

April 2014

## A SURE SENSE OF PURPOSE

*Young men and old, seek here a purpose for the soul,  
And comfort for the woes that over gray hairs roll.*

— Persius

In one of the short stories of Anton Chekhov, a Professor Nikolay Stepanovich approaches his twilight years after enjoying a long, distinguished academic career. During his prime, he was on the faculty of four universities, met all the important people at the upper echelon of society, and was famous throughout Russia. But now he feels a profound sense of emptiness. The triumphs of yesterday ring hollow; fame and recognition have lost their glow. Worse yet, his vast learning has failed to reveal a greater purpose to his life. What was it all for? What did it mean? Stepanovich feels dejected, deflated, depressed.

One suspects that there are many people like this today. They've been ambitious, worked hard, received awards and accolades, yet are no longer buoyed by memories of past achievements. There's an uneasy sense that something is missing, something of vital importance. Worldly prizes have lost their luster; self-satisfaction has given way to self-doubt; fulfillment to emptiness. What is missing? What have they overlooked?

Fortunate is the man or woman with a sure sense of purpose in their life, of being a part of something bigger and grander than the personal self. A few discover it early, others later in life. Some unfortunate souls wander aimlessly without ever finding it. With a sense of purpose, your life is immeasurably enriched. Though you may sense it but dimly, you have an inner conviction that your life is not lived in vain. With or without the spotlights of public recognition, in success or in failure, there is meaning and purpose to your existence. In hard times, you are able to deal with adversity. Difficulties are seen as opportunities to learn valuable life lessons. Confronted by pain and suffering, you somehow find the stamina to prevail. If you have gifts to share with the world, you do it not for personal glory or self-gratification, but because you cannot do otherwise.

Without a sense of purpose, life is a charade, shallow and petty. One ends up like Chekhov's professor—sad, lonely, and disillusioned. But now as ever before, the path to discovering your lodestar lies within. Only you can uncover the mystery of your existence.

**David P. Bruce** is the National Secretary of the Theosophical Society in America.