UPSC MAINS · ANSWER PRACTICE

Essay · Essay

It is best to see life as a journey, not as a destination.

जीवन को एक यात्रा के रूप में देखना सर्वोत्तम है, न कि एक गंतव्य के रूप में।

EXAM YEAR

2025

PAPER

Essay

SUBJECT

Essay

MARKS

125

WORD LIMIT

~1200 words

Answer Hint

Life as continuous growth rather than a final achievement; distinction between goals and purpose; value of experiences, relationships and learning along the way; danger of postponing happiness until success is achieved; ambition balanced with contentment; journey as adaptation through uncertainty, failure and change; examine the idea through individual life, career, society, leadership and civilisation; argue that destinations provide direction while the journey provides meaning.

Model Answer

Introduction

Human beings naturally set destinations: academic success, career advancement, financial security, social recognition or personal achievement. Goals provide direction, but treating life exclusively as a race towards a final destination can make the present merely a waiting room for the future. The metaphor of life as a journey suggests that growth, relationships, experiences and learning are themselves valuable, not merely instruments for reaching an endpoint.

Yet a journey without direction can become aimless. Therefore, the ideal life combines purposeful destinations with meaningful journeys.

www.becomeias.com YouTube: becomIAS | Instagram: howtobecomeias

Destination-Oriented Life

A destination-oriented mindset measures life through achievements.

A student may believe happiness begins after securing a particular examination rank. A professional may postpone fulfilment until achieving a particular position. An entrepreneur may define success entirely through wealth.

Goals are valuable because they create discipline and direction. Without objectives, effort can become fragmented.

However, excessive destination-orientation creates a psychological trap:

“I will be happy when…”

When one destination is reached, another often appears. The individual remains permanently dissatisfied.

Thus, success can become a moving horizon.

The Journey Gives Meaning

The journey includes everything that happens while pursuing goals:

- learning,
- relationships,
- failures,
- discoveries,
- responsibilities,
- personal transformation.

A student does not merely gain a qualification; the process develops discipline, friendships and intellectual capacity.

A professional does not merely acquire a designation; years of work develop judgment, relationships and experience.

Therefore, **the journey creates the person who eventually reaches the destination**.

Journey and Personal Growth

Life continuously changes.

People's interests, relationships, responsibilities and understanding evolve over time. A rigid destination-based approach may prevent individuals from recognising new possibilities.

A journey-oriented mindset allows adaptation.

Failure becomes feedback rather than final defeat. A change of career can become a new beginning. An unexpected challenge can reveal abilities that were previously unknown.

Thus, life becomes an ongoing process of **becoming rather than merely arriving**.

The Role of Goals

However, rejecting destinations completely would be equally problematic.

A destination provides orientation.

A student needs an examination goal. A public institution needs measurable objectives. A nation requires development targets.

The problem is not having goals but allowing goals to become the sole measure of existence.

The ideal relationship is:

Goals provide direction; the journey provides meaning.

This balance prevents both aimlessness and obsession.

Happiness and the Present

One of the greatest dangers of destination-oriented living is postponing happiness.

People may sacrifice relationships, health and personal fulfilment in pursuit of future success, assuming that happiness will begin after achievement.

But the future is uncertain.

A meaningful life requires attention to the present without abandoning future aspirations.

This does not mean rejecting ambition. It means recognising that **the quality of the journey matters as much as the outcome**.

Failure as Part of the Journey

If life is seen only through destinations, failure becomes catastrophic.

If life is understood as a journey, failure becomes information.

A failed examination may reveal weaknesses in preparation. A failed enterprise may reveal market realities. A rejected proposal may encourage

BECOME IAS
AI POWERED UPSC PREP

refinement.

This perspective builds resilience because the individual understands that **one setback does not define the entire journey**.

Relationships as Part of the Journey

No meaningful journey is purely individual.

Family, friends, teachers, colleagues and communities shape human development.

If success is pursued without relationships, individuals may reach their goals while discovering that they have lost the people with whom they wished to share the achievement.

The journey metaphor therefore encourages gratitude, companionship and mutual growth.

A destination can be reached alone; a meaningful life is usually built with others.

Leadership and Public Service

The journey perspective is equally relevant to leadership.

A leader who focuses only on measurable outcomes may ignore institutional culture, citizen trust and human dignity.

For public administration, development is not merely a numerical destination such as higher GDP or greater infrastructure. It includes the journey towards **health, education, dignity, inclusion and opportunity**.

Similarly, nation-building is not a single endpoint. It is an ongoing process of improving institutions and expanding human capabilities.

Society and Development

The metaphor can be applied to national development.

A country may set ambitious goals regarding economic growth, poverty reduction, education or environmental sustainability. These goals are necessary, but development must also be evaluated through the processes used to achieve them.

If growth is achieved through severe environmental destruction or social exclusion, the destination cannot fully justify the journey.

BECOME IAS
AI POWERED UPSC PREP

Thus, **means and ends must remain ethically connected**.

The Journey Through Uncertainty

Life rarely follows a straight road.

Unexpected illness, economic changes, technological disruption, relationships and social events can alter individual plans.

A journey-oriented approach encourages adaptability. Instead of seeing every deviation as failure, individuals can understand that changing circumstances require new routes.

This is particularly important in the modern world, where career paths and social conditions are increasingly fluid.

Philosophical Dimension

Many philosophical traditions emphasise process rather than finality.

The Bhagavad Gita places emphasis on disciplined action rather than attachment to the fruits of action. Buddhist thought highlights the impermanent and evolving nature of existence. Aristotle viewed human flourishing as something realised through the practice of virtue rather than possession of a single external achievement.

These perspectives suggest that **how one lives matters as much as what one ultimately possesses**.

The Journey Must Have Ethical Direction

A journey-oriented philosophy should not become an excuse for drifting without principles.

Life needs a moral compass.

Values such as integrity, compassion, justice and responsibility determine whether the journey itself is worthwhile.

Someone who achieves success through dishonesty may reach a destination but undermine the very meaning of achievement.

Therefore:

Destination gives direction; values give orientation; journey gives experience; reflection gives meaning.

Conclusion

BECOME IAS
AI POWERED UPSC PREP

Life is neither merely a race towards destinations nor an aimless movement without goals. Destinations provide aspiration and structure, but the journey contains the experiences through which human beings actually grow.

The finest life therefore balances **ambition with presence, goals with values, achievement with relationships, and progress with reflection**.

A person should strive for meaningful destinations without sacrificing the present in pursuit of them. After all, every destination eventually becomes another starting point.

Life is best understood not as a place we finally arrive at, but as the continuous process through which we discover who we are, what we value and what we can contribute.

BECOME IAS
AI POWERED UPSC PREP