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The Life as the Meaning
(An investigation on the meaning of life in Zen and the comparison of it with theistic religions)

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Abstract:

In Analytic philosophy, when the topic of the life's meaning comes up, primarily the concept of words of "meaning" and "life" is clarified. The analytic philosophers, often, have explained "meaning" in two senses: 1-The life's aim 2-The life's value or the life's function and advantage.

In some approaches, in analysis of the concept of "life", life has been considered beyond routine, usual, and repeated levels of it. This approach shows the meaningful life demonstrates through a transcendent Being. Hence, in theistic religions, human's life, when according to commands of that Being, is more meaningful and valuable. It is meta-naturalism view in debate on "life's meaning".

There is another approach named naturalism. Naturalists are trying to advance the theories which find life's meaning in a part or parts of natural life. They believe that even if there is no spiritual realm, meaning in life will be possible, for example, be successful in work or education; the same favorable affairs can be enough to be meaningful.

Besides meta-naturalism and naturalism, Zen's view is an exclusive view; because according to it, "life" itself is as life's meaning. In fact, the meta-naturalism speaks "the meaning of life", the naturalism discusses "the meaning in life", and Zen utters "the life as meaning". Zen declares when the person lives simply, freely and naturally, will achieve to aim and meaning of life. The distinction and the conflict in mind lead to all of human's problems. When the person is free from consternations of his mind, he will reach salvation and redemption. In Zen, human's salvation is accomplished through non-action (Wu-Wei), because every action, reaction, analysis, attention and so on, it will be a kind of difficulty, complexity, and lastly suffering. While Zen emphasizes on natural and spontaneous life, the meaning in theistic religions belongs to a transcendent being who has presented a design of life to humans.

Now we focus on the comparison of Zen and theistic religions views on what would make the meaning of life; but we primarily present a summary of criteria of Zen's school:

A-In Zen, the discerning mind causes humans' suffering and labor. B-The path of salvation from suffering, raised from distinction, is non-action and natural life. C-Afterwards, the person can achieve to sudden enlightenment in his life. D-The morality in Zen is named Te which related to natural and spontaneous behavior. A person in Zen practice according to the same conduct that is natural and explicit. E-Hence, the freedom from suffering (which is the aim of all schools of Buddhism), the path, the morality, and the enlightenment, the all are sought in the same life, no beyond this life.

In the case of comparison of Zen to theistic religions, it is worth mentioning some cases:

-The key concept in Buddhism and its schools, such as Zen, is suffering (Dukkha), which forms all of their ontology, anthropology, and soteriology, but in theistic religion, the concept of God plays the same role.

-In theistic religions, ultimate Being is the only worthwhile and meaningful aim of the Faithful man; unlike Buddhism schools which seek the meaning in liberation from life's sufferings.

-For believers there is only one design to live and it is that design which usually exists in sacred texts. Believer's life is arranged according to this design. But in Zen, person comes near meaningful life via simply and freely life, not via prescriptive commands of a transcendental Being.

- The morality in Theistic religions is based on the sacred texts and related to plural behavior and social standards; unlike Zen which neglects plural and prescriptive morality and emphasizes on natural behavior (Te).

-In theistic religions, sufferings and pains in world are not meaningless, but there is an optimistic view on them, while sufferings in Buddhism and Zen are more pessimistic and do not have a certain meaning.

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