

Outline short notes for Brother Teoh's Dhamma Talk on, "Understanding Life, its Meaning and Purpose from a Buddhist Perspective" at Subang Jaya Buddhist Association (SJBA) on 17 November 2019

Audio : <https://broteoh.com/wp-content/uploads/Teoh-SJBA-191117-Understanding-Life-its-meaning-n-purpose-from-a-Buddhist-Perspective.mp3>

YouTube : <https://youtu.be/KLi216rGnLg>

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2 : <https://broteoh.com/wp-content/uploads/Teoh-SJBA-191117-Understanding-Life-its-meaning-n-purpose-from-a-Buddhist-Perspective-2.jpeg>

1. To **live life**, we **must understand life**. Only then can we **establish** its **meaning** and **purpose**.
2. Its meaning and purpose depend on the **individual's life priority**, as everyone is different.
3. But as a **Buddhist** we are indeed **very blessed** and **fortunate** because we have our **great teacher, Lord Buddha's rather unique** and **wonderful teaching** to **guide us**.
4. The **essence** of the Buddha's teaching is the **4 Noble Truths** and these are **truths** that can enable one to **realize** the **awakening** and become **noble ones** or **enlightened ones (Ariyas)**. It can also **enable** one to understand the **secret** and **meaning of life** (both the **mundane** and the **supra mundane aspects**).
5. These Ariyas (wise, enlightened and noble beings) are always **mindful, heedful, constantly** aware and in the **state of Samadhi**. They **can see things as they are** because they had awakened to the Truth. They are **very noble** in **all aspects of life**. They had the **embodiment** of all the **Noble 8-fold path factors** of *right views, right thoughts, right speech, right actions and right livelihood*. They have **no more** problem with life because they **do not suffer anymore** and **all negativities of mind states** such as fear, anxiety, angry etc. **cannot** arise in them, as they **can live life** with **understanding**. Such Life is **rather unique** and **wonderful**.
6. Life can be rather **meaningful, beautiful** and **uplifting** with a **lot of joy** if one **knows how to live it** with **understanding**. Live life to the **fullest** to **experience** all the **pristine beauty** and **wonders** of life within the **moment** instead of **recalling** our **unhappy past (scars of memories)** to become **sad** and **projecting our thoughts** to **arise** the **fear** to **worry** about life.
7. Each and every one of us, **we hold the key to our own life destiny**. To be happy or unhappy is **our choice**, so **choose wisely, choose** to be **happy** following dhammapada **verse 2**. Just like the saying of the famous song goes, '**Don't worry, be happy**' (to avoid dhammapada **verse 1**, which leads to suffering).
8. Then why are **most people still not happy** and **peaceful**? Not to say, they **don't know** how to **choose**! It is **because** they are **deluded** and they **lack** this **dhamma understanding (to understand life)**. If you **don't understand life**, how can you **live life**?
9. Brother Teoh proceed to explain the popular **Maslow's Need Hierarchy** followed by **people** of the west. They are as below:
 - **Basic needs** (food and shelter). Initially having food on the table and a roof over their head is **priority**.
 - Then they will look for **Job security**. (Looking for a **more secure** and **better job**).
 - **Having a Sense of belonging** and **love** (to have good Relationships, starting a family, etc.)

- **Self-esteem:** Seeking status, prestige, recognition, sense of accomplishment, etc. – **career phase.**
 - **Self-actualization:** Seeking **highest fulfillment** in life – what the individual wants to achieve in life (their highest human ideal).
10. The above are mainly **mundane needs** and if you **gain them** through **crooked means** then **there will be karmic consequences.** But if you gain them via **the dhamma way** (which is the **righteous way**) then your life will be good and beautiful.
 11. When one progresses following the above **Maslow's need Hierarchy**, there is this **constant craving** for **further success.** Sometimes, this happens at **the expense of their own health** as the progression is performed **not following** the dhamma way. Then along the way, **whenever** they **cannot** get what they **crave for**, they **will suffer.**
 12. For example, there **can only** be **one eligible person** for a **particular promotion** or **only one champion** for any particular **event or tournament**, so **many** will **fail to achieve** what they **wanted badly.** If you do not understand this truth, you will suffer, especially so when you are **not** the one being **promoted** or the **champion** after doing your best. You may not be able **to accept the reality of what happened** then you will suffer.
 13. **Essence of the Buddha's Teachings, the Four Noble Truths:**
 - a. **1st Noble Truth:** The **8 realities of life and existence** are birth, old age, sickness and death, **separation** from love ones and one's prized possessions, **when we are with people whom we don't like**, when **we cannot get what we want** and finally the **5 aggregates of grasping** are **suffering.** Due to **self-delusion**, living beings **grasp** and **cling** to the 5 aggregates of form and mind resulting in **suffering** when they encounter the above 8 realities **without** the dhamma understanding.
 - b. **2nd Noble Truth:** The **cause** of suffering is **craving** borne of **self-delusion.**
 - c. **3rd Noble Truth:** suffering **need not be**, **enlightenment** in the here and the now, **Nibbana** can be realized.
 - d. **4th Noble Truth:** Way to end suffering is via **cultivating** the **Noble Eightfold Path** (meditation as taught by the Buddha).

We **need to train** the mind **to be heedful**, *to heed the **advice** of the Buddha to avoid all evils, do good and purify the mind.* The Buddha said, when mind arises, everything arises. If we **do not train** the mind to be heedful, we will act, speak and think **heedlessly** with an **evil mind**, that has the **evil roots** of **Greed, Hatred** and **Delusion** then suffering will follow us. That is also why we **need to keep the 5 precepts** to look after our karma.

14. As a **true Buddhist** we will know **how to develop** the **Success in life**, following the **Dhamma Way:**
 1. **1st 25 years** (Childhood and education **phase** of life): Strive for **Academic success.**
 2. **2nd 25 years** (Career **phase** of life): Strive for **career success.**
 3. **3rd 25 years** (Retirement **phase**): Able to realize one's **Financial freedom (Financial success)** to do what we love to do during this retirement phase. This is followed by our need to develop
 4. **Relationship success:** Having good family unit and good relationship with others. And finally achieving our highest human ideal to realize
 5. **Spiritual success:** Realization of the Truth leading to enlightenment in the here and the now.

1. to 4. are materialistic in nature. 5. is spiritual.

15. Our average lifespan is about 75 years. Divide into 3 phases, each 25 years:

- (1) Childhood and student **phase** (1st 25 years): Have time and energy but **not money**. (Happy go lucky type of life)
- (2) **Career phase** (2nd 25 years): Have energy and money but **no time**. (Too busy working for money).
- (3) **Retirement phase** (3rd 25 years): Have money and time but **no energy**. (cannot enjoy if without proper health).

To have the energy to do the things we want or love to do, we must try to **retire early** unless we **need to work** because we need the money. Or we **have to work** because you don't know how to retire.

16. Four types of Happiness for lay people:

- (1) Happiness of Possession – when you have earned them via the dhamma or righteous way.
- (2) Happiness of **having used** your **wealth** and **possession** for the good of the many, including yourself and your loved ones. (Don't be too frugal, if you can afford it because if you have the dana parami, money and wealth will come to you). You can pamper yourself a bit if you can afford it. Money in the bank is technically not your money, until you can get to use them.
- (3) Happiness of being **free from debts**.
- (4) Happiness of being able to live a **blameless life**. (When you have the means, don't be petty. Whatever that can be resolved by the money you can afford is not a real problem.)

17. **Life** can be **equated** to **Existence** and existence is **Time related**. So, to **understand life** we **need to understand Time**.

18. The whole **Spectrum of time** can be sub-divided into **past, present and future**. The **past is already gone**, hence **not a reality**. Future, **yet to come, also not a reality**. **Present moment** is **the only reality** and **highest** in life. But yet, the **present moment** is **so transient**, split second it is gone. So **how real can life be?** When you **realize** this **truth**, you realize the true meaning of **impermanence**. When you realize impermanent, you will understand dukkha and anatta.

19. To **transcend life**, we need to **transcend** even the **present moment**, to realize the enlightenment (Nibbana) which is the **unconditioned**. As long as we **are still** within the **field of thought**, we are **not able** to **transcend life**.

20. **Important inquiry:** 'Moment to moment life passes by and that is the only reality. What are you doing?' Human beings **without wisdom** are always **heedlessly thinking, planning** and **worrying** about **their life**, so much so they **totally missed** out on life. Their mind is **never quiet**. They are **never** with the moment in **silent awareness** to **experience** the **pristine beauty** and **wonders of life**. Which means they **never really live life**, instead **they only existed** through life. They may be **conscious** of life but they are **never mindful** or **aware** of the moment to understand what is going on within the moment or see truth as they really are.

21. **Question 1:** *Can you explain what you mean by **transcending life**, including transcending the present moment?*

Answer: The present moment is the **only reality** and the **highest in life**, so to transcend life we have to realize the **cessation of form and mind** leading to the **enlightenment (nibbana)** which is the **unconditioned**. That is how we can **transcend** the **present moment**. When this happens, our **mind ceases** and we **realize** the enlightenment (Nibbana) and goes into the **unconditioned**, which is the **timeless element** (Akaliko – beyond thought beyond time).

22. **Question 2:** *Life is scary when one gets old. What is a good way to manage such fear? Especially fear of separation from loved ones who love and care for us.*

Answer: Why **project** your **thoughts** to **arise** the **fear**? Old age, sickness, separation and death are **1st Noble truth's realities** which are **common** to all humanity. The difference between the one who suffers and the one who does not is, the one who suffers has **self-delusion**. They believe they are real and they exist. This **self-delusion** triggers of attachment and craving. We need to **meditate** to **realize** this truth. To **realize** that our 'body and mind' are just a **karmically conditioned** vehicle and a tool for us to come to this **existential world**. It is **impermanent** and **dependent originating**, a causal phenomenon, hence it is **not a permanent unchanging entity** that we can cling onto as the 'I' and the 'Me'. So, do not grasp at it but **use it appropriately** with **wisdom**. **Contemplate** the **5 daily contemplations** as taught by the Buddha to realize the initial wisdom. Listen to dhamma, contemplate and reflect until the dhamma is very clear.

When **faced** with a **problem**, **confront** it with **understanding**, do **not project** your **thoughts**. You will be at **peace** and there will be **no more fear**. The mind will have **clarity** when it is at peace. Then **inquire** who fear? If it is the **thought** that fear, then that is a **wrong thought**. Wrong thoughts are thoughts that **conditioned** your **fear, worry** and **anxiety**, etc.

Cultivate **Noble 8-fold path**, have **right views** to arise the **right thoughts** of **appreciativeness, contentment, kindness, love, joy** and **gratitude**. Do **inquire**: It's only a thought, how come it can have so much power over you? So, **do not be deceived** by such **wrong thoughts** again. Strive on with **heedfulness** to develop the **right understanding** to free your mind, to live the noble life of **deep inner peace, tranquility, happiness** and **joy**.

Don't doubt because everyone has the potential to be a SammaSamBuddha.

(Above draft outline short notes were prepared by Sister Mun Yuen).