Dear Alice!

I'm desperate (a permanent state, I suppose, not only for me, but also for most of my fellow human beings). I've forgotten the reason why I'm on this Planet. My life seems so senseless, eating, sleeping, going to work, hobbies, of course, while all around me, the world is tumbling down. How do I put some meaning in my life?

Signed,
Forgetful Amsterdam

**Answer**

Dear Forgetful Amsterdam,

Everyone gets the blues sometimes - they are a normal, but not terribly fun, part of life. However, when the feelings you're describing linger for weeks, or months, when it keeps you from getting to sleep at night, or getting out of bed in the morning, you may be what is considered, clinically depressed.

Depression is an affective, or mood, disorder. It's estimated that depression affects over ten million Americans. There is chronic, low grade depression, in which a feeling of sadness may last for weeks and recur every few months, but you can still function; and, major depression, where you are unable to function in at least one daily activity; are plagued by feelings of loneliness, despair, and helplessness; have changes in both eating and sleeping patterns; and/or, may have thoughts of suicide.

Below are some symptoms you may be experiencing if you are suffering from depression.
You may experience none, one, or some of these:

- Continual feelings of sadness, emptiness, and helplessness that seem to have no cause
- Loss of interest, or pleasure, in ordinary activities, including sex
- Decreased energy, fatigue, and feeling slowed down
- Sleep problems (i.e., insomnia, oversleeping)
- Eating problems (i.e., loss of, or increased, appetite; bingeing)
- Difficulty concentrating, or making decisions
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, and helplessness
- Irritability
- Excessive crying
- Chronic physical aches and pains that don't respond to treatment
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Thoughts of death, suicide, or suicidal attempts

You can check out the Mental Health America website [2] to connect with local therapy resources.

Feeling unfulfilled in life can really be a bummer. You do have options, though. If you haven't already, you could try getting involved in a volunteer organization. It may take some work on your part to determine your own morals and values, and then to find the group or organization that will meet your needs. Sometimes, working with people less fortunate can give a type of gratification that isn't available from daily tasks. Or, if you're concerned about the state of the world, try working with Greenpeace, or an international economic, or political refugee organization.

Good luck in your quest to find fulfillment. Remember, life is a journey and, often, it only gets better.

Alice!
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Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS) (Morningside) [10]
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