

No human being is insignificant

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We all question the meaning of it all, and our role in the big picture. A co-worker pondered the meaning of life the other day in the office. He wondered just what we're here for, since we're mere 'ants' in the cosmos, having little impact on anything. We scurry along in our lives, get married, have children, slave away at our jobs, all to what end? For most of us here in the 'advanced' western world, it's to survive financially, to pay bills and own 'things.' Being older and, hopefully wiser, this old dog tried to offer an explanation. It's true that our species and our planet is minute in there are five to 10 times more stars in the universe than there are grains of sand on all the world's beaches. Pretty humbling. But back to the tiny beings that inhabit our blue-green ball flying through space at break-neck speeds. I believe each and every one of us here for a reason. We wouldn't be here if we weren't needed in some way. Carl Jung noted that a human being would not grow to be 70 or 80 if our longevity had no meaning for our species. Our ancestors grew and evolved by telling stories ??it was their only way of documenting mankind's history. Today, we record the human saga daily, in a multitude of ways. Each tiny snippet, each newspaper article, social media post and every sentiment expressed by the masses, has some meaning. How do we figure out what the purpose of it all is? Well that's the ultimate riddle, isn't it? I think we find it through trial and error, through all the experiences that make up our lives. Since we're not given a road map, we trudge along, sometimes meeting dead-ends, and other times bumping into things. That's part of the fun. Some of us exist in relative anonymity, but there may be a reason for that, too. It's been said that one of the saddest things is a life wasted ??that a person can be born, live and die without anyone noticing. Our raison d'etre may be as simple as falling in love, raising a family and growing old. It may be as complex as being a mentor or achieving greatness in science, business or the arts. It may be that we give up our life, and our organs, so that others may live. It may simply be to bring joy to others while we're here, and learn a few things on our journey to pass along. Few careers involve contemplating existence, making changes or contributing to the very fabric of humanity. But some do. I have met trailblazers, military veterans, space explorers, as well as coffee shop owners and talented bartenders. I've encountered countless 'inquiring minds.' People are like playing cards in one massive house of cards. We all know what happens when just one is removed. There are also occupations that, in a way, do aim to preserve humankind's very existence. Our planet is so very fragile, that any massive changes to our climate, pollination habits and ultimately oxygen levels in our atmosphere, could spell disaster for us all. And holed up in a laboratory somewhere, someone is researching these things. Thank you! You could drive yourself crazy trying to decipher the infinity of the universe; the odds that human beings actually make a difference in the cosmos. We are infinitesimal, that's true. But even ants, mosquitoes and amoeba have defined duties and roles to play. They are part of the chain that is, well, everything. There are many takes on human existence and which aspects are deemed most important. The jury's out on this, and perhaps will always be on adjournment. Mariella Frostrup was quite right in noting we can sit around waiting for something to happen that will make sense of our existence, or we can get out there and find our purpose. The odds of each of us even existing and being here today are so great, it's incomprehensible. We know that one day we'll die, but until that day Richard Dawkins says we 'should count ourselves fantastically lucky to get our decades in the sun.' We're likely the only species on earth who see our existence as a puzzle to solve. As smart as apes and dolphins are, I doubt they spend much time dwelling on the big picture. But I could be wrong. In his Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy novels, Douglas Smith espoused that the dolphins, being much smarter than humans, knew of the Earth's impending doom, so they simply left, after trying to warn us. Their final words were 'so long and thanks for the fish.' Maybe, instead of asking why, life's most urgent question is 'what are you doing for others?' Unfortunately, we in west are so caught up in the economics of it all, we don't spend a lot of time contemplating our place in the world. But just what does it take to make a difference? Well, my daughter Lexie spent her university reading week in the small coastal village of Matelot, Trinidad. It's so small and seemingly insignificant there are very few references for the place on the Internet. The only thing I could find that was it's one of the most remote places on the island, a community that, despite all the odds, has survived and somewhat thrived. And that's why Lexie was there ??for a cultural exchange, and to help out in the local schools. She didn't mind being cut off the rest of the world. She and her team of volunteers were there to learn and interact with their fellow human beings, who seldom venture outside their district. Does this matter in the big picture? Well, it mattered to those villagers and young students who were touched by outsiders. It matters to the team of volunteers who will take this experience with them as they carry on and try to change the world. So, yes, it does matter, very much. Not all of us have the nerve to venture to remote corners of the world and volunteer our time. But we do come together support our own communities and we do impact the lives of our friends, neighbours and acquaintances. We give from the heart. And that very much matters. That's why we're here!

