
THE ROLE OF SEARCHING FOR THE MEANING OF LIFE FROM THE STANDPOINT OF RELIGIOUS FAITH IN THE SPIRITUAL SELF-REALIZATION OF THE INDIVIDUAL

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Abstract

The self-realization of the individual has always belonged to a range of issues that, to some extent, have been fundamental for society, have determined the essence of any historical model of society. The individual is the most dynamic creator of social reality; he/she directly develops and establishes it every day by his/her needs, abilities, knowledge, skills, faculties, volitional and emotional potential, in short, his/her own essential forces. In the article, we demonstrate various approaches to the concept of self-realization of the individual, analyse the current state of the development of the problem of searching for the meaning of life of the individual, and consider religious faith as a condition for searching and finding the meaning of life.

On the basis of an experimental study, we reveal the psychological specifics of the search for the meaning of life in adolescence in the context of religious faith. Based on the results of the study, we conclude that the search for the meaning of life plays a decisive role in the formation of life strategies, the hierarchy of values, and the spiritual self-realization of the individual. At the same time, religious faith has significant influence on the search for the meaning of life of the individual, determines the content of the process of mastering spiritual values and the formation of worldview, encourages the individual to activate the search for the meaning of life, becomes a foundation for the spiritual development of the individual, motivates the individual to self-perfection, the improvement of the world, and the augmentation of the goodness and wisdom.

Keywords: spiritual, religion, faith, orientations, individual

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1. Introduction

The Oxford Dictionary interprets the term ‘self-realization’ as “the realization of the possibilities of the development of the Self” [1]. In the works of philosophers, representatives of various worldview trends and scientific schools, a variety of views on the essence of the concept of ‘self-realization of the individual’ is reflected. In particular, the philosophy of idealism (I. Fichte) treats self-realization in conjunction with the concepts of ‘freedom’, ‘spirituality’, and ‘responsibility’. The idea of self-realization is also clearly expressed in the approaches to the personality of the adherents of existentialism, which assign a leading role to the problem of the human being and consider freedom and responsibility as the fundamental values in life (J. Sartre) [2].

The psychological content of the concept of personal self-realization is considered in scientific sources according to several meanings, in particular, as the person’s ability to realize the wealth of his/her own inner world in any form of activity (work, play, cognition, perception, communication, etc.); as the process of realization (transformation) of abilities and individual potentials (plans and mind-sets) in his/her own activity and in another person; as an aspiration to develop the strengths of his/her personality [3].

At the present stage, the difficulties in the content filling of the concept of ‘spiritual self-realization’ are connected with disagreements in understanding the form of the very category of ‘self-realization’ (whether it is a phenomenon, procedural category, result, need, ability, property, etc.). The challenge of understanding the essence of the concept of self-realization is due to the impossibility of observing it directly and objectively; it is only possible to see its results reflected in the human psyche [4].

Among the studies in the domestic psychology devoted to the problem of self-realization of the individual, worthy of attention are the concepts in which it is assumed that activity shapes and develops the psyche, and hence, the person him/herself. In the opinion of A. Leontiev, the basis for the formation and functioning of the individual is the hierarchy of needs that motivate the person to activity. At the same time, external factors of influence on the development of the personality are transformed into internal stimuli. The scientist explains the process of self-realization as the objectification of the essential forces and abilities of the individual in his/her social activity [5]. Rubinshtein notes that the entire mechanism of realizing one’s potentialities can be realized by the person at the creative level, expressing universality, originality, and individuality [6].

Thus, as spiritual self-realization we will understand the realization by the individual of his/her own subjective and creative project within the limits of harmony with society and him/herself. The phenomenon of spiritual self-realization includes such components as the meaning of life, vital meanings, meaning-of-life orientations; our study is precisely devoted to their search from the standpoint of faith in the self-realization of the individual in the modern world.

2. The current state of development of the problem of finding the meaning of a person's life

In modern psychological science, the research of the problem of searching for the meaning of life is directed at the consideration of the determinants of the development of the life meanings of the individual, the specificity of the influence of the meaning-of-life orientations on the formation of life meanings, the development of spirituality. The search for the meaning of life is regarded as a factor of intellectual, personal and spiritual development of the personality, as a source of self-upbringing and personal self-improvement, as a search for the identity of the individual. Special features of manifesting the development factors of the individual's identity are determined in the context of resiliency and social adaptation. Since it is these factors that are the characteristics of the development of the individual's identity, it becomes clear that the scientific-practical studying of the features of the meaning-of-life search is a very topical problem. Many studies are aimed at highlighting the extent to which the individual-psychological features of the personality can influence the spiritual self-realization of the person and finding out how it is possible to actualize these differences for optimizing the process of formation of lofty, social and spiritual values in the value-semantic context of the personality development.

A situational approach in the study of the search for the meaning of life is proposed by P.V. Veklenko [7]. His study of the goal orientation as an orientation toward the future reflects the individual's search for the life meanings that go beyond the situational level. At the situational level, an individual realizes certain goals from the standpoint of social needs, which are realized in the external pragmatic motivation. At the above-situational level, goals go beyond the current situation and are aimed at self-development of the individual, caring for others. At this level, the so-called 'lofty goals' [8] arise, which form the spirituality of the individual. The goal can be carried by abstract concepts connected with the process of imagination. This cognitive process allows removing the uncertainty of the external conditions of the future situations. The search for the meaning of life is accompanied by lofty goals, those that are recognized in society as the norms of behaviour and spiritual values. Certain ideas about 'love for neighbour', 'repentance', 'humbleness' are images through which a person constructs his/her own picture of the world. Thus, the images of faith go beyond the situational level, which allows setting lofty goals of self-development of the individual.

Each age period has its starting circumstances, which in the future should lead to new formations that are characteristic for each period [4, p. 46]. These new formations can arise under certain social conditions. The creation of these conditions provides the patronage for the development of spirituality of the individual. This corresponds to the situational approach: the environment should be considered as a single constellation of interrelated factors.

The formation of spirituality and the spiritual self-realization of the individual are directly related to the formation of moral values of the individual, are of universal significance. It seems impossible to have an objective perception

of a person outside the realm of spirituality. Today, a topical problem remains to clarify the psychological essence of the spiritual 'Self-image' of the individual. Self-consciousness, the development of the image of the 'Self' is carried out in the course of self-realization of the person in the material object-practical and spiritual activity [9]. At the same time, spirituality is a search, a practical activity, an experience through which the subject realizes the inner transformations necessary for self-determination. Thus, spiritual-practical activity is necessary for self-development, self-determination, and spiritual growth of the person.

Due to self-awareness, we realize the inconformity of the qualities of our personality with social and moral requirements; we also realize the inconformity of our mental and physical abilities with our aspirations. Guided by his/her self-consciousness, a person forms new personality qualities by his/her actions and deeds [10].

3. Religious faith as a condition for searching and finding the meaning of life

It should be noted that the belief in certain postulates and ideas forms a value-semantic hierarchy. Based on these meanings, a person seeks his/her own way in life. Therefore, the problems of the search for the meaning of life are considered not only in the work of scientists representing various scientific fields, but also in a significant number of works of the specialists in the field of Theology.

Faith presupposes the person's abandoning the everyday meanings for the sake of higher ones. K. Jung paid attention to the symbols by which the person constructed his/her life path and world outlook [11]. In these symbols, the meaning-of-life orientations of the personality are laid in the coordinates of which the search for the meaning of life takes place. The surrounding reality is reflected in an image, a model, a certain concept of the world, creates categorical structures of consciousness, which are objectified in certain social relations. These models form certain archetypes, which become a kind of cognitive patterns. The intuitive acceptance of the archetype precedes action. Understanding of good and evil, delineating the truth and untruth, responding to certain moral conflicts of life occur in 'a certain sense' at the level of instinct. Archetypal images always accompany the person, because they are the basis of mythology, religion, and art. Spirituality is formed in these cultural formations; the formations themselves are transformed into symbols that are contained in the subconscious. In certain moral collisions, a person reacts intuitively, according to these patterns of norms and rules of behaviour. Religion is symbolic in nature, which gives strength to its influence on consciousness.

Religion has its own specific symbols that help the individual to construct his/her own associative space of the moral standards system of society. Faith becomes an ideal to which a person aspires, on the basis of belief in the higher consciousness, God. God stands as a symbol of the ideal, the life foundation, which helps the individual to organize his/her life according to new principles. Personality enters into a new system of norms and rules of life for him/her.

Turning to faith, to religion, a person returns to society, becomes involved in the system of morality and laws [12].

Religion provides its own moral system, rehabilitates the person in his/her repentance, and endows the soul with harmony. Christian morality as a means of representing the 'picture of the world' fills the individual's consciousness with the content, is determined by the multifaceted nature of human activity, depending on the field of interaction of social objects (be it politics, religion, society as a whole). Christian postulates of goodness, love for one's neighbour help the individual overcome self-centeredness, detachment from the problems of the other. In the 'love for neighbour,' individuality is saved from selfishness. Christianity makes it possible to understand the truth that human being is only a part of the entire universe. He/she, recognizing only him/herself and not recognizing the other, cannot enter into this world complete. Only by removing in his/her consciousness and life that inner border that separates his/her personality from the other, he/she can 'love his/her neighbour'. A person can exist only with others, becoming an integral part of society, independent and at the same time 'dependent' on others. By asserting him/herself outside of others, a person deprives him/herself of the meaning of life and turns his/her individuality into an empty form.

Modern directions of the Psychology of religion consider the influence of faith on the formation of certain ideas of the individual concerning time, space, universe, past, and history. Religious views of the representatives of various religious denominations have their own angle of ideas about the origin of human culture and the meaning of life. Church as a social institution renders psychological assistance to a person in crisis situations. Psychological features of the influence of church rituals, church service, singing, prayer, repentance have a psychotherapeutic effect. In different epochs, these influences have been a significant contribution to the formation of the views of the individual, the meaning-related reference points in the search for the meaning of life, which are still being changed and supplemented. Different spiritual practices offer their own ways of searching for the meaning of life and spiritual growth.

All religions warn against causing harm to people even by thought. This is the truth that serves as a mechanism of faith. Human being is an integral part of a single organism. Investigating the problem of man's spiritual potential, R. Swinburn reveals the search for the meaning of life through dialogue with God. "The spiritual potential of man has its own ontology and the transcendental, divine origin. God is higher than existence and non-existence. Man is not able to see the Divine essence, but is able to contemplate the Divine energy." [13]

A spiritual paradigm is identified in psychological practice, psychotherapy; methods of psychological help in the context of the spiritual paradigm are offered. In addition to the generally accepted methods of psycho-correction, of interest are the following ones: spiritual conversation; meetings with the clergy; catechization; psychological preparation for the sacrament of baptism and anointing, confessions, joint prayers; pilgrimage to holy places, etc. [14].

Faith is formed by a certain society; therefore, a certain context of faith is formed by the social environment, various life situations, crises, etc. While searching for the meaning of life, the person relies on the established foundations of his/her own life, worldview reference points, behavioural attitudes that help him/her in certain crisis situations.

Faith creates a certain hierarchy of values that direct the life choice. This choice is adjusted throughout life due to various factors: age, occupation, study, work, hobbies, place of residence, family upbringing, traditions, state of health, etc. The factors of the search for the meaning of life are crisis situations, age crises, and crisis states. Age crises are accompanied by the appearance of new goals, new life strategies that become the starting point of personal growth. Crisis situations may or may not coincide with age crises (death of a loved one, acquired disability, catastrophes, accidents). Under such conditions, there arises a need for new meanings, values, a change in the hierarchy of meaning-of-life orientations; and faith offers such a change.

4. Methods

The research goal is to reveal the psychological specifics of the search for the meaning of life in the context of religious faith in adolescence.

On the basis of theoretical positions, methodical instruments of the research were chosen. The purpose of these methodical instruments was to elucidate the features of the meaning-of-life orientations of the individual (MLO) using the 'Meaning-of-life orientations' test by D.A. Leontiev [15] that allowed evaluating the meaning of life 'source', the one to be found by a man either in the future (goals), or in the present (process), or in the past (result), or in all those components of life, in various groups of research subjects: healthy, with shortcomings, substance dependent (dependent of psychoactive substances that exert narcotic effects on the body: alcohol, drugs, medicinal (non-narcotic) drugs, etc.

The worldview orientation was defined with the help of interviews on the following topics: 'What is faith in God for me?', 'The most important events of life' and 'What is the meaning of life for me?'. The comparison of the results was conducted with the purpose of studying the features of the search for the meaning of life in senior schoolchildren and students with various personality traits (health problems, dependence).

The experimental study was conducted in the groups of the chemical substances addicted people at the Social Rehabilitation Centre: 30 people, 30 senior schoolchildren and 60 third-year students of the university. Samples were divided into groups depending on personal characteristics: chemical dependence, healthy and disabled, in which the characteristics of MLO, faith and life meanings, which had been identified in the search for the meaning of life, were determined. In the process of ascertaining experiment, comparison of the indicators of the methods in different groups was carried out.

5. Results

Let us first consider the results of determining MLO, the level of definiteness of the meaning of life and the strategy for its search.

The analysis of the data showed that in the healthy group, the average MLO score for the Leontiev test was 111.7 points.

The 'goal in life' factor (I), characterizing the direction and time perspective, which the consciousness of life provided, was developed in this group on average at 34.2 points, that was, at the normal level (31.1 points).

The factor 'life process or interest and emotional intenseness of life' (II) was 35.2 points (the normal value was 29.9), which indicated high intenseness of life of these students; it was important to note here the-present-day intenseness.

The results' quality in life or pleasure from self-realization' (III) for senior schoolchildren of this group was developed at 27.3 points (with the normal level of 24.4).

The 'control locus – Self' (IV) was 36.2 points (the normal value was 19.9). This is a high indicator of the ideas of young men about themselves as very strong personalities having sufficient freedom of choice to build their lives.

The factor 'control locus – life' (V) or life management was 33.5 points (the normal level was 29.5). So, this group is characterized by the conviction that a person can manage his/her life him/herself, directing his/her forces to realize his/her goals and plans.

This is how the meaning of life is defined in the group of those not believing in higher powers: "If you want to achieve something in life, you need to do something yourself, and not wait for miracle forces. Only parental help or a lucky chance to achieve one's plans is possible. To rely on belief in something else is just wasting time" (Sergey K.).

Believers rely not only on their own strengths, but also on the support from the God's will. They see the meaning of life 'in the acceptance of such a fate, which is sent to the person to test his/her will, his/her resistance to difficulties and temptations. Life is an opportunity to save ourselves and all of humanity'. For those who believe and those who do not believe, there is an opinion that the meaning of life is what the person lives for. The difference is manifested in the meanings and values for believers and non-believers, but the common thing is that they comprehensively think about the problems of existence and their lives.

In the group of young men with some health disadvantages, the MLO indicators differed from the previous group. The average value for MLO was 91.5 points (lower than in the healthy group, but higher than in the group of chemical substances addicted people).

The 'goal in life' factor (I) was 28.3 points. This indicator was lower than that for healthy people; for example, the goal in the group of people with disabilities was 'to be like everyone else', 'to have everything in life that healthy people have'.

The process of life, interest and emotional intensity of life in this group were expressed at 28.4 points. The results' quality in life or pleasure from self-realization was 22.4 points, which was due to certain limited physical abilities and, as a result, dissatisfaction with self-realization.

'The control locus – Self' was developed at 27.8 points. 'The control locus – Life' was 27.5 points. Low scores on the latter indicator characterized to a certain extent fatality with respect to the trials of fate.

The figures for believers and non-believers in this group were not significantly different. Only the definition of the meaning of life among believers was manifested in the context of religious canons. For them, the meaning of life meant 'accepting the difficulties of fate as the will of God, saving the soul on this path of trials'. The similarity of life goals in this group was manifested in the desire to get an education, a profession, a decent job, to create a family.

In the course of the experiment, it turned out that for some people disability appeared to be a potentially destructive factor in life; for others - an impetus to spiritual growth, the search for individual creative opportunities for the realization of one's ideas, ways of transformation; for the third - a psycho-trauma, characterized by symptoms of general anxiety, depression of emotions, experience of a crisis psychological state. For those who believe in higher powers ('God will help me hold my ground in any difficult circumstances'), faith gives protection not from the life problems themselves, but from certain perceptions of them, it provides change in the way of seeing these problems.

In the group of the chemical substances addicted, the average assessment of MLO was 90.3 points, which was significantly different from those of healthy and disabled people. This was the lowest figure in the groups of subjects.

The young men thought about the life goals at the level of 27.3 points. The process of life, interest and emotional intensity of life in this group were manifested at 26.4 points. The results' quality in life or pleasure from self-realization was 20.2 points.

'The control locus – Self' was expressed at 19.5 points. 'The control locus – Life' was 18.3 points. The low scores on these indicators characterized the inability to control themselves and their lives, take responsibility for everything that happens to them. Faith for them was only an opportunity to shift responsibility for their lives to circumstances, to others. In our opinion, this perception of the world, of one's own life is not conducive to spiritual search for life's meanings. According to the conviction of the chemically dependent people, the meaning of life was to find possible help from outside: 'let others do, they can, but it is hard for us', 'maybe God will help – this is the last hope', 'life is short, why spend time in searching for some meaning. Just live and rejoice'. For those who believed in the healing of dependence, 'the meaning of life was an attempt to find a way out of the abyss, to become like everyone else', 'try everything to bring back the joy of life'. A common opinion for them was 'to change their lives'. Some saw these changes in self-actualization in a certain profession, others - in the creation of their own family.

6. Discussion

It can be observed from the analysis of the results of the ascertaining experiment that the quantitative indicators in the groups of disabled and dependent did not differ much from each other (Table 1), while the meanings that were involved in the search for the meaning of life differed precisely among those who believed in higher powers and those who did not believe.

Table 1. The MLO indicators in the group of chemically dependent people (according to the MLO methodology by D. Leontiev [15]).

Group	Indicators	Life goals	Process of life	Pleasure from self-realization	Control locus – Self	Control locus – Life	Average assessment of MLO
healthy	average	34.2	35.2	27.3	36.2	33.5	111.7
	stat. dev.	6.53	6.22	4.76	4.44	6.41	17.94
disabled	average	28.3	28.4	22.4	27.8	27.5	91.5
	stat. dev.	6.65	5.55	4.89	5.14	6.18	28.06
dependent	average	27.3	26.4	20.2	19.5	18.3	90.3
	stat. dev.	7.95	5.22	5.68	3.75	6.33	27.91

Faith directs the search for the meaning of life toward the capabilities of the individual him/herself, the search for one's own reserves of self-cognition and self-development. A certain idea (the paradigm of justice in the context of a certain faith, confession) becomes the criterion of a righteous path, which determines the philosophy of 'salvation'. This gives answers to the person, concerning which way to go, what to fight for in life. Certain reactions of the individual in crisis situations – the feeling of resentment towards fate, its injustice towards the person – arise in the context of physical disabilities, life troubles or death ('it is unjust to be an invalid who cannot compete with the healthy, to be sick often, die young, be an orphan, without means', etc.). These feelings become a catalyst for the search for new life meanings, the search for 'justice'.

Thus, the spiritual self-realization of the individual is closely linked with crisis problems, in particular, with physical shortcomings or dependence. The spiritual self-realization of the person presupposes the integration of one's feelings, gives physical and mental health. Considering the category of spiritual self-realization as a mental mapping, it is possible to identify the place of influence of the peculiarities of the lack of health or dependence on the organization of the individual's life. The individual is an active participant in his/her life's path. Using the worldview ideas, he/she creates his/her own life reality. In this reality, his/her social experience is accumulated, which is represented in the worldview universals creating a holistic image of the human world. The person takes into account the specificities of his/her ability to master this world, with its requirements and laws. Taking into account in real life of all the difficulties of this mastering superposed over the health problems or dependence influences the worldview schemes. It is these schemes that determine

the spiritual self-realization of the person, organize the subjective perception of the world, its experience and understanding.

In the opinion of researchers, for a person with health problems, the characteristic and dominant is the need to be 'like others', levelling the uniqueness, difference from others. Sometimes this distorts the meaning of the free choice of the goal-setting mechanism; the person narrows it down to a certain standard of life goals of an ordinary, 'like everyone else' person who does not have health problems. The person becomes a hostage to the idea of 'being like others, the healthy ones'. This one-sidedness of choice inhibits the process of development of 'singularity', 'uniqueness' of the individual's life path [16].

The realization of life goals is rarely brief and never occurs instantly. During life, a certain life strategy of the individual is realized, which he/she determines independently, coordinating, in a certain way, the life goals and means of their realization. A certain pace and order of realization of the life plan are set. The life plan fulfils the function of choosing the means of achieving the goal, the use of optimal means that correspond to the set goals; establishes the sequence of using these means; determines the timing of the implementation of the whole set of actions aimed at achieving the goal. Life strategies may change in accordance with the realized stages of the life plan, depending on the change in the goal, the conditions for achieving it, and the needs of the individual. In the change of life strategy, the leading role belongs to the goal.

Carrying out research among older teens, scientists have established that religious faith, as a search strategy for the meaning of life, is formed on the basis of changing the attitude of the individual to one's feelings, one's vision of the problem, the possibility of changing these attitudes, acquiring a new experience that is assimilated into life experience [17]. The person's experience of changes in his/her new practice becomes relevant in the experience of one's identity, which is the basis of spiritual self-realization. When a person changes his/her identity and feels discomfort, the comprehension of these changes takes place. It is at the time of meeting with obstacles in solving problems that there occur identity change and the construction of a new strategy of behaviour, change of goals and means of achieving them.

Belief in higher powers relieves a person from loneliness; he/she gets support, thanks to which his/her spiritual development becomes possible. Faith coordinates the person's creation of his/her world by structuring his/her life space in accordance with his/her life experiences.

In the opinion of the researchers, the disagreements connected with the change of life position and lifestyle is the most difficult for the individual. The ability to regulate one's life path becomes the basis for the formation of life strategies, meanings, spiritual self-realization of the individual. At the subconscious level, the feeling of despair, caused by alienation, loneliness and fear, intensifies the perception of the surrounding world. These experiences, together with the associations that arise from books, the information field of the person's environment, become those stimulants that accelerate and mediate the development of a life strategy for searching for the meaning of life [18, 19].

7. Conclusions

The search for the meaning of life plays a decisive role in the formation of life strategies, the hierarchy of values, and the spiritual self-realization of the individual. Viability in standing against life's troubles creates the conditions for the search for new strategies for solving life problems, is the impetus for the search for new life meanings. Feelings of resentment, injustice in crisis life situations catalyse the search for MLO, justification of one's own position.

The search for the meaning of life occurs due to a change in the value system, the principles by which the person lives, on the basis of which he/she builds his/her life path. A change in the hierarchy of values determines the choice of life strategies, the construction of new life prospects. By changing some life priorities to others, the person models the future life path (social status, future profession, family, etc.). In the model of the future, the mechanisms of adaptation to micro-community are laid: the adoption of norms, rules and behaviour patterns characteristic of a certain reference group, as a result of identification with it; adaptation to the nearest environment; interaction with others on the basis of responsibility. Only if one realizes one's needs, qualities, possibilities and faith in one's strength, the self-realization of the personality, the spiritual and personal integration of the personality is possible.

Faith influences the search for the meaning of person's life, determines the content of the process of mastering spiritual values, the formation of worldview, the formation of a 'plane', where personal qualities and characteristics for building an individual space are reflected; encourages the individual to activate the search for the meaning of life, becomes the basis for the spiritual development of the person, motivates the individual to self-perfection (reproduction of the beautiful and perfect in oneself), the improvement of the world, the enhancement of goodness, wisdom (search and multiplication of truth), observance of spiritual principles, the reproduction of harmony in one's own life. Faith is a form, means, mechanism of awareness and reflection of the picture of the world; the factual and predictive model of life that organizes the life of the individual, hierarchizes life values, determines the life goals and means of achieving them.

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