

THE SPEAKING TREE

Overcome Anxiety By Finding Purpose In Life

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Ibn Hazm, the 10th century Andalusian polymath and scholar of Islam, said, “I searched for a common goal amongst mankind, I have not found anything other than conquering the universal ailment of anxiety.”

Despite having made immense scientific progress, there seems to be a decline in the mental health of our people. Studies have shown that it is important to have coherent goals and direction in life in order to live happily and relatively devoid of anxiety. Our existence should matter, it must have value, worth and importance for us.

We may be able to acquire meaning through signs. According to the Quran, an ‘Ayat’ is a sign, a small unit that holds complete meaning. The mechanics of this concept are explained in detail in Islamic scriptures through the various ‘Ayah’ used to describe a sign. It can be an object, quality, or event whose existence indicates the presence of something important. The Holy Book broadly talks about two kinds of signs: ones that are mentioned in the Quran, ‘Ayat Qurani’ and others that come from the world around us ‘Ayat Mashhoodah’. It is our job to extract knowledge from an ‘Ayah’ to guide us on how to act, think and feel.

To extract knowledge when we are already filled with set beliefs about life, we may want to go back to being a child, nurture child-like zeal and curiosity to combat the ‘mature’ arrogance of rote knowledge.

Historically, we have not paid attention to the natural world in the study of semiotics, focussing exclusively on language and man-made signs and symbols. Scholars like Zohair Abdul Rahman say that the Quranic model promotes the idea that the entire world is made up of signs. The Quran, verse 10:5, says that, ‘He is the One who made the sun shining and the moon illuminated, determining for it its stages, so that you can know the number of years and account for time. Allah created all of that with a purpose, He distinguishes the signs for people of knowledge.’ This passage is a prime example of how one can start to incorporate the process of distinguishing signs to gain a more thorough worldview. This method will help us in extracting personal meaning and values from the world around us. Once realism and gratitude begin to take root through the correct deciphering of signs, we can handle anxiety with truth and higher logic which are based in the ‘Now’.

Ibn Hazm says that at the end of all your dreams and aspirations is the eventuality of grief. There is no greater example than the pandemic-infested times. Covid-19 has taken some of our ambitions away. There is no escape from this except in striving towards the One who has given us breath and will take it away as well. Such a man’s anxiety is a lot less than the anxiety prevalent in mankind. Seeking meaning is our way out of unhappiness and emotional imbalance. It is a spiritual endeavour that helps in self-regulation, high level of coherence and a feeling of wholesomeness. It centres around discovering what makes our lives worth living.

