

***Namo tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammâ Sambuddhassa!*****A BUDDHIST APPROACH TO THE MEANING OF LIFE <sup>1</sup>**© Dhamma Group • Created: 17/06/09 • Modified: 19/06/09 • Email: [dhammagroup@yahoo.com](mailto:dhammagroup@yahoo.com) • Web: [www.DhammaGroup.tk](http://www.DhammaGroup.tk)

What is the meaning of life? This is the question one often grapples with while struggling with the ups and downs of everyday life. The meaning of life can be understood in the context of ever approaching death.<sup>2</sup> Death is ever approaching and life surely ends in death. So whatever is good and worthwhile should be done at the earliest opportunity without delay.

The current optimistic average lifespan for a human being is 80 years. The first twenty-five years one usually spends studying and/or training. The last 20 years of one's life is spent in old age and sickness. So realistically one only has about 35 years at the most to do anything worthwhile with one's life.

Taking the time to do the basic arithmetic can help one to see how many years one has until death. That is one's average expected lifespan (usually 80) minus one's current age (lifespan - current age = years left). One should subtract a further 20 years from this figure, for the last 20 years from 60 to 80 where one will inevitably suffer from old age and usually major sicknesses, to get an idea of how many *useful years* one has left to achieve anything worthwhile (years left - 20 = useful years left). For someone who is of 32 years of age for example, the useful years left works out to be only 28 years (i.e. 80 - 32 - 20 = 28 years).<sup>5</sup>

What can one achieve in such a short time-span? One could make a major contribution to the world if one realizes how little time they have left on this planet and starts working for the happiness and well-being of others every spare moment that one has. If one keeps in good health, even the last 20 years could be more or less utilized to this end. Skilful management of one's time is also very important.<sup>6</sup>

It puts into perspective and brings into question all the things that one is currently doing at present, i.e. what society expects of one. How important is it to participate in the rat-race that one is currently caught up in? Will this race matter at all at the end of one's life? Is working a 9-5 job for someone else, paying a huge mortgage with other loans and then leaving it all behind after death (what everyone is doing at present) what life is all about? Do not be afraid to question worldly conventions, even if they have been passed on from one's culture, elders, friends, family, etc.<sup>7</sup> Is it not better to focus more on the welfare of ourselves and others and to do much as possible before death?

Importance of living a good life of selfless-service for the welfare and benefit of others becomes apparent when one realizes how short one's life really is. The greatest service that one can do for oneself and others is to purify one's mind and help others to also do the same. Dedication of one's life to such a goal, even if one is encumbered with many duties, would be a life well-lived. This is a very fortunate time where the Lord Buddha's teachings exist - although there is no guarantee on how much longer it will last. So it is even more imperative that one embraces the invaluable *Dhamma* teachings in this very life, not leaving it for another life when it may be too late and begins walking on the *Path* towards *Nibbana*, while helping others to also do the same (i.e. taking them with oneself).

May you realize how little time is left in your life, realize what the truly worthwhile priorities are and make haste towards *Nibbana* while helping others to do the same. May you attain *Nibbana* or another higher state in this very lifetime and be a shining gem for others to follow!

**THE MEANING OF LIFE**

What is the meaning of life?  
 Before too long life ends in death,  
 and whatever is worthwhile and good,  
     should be done,  
 without further delay;  
     this is the meaning of life.

## Notes

1. The latest version of this document can be found in **HTML** format here <http://tinyurl.com/mdvnm3> (or <http://sites.google.com/site/dhammagroupweb/pubs/life>) and in **PDF** format here <http://tinyurl.com/lqbw3d> (or [http://sites.google.com/site/dhammagroupweb/pubs/A\\_Buddhist\\_Approach\\_to\\_the\\_Meaning\\_of\\_Life.pdf](http://sites.google.com/site/dhammagroupweb/pubs/A_Buddhist_Approach_to_the_Meaning_of_Life.pdf)).
2. The **Lord Buddha** emphasized the importance of contemplation of death as one of the ten worthwhile contemplations. Constant awareness of impending death, while it can be misunderstood as a ‘negative’ practice, in reality only gives rise to very positive mental qualities and outcomes (it is the association of this idea with death without understanding the underlying principles that gives rise to a negative perception of this valuable practice). When one realizes through constant contemplation that death could occur at any given moment, even the very next moment one tends to get a sense of urgency for doing and being good, as no one likes to die with a bad conscience. When one realizes that one could die in the very next moment one tends to let go of any impurities within one’s mind immediately, lets go of any petty squabbles and issues with others<sup>3</sup> allowing one to put everything into their correct perspective.<sup>4</sup> Most importantly one acquires a sense of urgency about attaining a ‘state of safety’ such as stream entry (*sotapatti*) or higher as one realizes the futility of life that ends in certain death and the true danger of *samsara* (cycle of birth and death). Refer to *The Ten Recollections - A Study Guide* here <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/study/recollections.html>
3. Refer to Ajahn Brahmali’s talk *Dependent Origination* here <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sNjCCKyOJI>
4. Refer to Ajahn Brahm’s talk *Does Life Suck?* here <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eSIEN0pZkxE>
5. *Appendix A: Life Planner* below can be utilized to not only review one’s life’s achievements to date, it can also be used to visualize how many years are left and to plan what one hopes to achieve in that time. One can resolve to achieve at least one significant achievement every year, while giving priority to Dhamma achievements and mark it in the calendar. This can be used as a ‘*pin-patha*’ (merit sheet) to mark the significant good deeds done in one’s life, to reflect on during one’s last days before death for a better re-birth (if one has not attained *Nibbana* at that point).
6. A day can be divided into 3 blocks. The morning from 6AM to 12PM, the afternoon from 12PM to 6PM and the evening from 6PM to 12AM midnight; each block is six hours in length. The time from 12AM to 6AM would generally be used for sleep, so is not usable for doing anything worthwhile. Each of these blocks can be further divided into two 3 hour sections, giving a total of six sections of useful time units in a day. This division of the day into blocks allows one to track how much time has already elapsed and is how much time is available in one’s day to do anything worthwhile.  
  
When one tracks one’s time usage in a day like this, one will realize how little time there is available in a day. Similar strategies can be used to divide up other time units such as seconds, minutes, hours, weeks as well as months. For example, a student who studies for an exam can utilize the first six hour block of time in the day to study one subject, the second six hour block to study another subject and perhaps the last six hours for either further revision, spending time with friends and family, studying/practicing the *Dhamma* or for rest.  
  
Refer to *Appendix B: Useful Hours in a Day* below for more information on this.
7. Refer to the *Kalama Sutta: To the Kalamas* here <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an03/an03.065.than.html> and here <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an03/an03.065.soma.html>

## Appendix A: Life Planner

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Please refer to the next page.

# Life Planner

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Age 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40
41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50
51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60
61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70
71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80

Education & Training  
(1 - 25)

SPECIAL

SPECIAL

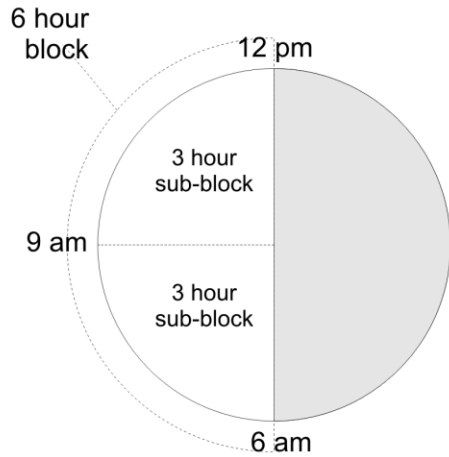
Sickness & Old Age  
(60 - 80)

DEATH

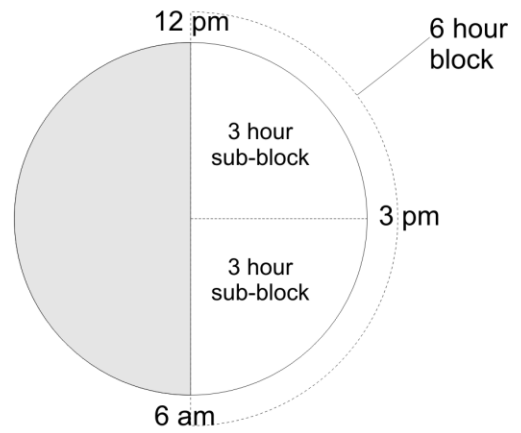
Appendix B: Useful Hours in a Day

# Useful Hours in a Day

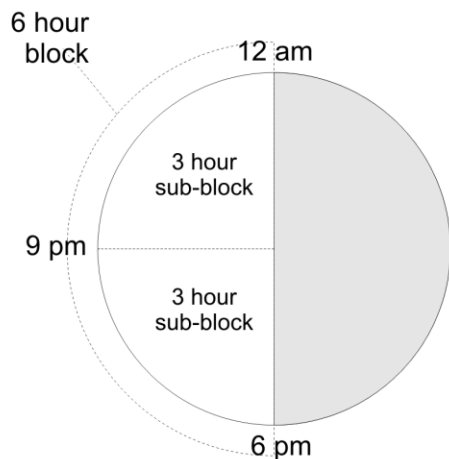
First Useful Six Hour Block in the Day  
6am - 12pm



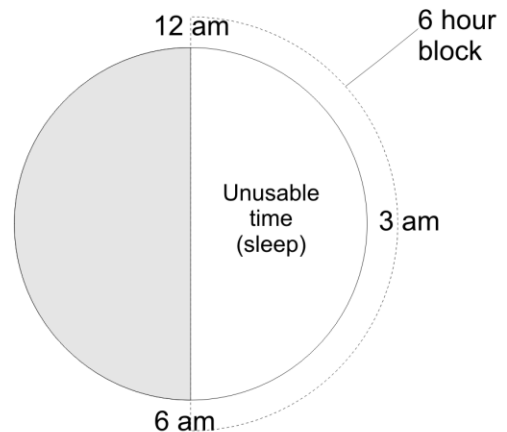
Second Useful Six Hour Block in the Day  
12pm - 6pm



Third Useful Six Hour Block in the Day  
6pm - 12am



Fourth Six Hour Block - Unusable  
12am - 6am



A day can be divided into 3 blocks. The morning from 6AM to 12PM, the afternoon from 12PM to 6PM and the evening from 6PM to 12AM midnight; each block is six hours in length. The time from 12AM to 6AM would generally be used for sleep, so is not usable for doing anything worthwhile. Each of these blocks can be further divided into two 3 hour sections, giving a total of six sections of useful time units in a day. This division of the day into blocks allows one to track how much time has already elapsed and is how much time is available in one's day to do anything worthwhile.

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## Related *Suttas* (Discourses) & Articles

1. *The Ten Recollections - A Study Guide* by Thanissaro Bhikkhu see <http://www.accesstoinight.org/lib/study/recollections.html>

2. *Anguttara Nikaya* 3.65, *Kalama Sutta*, *To the Kalamas* see <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an03/an03.065.than.html> and <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an03/an03.065.soma.html>

### **Related Buddhism (Dhamma) Articles**

1. *Daily Dana* - On giving and generosity, see <http://www.vihara.org.au/go?to=dailydana>
2. *Five Precepts* - Developing virtue through the five precepts, see <http://www.vihara.org.au/go?to=pansil>
3. *A Buddhist Approach to Time Management* - A Buddhist approach to effective time management, see <http://www.vihara.org.au/go?to=timeman>
4. *Make Haste* - About the dangers of *samsara* (endless round of birth and death) and a call to attain *Nibbana* (release) at the earliest opportunity, see <http://www.vihara.org.au/go?to=urgency>
5. *A Buddhist Approach to Problem Solving* - A Buddhist approach to problem solving through the development of wisdom (*panna*), see <http://www.vihara.org.au/go?to=probsolv>
6. *A Buddhist Approach to Disillusionment* - A Buddhist approach to seeing past the trickery and into reality, see <http://www.vihara.org.au/go?to=disill>
7. *A Buddhist Approach to Disenchantment* - A Buddhist approach to becoming disenchanted with all that gives rise to stress, see <http://www.vihara.org.au/go?to=disench>
8. *Equanimity* - Dealing with the eight characteristics of life, see <http://www.vihara.org.au/go?to=equanimity>
9. *Four Noble Truths* - The essence of Buddhism, see <http://www.vihara.org.au/go?to=fourtruths>
10. *Noble Eightfold Path* - The path for ending stress and suffering, see <http://www.vihara.org.au/go?to=noblepath>

### **Online Resources**

1. *AccessToInsight.org* here <http://www.accesstoinsight.org>
2. *What-Buddha-Said.net* here <http://what-buddha-said.net>
3. *What-Buddha-Taught.net* here <http://what-buddha-taught.net>
4. *Buddhanet.net* here <http://www.buddhanet.net>
5. *Vihara.org.au* here <http://www.vihara.org.au>
6. *DhammaGroup.tk* here <http://www.dhammadgroup.tk>