

Lived by Life, On Purpose

By Munir Peter Reynolds

Talk Given at Center for Spiritual Life Bitterroot Valley, June 15, 2025

I would like to talk about uncovering our true purpose from the Sufi perspective.

The highest purpose any of us could ever attain is to uncover and live from our true nature. If we do that, then everything is in its proper place because it's "what is". We can just be who we naturally are and our purpose just flows out of that. But, if this sounds too obscure or unattainable, then we had better go into it...

What if...we are *being lived by* something tremendous, beyond our wildest imagination, but we miss that because we are mostly living from thought, from the past, from the *known*. What if we're being lived by... Life, with a capital "L". Big Life, Maha-Life? What if *that* indivisible, enormous reality is what we *are*, really, before we are separate persons or anything we can conceive of?

And what if Life has its purpose, the Universe the same purpose, and the apparent human being the same? And it's all one thing? In a human being, that Universal purpose is localized and focused in a particular direction, a particular flavor, in order to serve the whole.

That's what I'd like to talk about, including how following five innate desires we all have will lead without fail to our purpose, which is one with the purpose of Everything.

The great Sufi poet Sa'di says, "Every soul is created for a certain purpose and the light of that purpose has been kindled in that soul." So he is saying our purpose comes from deep down, from the very light of being, the light of what we are. How do we go from that light to a confident, on-the-ground, 3-d living "on purpose"?

One of my high school friends always knew that he wanted to be a surgeon like his dad. Sure enough, he sailed through med school, became a highly respected physician, and eventually volunteered internationally for Doctors without Borders. Some people know not just what they *want* to do with their life, but what they *will* do with it. Happily, my friend had stellar, affirming parents and many other things going for him. That context helps.

We need first to realize that our purpose unfolds in a context, *and everything depends on how we interpret experience and respond to that context moment to moment*. How wide do we allow that context to be?

Is it my parents' expectations?

Is it the place I go to escape from myself, or the latest infatuation I've picked up?

Is that context intertwined with all my beliefs and fears about myself and the world?

Do I believe the universe is a safe place or something I have to steel myself against?

The mind may put all this and more into an unconscious stew or interpretation of what Life is.

Carl Jung said that "Every human being is a work of art made from the best available materials." So let's start where we are and realize that we've done well just to be here talking about this. We did the best we could to figure this life thing out and be on purpose.

Back in the 1980s a popular book was *What Color Is Your Parachute*, a self assessment tool to figure out your purpose or career in life. I used it myself in an identity crisis I had in my late twenties. It's still published today, mainly focused on how to get a job in the digital age. The limitation with these sorts of well-meaning methods is that the mind operates from the *known*. The mind sorts through everything it has latched onto or reached conclusions about to try to discern what should happen next. In fact, purpose can be a huge lollipop for the mind. It says, "Just give me my purpose and I'll run with it." The separate self can identify with so many activities that prop it up.

This is illusory because Reality is One, a vast field of infinite possibilities. Our true self is awake to those possibilities and drawn to certain life circumstances that are alluring, a response which may look risky or go against the grain of conventional ideas. So, when we're awake to Life as the context, our fears, the belief we need protection or a parachute to meet life are in abeyance.

When I had that identity crisis in my late twenties, I knew down in my bones I needed to break out. I had moved back to my hometown in North Carolina to take a job there. I was trying to just be myself, and I couldn't do it. I had changed too much and I didn't fit anyone's expectations. So, I quit the job after just three months, bought a black leather jacket and a plane ticket to Seattle to visit a friend. I was following a thread into the unknown. My friend picked me up at the airport and took me to dinner - prepared by the woman I ended up marrying 38 years ago.

Though I knew nothing about true nature back in those days, still my instincts were good. I broke out of the mold and it led me in completely new directions.

Again, Sa'di says, *"Every soul is created for a certain purpose and the **light** of that purpose has been kindled in that soul."* Light is the key. We "light up" about something that inspires us. So the first question to ask ourselves is, "Am I willing to follow my inner light of inspiration wherever it leads me?" If I'm open to this light, I'm aligned with my deepest values, my deepest knowing. Then Life responds and starts opening up. I will notice that and draw close, perhaps going in directions that seem off the wall or even unsafe. I am travelling *without* a parachute, because I *trust Life*. Risk feels okay.

So, we are describing purpose as a *journey*, watching attentively for the scenery and the unexpected and responding according to inspiration. This is very different from a manager proceeding from goals and objectives. The world is not something we're attempting to negotiate, overcome or

parachute into but is the vast field of possibility that is just an extension of our Self.

What would it mean to move over, to let LIFE have its way with us? That's like being in the center of the river, carried along, no longer grasping for safety at the vines along the shore. We're all in!

How do we get to this level of letting go, light and inspiration? The Sufis say we have to become conscious of your true nature. We do this by going into our own ground, through contemplation, meditation, being still, being in the breath. We relax attention on objects and instead lean into the *context*, which is spacious awareness. There we are able to know our Self as loving intelligence. We are more able to see how limiting beliefs are affecting us. Things like, "I'm not good enough," and that sort of thing.

When we make this leap to Life's agenda for us, we're not really concerned with outcomes. We want freedom and fulfillment at the deepest level. We want to be aligned with our deepest values. When we travel this road, choices get made by themselves rather than by someone who chooses.

That is in fact what actually happens all the time, but we don't realize it. The mind weaves together memory and thinking and creates a "me" that believes is making decisions in life...like whether you chose coffee or tea this morning...believing that it is the "chooser", it is the doer. In fact there is only choosing. So many factors go into any choice we make, like coffee or tea, that it is really the whole universe that chooses coffee.

Let's go further into purpose with the teaching of the great Sufi Hazrat Inayat Khan. He asserts to allow your desire or - I call it **longing** - to reveal your true nature and take you to your purpose.

He says, *"These five things work consciously or unconsciously in the profound depth of every soul. These five aspects **belong to the one purpose** in the accomplishment of which the purpose of the whole creation is fulfilled."*

Five things: A longing for-**Living, for Knowledge, for Power, for Happiness and for Peace**. This longing arises from the echo or trace of our true nature, what we already are deep down. Let's look at these inherent longings. (HIK's words are in *italics*.)

1. **Longing for Living:** *"When the desire to live brings one in touch with one's real life, a life which is not subject to death, then the purpose of that desire is accomplished."* So HIK puts the assumption of death right up front there. If we believe that we are the body and that we die with the body, that assumption can underlie most of our holding back or hedging on Life. If we're suffering, we're not living well. So, relieving our suffering by coming out of wrong identifications, trauma and beliefs presses in on us. Longing for our *real Life* motivates and leads us out of these.

What brings us in touch with our real life - **a life which is not subject to death**? One inquiry is, in your direct experience have you ever not existed? The essential you lies outside of time and space. Also, it's been said that life is only change. But play with this. What if Life is only the *appearance of change*. We make the *interpretation* that Life is change. If we look deeply and intensely from our own ground of being, we see that Life is eternal, and we are *the eternal knowing of Life*. Take up the contemplation, "Is the body essential to me, or am I something prior - the knowing of it?" The "I Am" in each of us has a different destiny than the body because we are in fact the Only Being that there is.

Spiritual life is inquiry, looking at what is true and coming out of limiting beliefs. What we believe about this has a profound impact on our willingness to take risks, to follow soul purpose.

2. **Longing to Know:** *"When one has been able to perceive fully the knowledge of one's own being, in which is to be found divine knowledge and the mystery of the whole manifestation, then the purpose of knowledge is attained."* He's not talking about worldly or intellectual knowledge - knowing more and more about less and less,

but *knowledge of being*. This is Vedanta - “the end of knowledge.” He’s saying use your capacity to know to follow your knowing all the way to the end - understand the nature of your mind and your being.

We can only *be* what we are. We can only *know* what we are *not* because we have to stand apart from it in subject object relationship to know it. That’s how we can know the body, it’s because awareness or consciousness stands apart from it and knows it. Therefore we as conscious awareness are untouched by the appearance or interpretation of change. Knowledge of our being satisfies the longing to know.

3. **Longing for Power:** *“When one is able to get in touch with the Almighty Power, then the desire for power is achieved.”* We can know we are powerful, but struggle to uncover that in ourselves. Even science says that all of the energy in the universe comes out of nothing. *Nothing* is the source of all the power any of us needs. We are nothing already from the standpoint of being. This brings our grasping for power to an end because we understand its Source. Then universal power begins flowing through us.
4. **Longing for Happiness:** *When one has been able to find one's happiness in one's own heart, independent of all things outside, the purpose of the desire for happiness is fulfilled.* We’re happy when we realize that there is nothing lacking. This feeling of being full is temporarily fulfilled when we obtain an object we’ve been wanting. But then, a feeling of lack comes creeping back in. In being, we discover that we’re looking out from the very source of fecundity. True happiness is innate and uncaused. Any need arising within us is met when we turn loving attention to it. Happiness is uncaused and the very nature of what we are.
5. **Longing for Peace** - *When one is able to rise above all conditions and influences which disturb the peace of the soul and has found one's peace in the midst of the crowd and away from the world, in him the desire for peace is satisfied.* Rising above conditions and

influences means being who you really are, no matter what is going on. In other words accepting Life as it is. In our very own being, peace is simply the lack of resistance to Life. If we become a lover of “what is” we are instantly at Peace.

HIK further says that “It is in the fulfillment of [all] these five desires that one's purpose is accomplished, the purpose for which every soul was born on earth.” So these desires are like the echo of our true nature calling back to us to remember who we really are.

So, to sum up:

1. “I’m Being Lived by Life” - can be the reminder or touchstone of shifting our perspective on purpose. It flips the usual exploration on its head.
2. Purpose unfolds in a context and is revealed in how we respond to circumstances moment to moment. Wake up to your life and the straws in the wind that may be calling you out of your comfort zone.
3. The greatest purpose any of us can have is to uncover our true nature, who we are in being. Then purpose, happiness, peace, contentment are immediately yours. Spend more time in silence and quiet. Let the context speak to you about what’s next.
4. Your purpose comes from who we are, which is the Only Being there is. Remembering or recovering your being may take some contemplation and letting go. But it is worth it. It’s the only thing that will satisfy your longing for purpose because in doing so you see through and set aside all your self-imposed limitations created by the mind. As Meister Eckhart says, “go into your own ground and get to know yourself there.”
5. What lights you up? Give yourself to that. It’s the light of your soul shaking the dust off and saying “Let’s go!”
6. If you are suffering or in conflict, remember that it’s just the natural longing you feel for your true nature. “Pain pushes until vision pulls,” as Michael Beckwith says. You have to begin to accept - “I can awaken too, in this lifetime”. The fear of death and other limitations may make it seem otherwise. It’s not scary to look at the truth. Follow your natural thirst for **living, knowing, power, happiness, peace.**

This is your real self drawing you further into Life, which is what you are.

7. Your purpose or my purpose is only the localised element of the universe's Purpose, one with the infinite, eternal journey of Life itself.

As Rumi says,

*"Do not feel lonely,
the entire universe is inside you.*

Stop acting so small.

You are the universe in ecstatic motion.

Set your life on fire.

Seek those who fan your flames."

I hope this exploration may help to rekindle that fire in you this morning - the remembrance of *who you really are* and your eternal purpose.

Thank you.