure you of one thing: this is the question before which I have seen the greatest men, titans of thought, and giants of business, become as small as young children. Searching for an answer we have found that there is more truth in fables and parables than in history. In particular, we have discovered the most illuminating and inspiring ideas in a short story for children.

In Saint-Exupéry's most famous novella, the main character of the Little Prince leaves his tiny planet, an asteroid no bigger than a house, to see what he can discover about the rest of the universe. He visits six other asteroids – each of which is inhabited by just one adult who is foolish in his own way. He visits the King, who apparently reigns over the stars but only by ordering them to do what they would normally do anyway. He encounters the Conceited Man, who wants to be admired by everyone; he cannot hear anything that is not a compliment, but he lives alone on his planet. The Little Prince meets the Drunkard, who drinks to forget, and the Businessman who is constantly busy counting the stars he thinks he owns. He wishes to use them to buy more stars. On one asteroid, he finds the Lamplighter, who lights and extinguishes the lamp once a minute, at the rotation speed of his asteroid, endlessly, uselessly, getting no rest. And he encounters the Geographer, who spends all of his time with his nose in astronomic maps, but never leaves his desk to examine his own planet. Ordinary men as we know them are like the solitary inhabitants of the asteroids visited by the Prince. Each one is locked in his own world, in the prison of his role, sealed in a bubble of vanity and egocentricity, constantly busy in a hypnotic concept of work, doing what they do not love, in places and with people they have not chosen. But moreover we are most perfectly represented by the railway Switchman whom the Little Prince meets on the seventh planet: the Earth. He is the most emblematic character study on the absurdity and ridiculousness of the human condition. In his mirror we can see the parody of ourselves – our deformed image and the allegory of our lives. The Switchman tells the prince how passengers constantly rush from one place to another aboard trains – never satisfied with where they are, and not knowing what they are after, with only the children amongst them bothering to look out of the windows. Where are we heading? What is our journey's destiny? What is our aim in life? We never stop in silence and solitude to take time to muse on these crucial questions.

Each man is born to do something unique – some purpose that only belongs to him. Our goal in life must be to know ourselves and to find out for what we were uniquely born. To know our Aim – to know how to formulate our goal – is part of knowing ourselves. For the ancient Greeks, the life or death of ordinary men was of no relevance to Gods. Ordinary men belonged to the swarming mass of a collective destiny. Only heroes and demigods were entitled to a fate, and to turn their lives into a personal adventure.

To remember your Aim, especially under the most difficult circumstances, sends messages of success to the future and puts you in a position of pre-eminence compared to the masses of humanity. To have an Aim is to possess the seed of one's destiny. It means to have a sense of discrimination, and to know what is essential and what is not essential in your life. An Aim gives a sense of incorruptibility. Focus on your aim without deviating, without being attracted to, or deceived by cheaper aims. A leader is a man who knows himself and what is his special mission in life. He is aware that outside of himself, there is no force, whether known or unknown, whether natural or supernatural, that can influence his destiny. He is alone facing himself.

Our Aim creates our lives, our future, and our personal and financial destinies. Even the physical space in which we live and work is determined by our Aim. The higher your Aim, the richer your life.

It is emblematic that in English, "Aim" is the anagram of "I am". Aim = I am. Hence, to the ontological question: who am I? we can now give the following answer: I AM MY AIM. Once you have formulated your Aim, write and re-write it, muse on it again and again. Visualize it over and over, and never stop visualizing it until you become one with it. When a man becomes one with his Aim, he develops a sense of greatness that knocks down inner and outer limits. Paul Klee (1879-1940) the great Swiss painter, in order to express how intertwined was his life with his art, used to say: "The Colour and I are one and the same thing".

When you have an Aim you will be opposed by an adversarial force which is never superior to your strength, or to your intelligence. It is apparently working against the fulfilment of your goal, but in reality it is your best ally. Beyond the appearance, behind its fierce mask, this antagonistic force is essential to your success and works day and night at your service to provide you with all the opportunities you may need for your evolution and for the achievement of your Aim.

With regard to the Aim, mankind divides itself into two species which are psychologically distinct: Dreamers and Non-dreamers. And Dreamers are divided into Full-time and Part-time Dreamers. The Non-dreamers and Part-time ones chase money, fame, power and any material possession. Only Full-time Dreamers know that what is worthwhile in life is not wealth, comfort or appreciation from others; it is to pursue a game which is worth playing. And firmly tied to their dream by a golden thread stronger than a steel cable, they are impeccably pressed toward the greatest achievement in life, the unity of their Being, their completeness. Meanwhile, study, observe yourself and know your Aim! And one day you will take part in the most magnificent spectacle on earth: your own integrity! Nothing is more important. This is what is life for.