

What is man's purpose in life?

Man attains distinction only when he leads a purposeful life. A purposeful life is one in which man discovers his supreme status.

An animal strives to obtain food; a bird flies in search of a better country when the seasons change; a wasp busies itself building up its own home from tiny dust particles; a herd of deer protects itself from wild beasts of prey. All these appear to be purposeful actions. But when the phrase "a purposeful life" is applied to man, it does not refer to efforts of this nature. Without doubt man, too, has to arrange for food, clothes and habitation for bare survival.

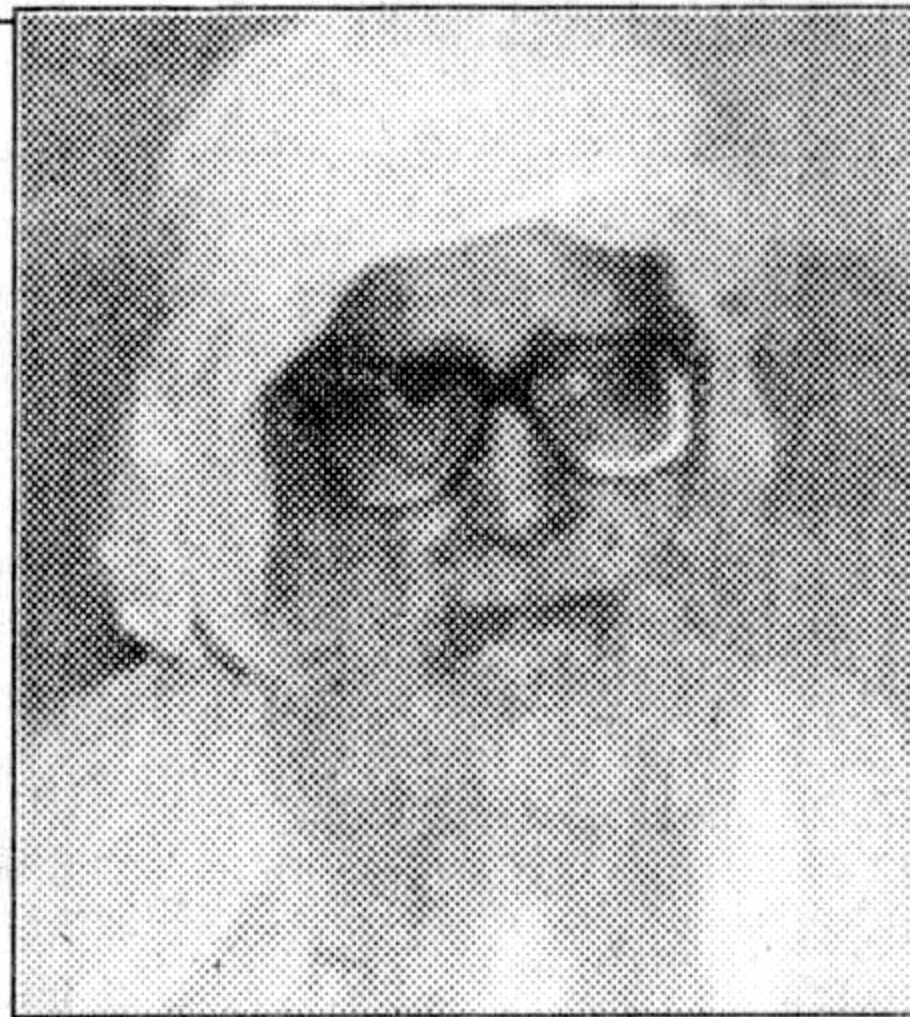
Man's life becomes purposeful only when it goes beyond common animalism and takes the form of superior humanism.

God's creations fall into two categories: animate and inanimate. Obviously, animate objects enjoy a certain superiority over inanimate objects. The former can be divided into three classes: the vegetable, the animal and the human. Modern scientific research has shown that plants also possess life, nourish themselves, grow and have feelings.

But animals and men represent a higher form of life. In what way does man excel animals? Many theories have been advanced over the ages and great minds are still studying it. But modern biologists have come to the conclusion that it is man's capacity for conceptual thought which distinguishes him from other life forms. Animals lack this quality, whereas man is conscious of the fact that he is thinking. He consciously forms a plan of action in his mind; he determines actions everyday. Though many animals act like men, they are not the result of thought; they all stem from pure instinct. Animal actions are governed by environmental stresses from without and physical pressures from within.

Man can use his conceptual quality to search for his purpose. It does not result from the pressures of desire or of immediate exi-

Horizons



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gencies. It must emanate from his own urge to worship God. It has been explained in the Quran: "I created mankind and the Jinn that they might worship Me. I demand no livelihood of them nor do I ask that they should feed Me. God alone is the Munificent Giver, the Mighty One, the Invincible." (51:56-58)

These verses specify man's purpose in life as worship. This is a purpose which elicits from man his uniqueness in its ultimate form. God does not demand of you a livelihood, the verse says. Rather He himself is responsible for your livelihood. This means that worship

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of God is a purpose which is motivated neither by inward desires nor outward influences. Rather it comes into being through thought alone.

When a person works, makes money, builds a house, makes an effort to improve his standard of living, he appears to be engaged in efforts towards some worthy end. But this cannot be called purposeful life, for these activities do not demonstrate man's unique status. These functions might seem to be the result of deliberation, but are actually born out of the struggle for survival.

When man grows, he realises that there are certain material necessities without which he cannot live. He requires food, clothes, a place to live; he requires a reliable source of income to sustain him throughout his life. Then he sees that those who have material abundance enjoy respect and apparently possess every form of happiness and luxury in this world. Thus he is driven on to do more than just seek a livelihood; he wishes to earn a degree greatly in excess of his actual requirements.

In the bustling market, grandiose offices, and opulent buildings, he is not really being guided by deliberate thought. Rather, he is guided by inflated ideas of his own needs, desires, longing and ambition to achieve fame and status. These activities, therefore, cannot be considered as being directed towards the purpose which set man apart from the animal and lends him a higher distinction.

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To determine the purpose of life is, in short, the effort to make it meaningful. It must surely, therefore, be one which is in accordance with man's unique status; it must be one which leads man on the path to success and progress in terms of his true nature.