



ZACK BODNER

AUTHOR, SPEAKER, STORYTELLER, COMMUNITY BUILDER

Zack Bodner is the author of the book *Why Do Jewish? A manifesto for 21st century Jewish Peoplehood*. His book, which is an Amazon #1 new release in Jewish Life and Religion & Philosophy, takes one of our oldest wisdom traditions and provides an accessible road map for anyone looking for answers to life's most important questions.

Zack serves as the President and CEO of the Oshman Family JCC in Palo Alto. Under Zack's leadership, the JCC began hosting an annual conference called Zionism 3.0 which became The Z3 Project, a global effort to reimagine Diaspora-Israel relations.

Before joining the JCC, Zack served for 14 years as the Pacific Northwest Regional Director of AIPAC. Zack holds a Master's degree in Philosophy of Religion and Theology from Claremont Graduate University, earned his Bachelor's degree from Yale University, studied at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, and Stanford Business School's program for Executives in Non-Profit Leadership.

Zack is an accomplished speaker, including as a MOTH storyteller and TEDx presenter, and writes regularly for Jewish publications in the US and Israel. He is a member of YPO, participated in the Executive Leadership Seminar at the Aspen Institute, is a board member of the JCC Association of North America, and is on the Advisory Board of the Taube Center for Jewish Studies at Stanford University. Zack lives in Silicon Valley with his wife and three children.

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If God Doesn't Exist, Then Life Has No Meaning

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Recognizing that no one can empirically prove or disprove God's existence, I'd like to offer a thought experiment that may persuade some to take that ultimate leap of faith. Let's begin by assuming there is no God.

If God doesn't exist, then life has no meaning. Life is just random. Pure chance brought us to this moment, and life is the biggest pyramid scheme in the history of the universe.

Therefore, if there is no God and there is no meaning, then we are just staying alive for the sake of staying alive. In that case, shouldn't we be living by the law of the jungle, doing anything in our power to look out for number one? Shouldn't we be indulging our most animalistic impulses and as long as we are not breaking any laws, crushing anyone who gets in the way of our happiness?

Yet, most of us are not living this way. Why not? Why are you not lying, cheating, and taking advantage of everyone to accumulate power and wealth, and living the most hedonistic lifestyle possible? Why are you holding back? Of course, some people do live this way, but I'm pretty sure they're not reading this essay.

Let's assume you are not living like the ancient Sodomites out of self-interest. That notion of "*what goes around comes around*" has you worried about the end game. If so, then either you're too scared to get the most out of life, or your conscience — the internal compass that guides us between right and wrong — is holding you back. Where does that come from? Who planted those values deep within you to keep you from acting like animals?

The other possibility is that you feel like there's something more purposeful to life than just looking out for yourself to get ahead. In that case, where does that sense of purpose come from? There are really only two explanations.

First, perhaps purpose is man-made, which means any individual or society can create a sense of greater purpose. If that's the case then purpose, and the rules that go along with it, is completely subjective. So, what would stop us all from joining cults engaged in polygamy, slavery, or human sacrifice? Life would be meaningless, amoral, and untethered. We're back to where we started.

The only other explanation is that purpose, morality, and conscience — the internal compass that guides us between right and wrong — are not subjective. They come from something beyond the realm of humans, a higher power, an ultimate source: "God." If that's the case, because God exists, there *is* meaning to life. There is a purpose to the universe and a purpose to our existence — a purpose for each and every one of us.

We may not know what that ultimate purpose is (indeed, how could one possibly know divine intention?), and we may not know what our individual purpose is, but isn't it reassuring to know that life is not random and meaningless?