

Dying to Live

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For most of us, life in our times is characterized by a dreary routine with a hectic pace that causes stress. Rising violence, lawlessness and uncertainty add to this stress and kill the joy of living. According to the sages, most human beings hardly 'live' life. As sage Dada Gavand puts it, they are "just continuing in time"[Bhalla,Vipin.p 62]. For most of us, to be alive in a given moment is to be hundred percent present, to be completely immersed in it. However, currently, whether we are eating, walking, talking or thinking, we are rarely fully there, except perhaps in a moment of either crisis or ecstasy. The rest of the time, we are hopelessly fragmented, thinking of ten different things at a time and failing to understand or savor the given moment in totality.

The opposite of life is death, which is perhaps the most dreaded word in the dictionary of any language. It signifies the cessation of all activities and experiences, thoughts and sensations; whereas what man covets the most is the state of immortality. Interestingly, life and death are closely linked and may even co-exist. For instance, old cells die and new ones are born in our body at frequent intervals. Neurosurgeon, Deepak Ranade points out that in Quantum Physics, "Analogous to Schrodinger's cat being simultaneously dead and alive, the photon exists in a wave and particle form simultaneously." [Times of India, 'Speaking Tree' December 11, 2012] Life is constantly in a state of flux. Childhood is replaced by youth and then by old age. We die to past experiences and are born into new ones until we reach physical death - the ultimate biological full stop. We encounter death around us too and yet we are reluctant to accept our own mortality.

As Dada Gavand says in one of his pointers, "life resides more in the unknown than in the known". We are yet to unravel the secret of life / creation .We do not know where we go after death. We have no idea where we go during deep sleep but we are not afraid of falling asleep as we believe we will wake up next morning.

Surprisingly, though 'I' goes to sleep, some witness [we know not 'who'] persists and hence, on waking up, one may describe a dream/nightmare or say one has enjoyed sound sleep. The '*Mundaka Upanishad*' throws light on this detached witness and its relationship with 'I', by using the metaphor of two birds on a tree who are 'ever associated' : "Of these, one eats the fruit of divergent tastes, and the other looks on without eating"[Third *Mundaka*, Canto 1, Verse 1,p 137 in **Eight Upanishads – Vol. II**] A large fraction of questions regarding the functioning of the human brain remain unanswered. Much of the universe too is still a mystery to us, both at the macro and micro level. We do not know what the next moment has in store for us. Our life is ridden by the fear of the unknown and as a result we are often as much afraid of life as we are of death.

Fear is considered to be the deadliest of poisons. J. Krishnamurti says in **Nature of the New Mind**[The Sixties], "Living with fear is evil because it breeds hatred, distorts your thinking, and perverts your whole life." [p.95] Krishnamurti, here, is alluding to psychological fear and not to spontaneous, physical fear [say of a snake] which is just the instinct of self-preservation. Ignorance, or the identification with body-mind rather than spirit, is the root cause of fear, as much as of sorrow. It is said that Sri Ramana Maharshi, at the age of sixteen , was suddenly gripped by the fear of death one day. The young lad dramatized the occurrence of death by holding his breath, stiffening the body and imagining it being carried to the funeral ground and burnt to ashes. However, as Arthur Osborne reports in '**The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi in His own Words**', the young Ramana suddenly realized that even after the death of the body, the spirit lived on and was deathless: " The body dies but the Spirit that transcends it cannot be touched by death . That means I am the deathless Spirit. All this was not dull thought; it flashed through me vividly as the living truth which I perceived directly, almost without thought-process. 'I' was something very real, the only real thing about my present state, and all the conscious activity connected with my body was centered on that 'I'. From that moment onwards the 'I' or Self, focused attention on Itself by a powerful fascination. Fear of death has vanished once and for all. Absorption in the Self continued unbroken from that time on". (p.iv)

Very few people can maintain equanimity in the face of death or sorrow. **Shreemad Bhagwad Geeta** (Chapter VI) defines the ‘Sthitapragya’ as “He who, through the likeness (sameness) of the Self, O Arjuna, sees equality everywhere, be it pleasure or pain, he is regarded as the highest Yogi”. This is also an approach suggested in the Bible which recommends being in the world, but not of it. Self-enquiry is one of the ways to arrive at such a state of self-realization. Complete surrender to the Higher Self/God is the way suggested by religion.

The mystics affirm the possibility of rising beyond the here and now, by touching the dimension of the timeless which is beyond all dualities such as life and death, sorrow and joy etc. According to Dada Gavand (see www.mysticdada.org), man is never free and is totally conditioned by his past, “You are pushed around and you are living in time, counting your days, months and years. There is a new way of living which is a timeless process. There is a new momentum which moves, which lives from moment to moment and that is true living. And it is the greatest discovery of life – to discover that moment which moves in eternity. With that movement alone you live because in fact that is the living thing. What you call life is just inertia of the past which is pushing you. So let us discover that living momentum and then we will know what living is, what the effervescence of that energy is”.

Life is not easy to define. Scientists debate over issues such as brain-death or comatose condition. Living cells constantly exchange energy and can replicate themselves. At a philosophical level, the **Mandukya Upanishad** mentions four possible states of living with regard to human beings: the waking state, the dream state, the deep sleep state and the ‘Turiya’ state which cannot be described in words except through the negation of all attributes. It is the substratum of all illusion. It is neither “conscious, nor unconscious; which is unseen, beyond empirical dealings, beyond the grasp (of the organs of action), un-inferable, unthinkable, indescribable; whose valid proof consists in the single belief in the Self; in which all phenomena cease; and which is unchanging, auspicious and non-dual. That is the Self, and That is to be known”[Chapter I, Verse 7 ,p 200 in **Eight Upanishads-Vol. II**].

According to Advaitin spiritual teacher Rajiv Kapur, in order to experience the joy of living, we must be willing to die even to the present, the waking state and reach the Source itself – from where this present moment has manifested. “While a few

take the 'Here' and 'Now' to be the only reality, and equate awareness only to a waking state consciousness, others even imagine life after death (heaven, astral planes, etc.) and that is the reason they close themselves to exploring death, for they fear it. **But true living must embrace death first for there is no other way.** When you die to everything, which includes even this present moment, only then will you truly live and know yourself as Love. It is hard to describe in words but it is something like watching the entire mechanism of body/mind collapse. The whole world may seem to be crashing down on you. You may feel like you are sitting on a pyre and burning. Every cell of your body will revolt and you will feel your skin peeling off. This is only a process that takes away everything you once were holding on to. So, whatever you once knew yourself to be – the body form, mind, senses, breath, prana, oneness – all of that will burn in that fire and turn to ashes. It is not a very comfortable place to be in but there will be no escape till the movement comes to a halt. Once this ends you will find yourself in another dimension altogether. You will know yourself as Love – the substratum of all. **This is real silence where Consciousness itself will be missing.** There will be no centre”[see www.rajivkapur.com]. Mystics have always affirmed that love and bliss are the natural outcome of such a death.

To die to everything does not imply literal or physical death. It is to die to the ignorant belief that one is one's body / mind and to realize one's true Self which is pure, unconditioned, intuitive awareness or 'beingness'. As Sri Ramana Maharshi puts it in his **Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi**, “Birth and death pertain to the body only; but they are superimposed on the Self, giving rise to the delusion that birth and death relate to the Self”[p 547] . Several Scriptures and spiritual teachers point the way to the true Self .Though the practices they suggest may differ they agree on one basic point : it is only by giving up one's attachment to the five senses and the ego-self that one can experience life in the true sense of the term. This does not mean that one has to live a life of seclusion and renunciation, away from society and worldly life. On the contrary, one then lives as a truly integrated and free being whose every action arises spontaneously, without the dictates of the ego-self, bringing about the greatest good of the greatest numbers .Thus, paradoxically,

if one is 'dying to be happy' by living life to the fullest, one must be ready to die to all that is untrue.

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