

ABOUT DEATH

by Martin Israel and other members of the
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INTRODUCTION

But the souls of the virtuous are in the hands of God, no torment shall ever touch them. In the eyes of the unwise, they appear to die, their going looked like a disaster, their leaving us, like annihilation; but they are in peace. If they experience punishment as men see it, their hope was rich with immortality; slight was their affliction, great will their blessings be. God has put them to the test and proved them worthy to be with him.

Wisdom of Solomon 3: 1-5 Jerusalem Bible.

Death is the end of mortal life. It is not merely its termination, but also its final purpose. It forms the summing-up of a lifetime's experience and it leads the way to the soul's further advancement in realms of higher endeavour. Such, at any rate, is the religious view of death, which sees, albeit with the eye of faith, a succession of survival and growth in the uncharted realms of the after life.

We, in this booklet, have attempted to present an account of the process of dying from its inception during the peak of life to its close with the dissolution of the body and the experience of bereavement. We have assembled such evidence as points to survival of that immaterial principle which is called the soul, or true self. In all, our hope is that this awe-inspiring topic, too often painfully ignored in worldly conversation, may be a source of genuine rejoicing when its full implications are studied dispassionately and with knowledge. To be sure, no one on this side of the grave can know the answers, but what has been given both to the dying and to those who have narrowly escaped death confirms the intimations of the mystics of the great religions of the world.

The booklet continues with some personal testimonies of those who have experienced the death of loved ones and the conviction of their survival in a larger frame of life. To end with there is an anthology about death in its spiritual context. Probably the most inspired words on this theme were uttered by St. Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians:

Though this outer man of ours be falling into decay, the inner man is renewed day by day. Yes, the troubles which are soon over, though they weigh little, train us for the carrying of a weight of eternal glory which is out of all proportion to them. And so we have no eyes for things that are visible, but only for things that are invisible; for visible things last only for a time, and the invisible things are eternal. For we know that when the tent that we live in on earth is folded up, there is a house built by God for us, an everlasting home not made by human hands, in the heavens. In this present state, it is true, we groan as we wait with longing to put on our heavenly home over the other; we should like to be found wearing clothes and not without them. Yes, we groan and find it a burden being still in this tent, not that we want to strip it off, but to put the second garment over it and to have what must die taken up into life. This is the purpose for which God made us and he has given us the pledge of the Spirit. We are always full of confidence, then, when we remember that to live in the body means to be exiled from the Lord, going as we do by faith and not by sight—we are full of confidence, I say, and actually want to be exiled from the body and make our home with the Lord.

2 Corinthians 4: 16— 5: 18 Jerusalem Bible.

THE PHENOMENON OF DEATH

I THE MEANING OF DEATH

In the midst of life we are in death. The death of which I speak is not merely the cessation of bodily activity that we all know as death, and which may befall any of us even at this moment, but it is even more cogently the end of a present phase of awareness with the promise of a new venture into the unknown.

Who am I? If I identify myself with my body of flesh and bone I will soon come to see that there is little of this that can be called permanent. The cells of my skin, as they reach the surface, die and are shed. The cells of my inner organs undergo slow cycles of growth, maturation, senescence, and death, and they are in turn replaced by new cells. There are some cells of my body which cannot be replaced; the nerve cells of the brain undergo death throughout my adult life and they are never replenished. Even my bones, which on the surface seem durable enough, are undergoing constant remodelling; old bone is eaten away and new bone is laid down in lines of stress where support is most necessary. The boy I was many years ago is hardly recognisable as the middle-aged adult I now am, and in due course, if my life is preserved, I will present the shrunken, stunted body of an old man. Everything about my physical body is in a state of constant disintegration and replacement. As I grow older so the replacement becomes less perfect, until I can no longer survive the attacks of hostile outer agencies and invidious inner assaults. So I am in death even during the peak of life.

Nor is my mental and emotional life any less fluctuating. When I was a child my horizons were limited by thoughts of school and passing examinations. At a certain age I left school and enjoyed the higher education afforded by a university. Soon the memory of school faded away, and I was fully occupied as an undergraduate. In due course I qualified in my particular discipline and entered the world to practise it. In all too short a time my life at university had passed into the halflights of distant memories. At present I am at the peak of my career, but thoughts about later retirement are already impinging on my consciousness. There will indeed be a time when I will have to relinquish all the interest and fascination of a professional life and make my peace with the enforced inactivity of old age, provided I am not called away prematurely. But be that as it may one thing is certain: at a moment in time I will be called away from my present activities finally and decisively, and will have to make my peace with a new world of which I know very little. This is the meaning of death: the entrance into a new realm of existence glimpsed by faith rather than illuminated by knowledge.

When I was a child I spoke, understood, and thought as a child (1 Corinthians 13: 11). When I grew up into an adult I parted with childish concepts and put on the mind of a mature person. The dreams, fantasies, and illusions of my childhood are now past memories, and I have gained in sympathy and understanding for many people whom I would previously have dismissed as of little importance. Growing into life is also growing towards death, which is the great leveller. But this levelling effect is merely a surface phenomenon: the outer dross of personality is flattened, but the core within, the pearl of great price that is one's true self, shines most beautifully when the outer layers of debris are removed.

It becomes clearer as we grow in years that the real purpose of our evanescent life on earth is to help us develop into fully integrated persons, so that when we have finally to quit the flesh there will be a well-formed personality based on mental attitudes and moral well-being to carry on our consciousness into the formless world beyond the grave. Everything we have here is in a state of flux, and nothing outside the central core of identity (which is called the soul, or spiritual self, or transpersonal self) is truly our own. But we grow into this knowledge through the vicissitudes of life, especially the wounding and self-revealing relationships we undergo with other people. The way of transcendence of selfishness to the full glory of the Self is through commitment to our fellow men, yet with complete non-attachment. By being non-attached I can be of genuine assistance to another person without clinging to him or demanding recognition or reward from him. When there is non-attachment there is a perfect freedom in depth of the relationship. Death in its many guises is here to teach us the meaning of non-attachment, for when we are about to die we attain detachment from even our most precious belongings, which are, at last, seen to have a wider significance than to exist merely for our selfish pleasure and self-esteem.

As I progress in the spiritual life I become less attached to past regrets and future hopes and fears. My mind is rested on the moment in hand, and distracting thoughts cease to be obtrusive. Eventually I learn to live entirely in a single point in time, and I find in the consciousness of that moment the point of my identity. When this fact of existence is known through experience, I have moved from the life of imprisonment in

matter to the life of eternal freedom. Then I am ready to face death with composure, knowing that my work on earth is done.

2 - PREPARATION FOR DEATH

From the middle of life onward only he remains vitally alive who is ready to die with life.

C. G. Jung: The Soul and Death.

No one knows when he will die; he should therefore act at all times with such excellence that, if the present moment were to be his last one on earth, he would leave behind him as little chaos as possible and much peace. We always advise a person who is seriously ill to put his affairs in order. In most instances this can be done before the relentless inroads of disease render him impotent. But if we were leading the spiritual life, our affairs would always be in order through the perfection of our present actions. Jesus commands, "Be ye perfect even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." (Matthew 5: 48). This is truly a counsel of perfection, but it is nevertheless applicable to mortal life. That which is perfect mirrors in its substance the Creator and leads others on to an encounter with Him. This is the heart of Jesus' other great injunction, "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven". (Matthew 5: 16). In terms of preparation for death this could be paraphrased, "Do your work each moment with such right mindfulness that you glorify God in every action."

Our most important actions are those that affect relationships with those around us. If we can attend fully to them and their needs, we are not far from the mind of Christ. When we are suffused with the joy of creation during even the most barren periods of our life, we are near indeed to knowing the pearl of great price that is within us and is the essence of eternal life. As we move to the unknown region, we have to take stock of ourselves and the type of life we have been leading. Our present selfishness looms like a mighty mountain over our lives and occludes from our view the splendour of the real world around us. We seem so often to be imprisoned in a web of destructive relationships, so that much of our attention and effort is dissipated in vain imaginings and fruitless fears, while our emotional life is harnessed by resentment against others. The years go by, and instead of growing into something of the stature of a mature person capable both of enjoying life and making our contribution to it, we find ourselves trapped in a shadowy domain of destructive emotions and negative thoughts. Unless we can break out of this prison of selfishness and isolation, we will proceed in it to the larger life beyond death.

This is what hell is about: the separation of the individual from the total reality of life, which shows itself first and foremost in the beloved community of aspiring souls.

The aware person takes hold of himself; he is able to stand back and view his emotional responses to others with control and detachment. We have to see that a life spent in resentment is like a cancerous growth eating away the centre of our identity, the soul. All our efforts and time can easily be spent in imagining dire punishments against those whom we believe have injured or wronged us. Instead of living fully in the moment and giving ourselves to the present situation, we are then simply groping in a black pit of anguish. When the time comes for us to quit the mortal body, we will find ourselves immersed in dark feelings of hatred without any ray of spiritual hope to enlighten the way. It therefore follows that we should strive to put right all bad relationships as soon as possible. This means first of all having a period of deep reflection about our own past life and trying to see how much our own perverse attitudes have contributed to the present malaise. If we ponder deeply enough, we will begin to see that the difficulty in our own personalities probably started very early in our lives, and that we still harbour a great deal of submerged resentment against our parents, who may well have died many years previously. It should not require the services of a psycho-analyst to expose the inner core of our deep perversities—at least in the great majority of people. Through humility, perseverance, and above all the grace of God which often manifests itself gratuitously in dreams, we can learn much about the springs of our actions, which lie deeply submerged in the unconscious.

When the heart of our difficulties is shown to us, we should confront it directly and lift it up to God — however we conceive Him— and pray that a blessing may accrue even from our darkest secrets. His forgiveness to us, manifested as unconditional love, is the blessing.

Then we should strive for reconciliation with those whom we cannot tolerate. This does not mean ignoring or plastering over a grievance or point of disharmony and pretending it does not exist or, at any rate, does not matter. It means confronting the difficulty in mutual responsibility and working together towards its resolution. In many instances this admirable way forward may be rendered impossible because of the intransigence of the other person, who may not be able to face the fact that he too has his dark side. In this

case we have to let matters rest as quietly as possible, but at least proceed in our own lives in full awareness of the situation and praying ceaselessly about it to God, that He in His own mysterious way may redeem a situation that seems hopeless on a human level. However, one thing is certain: we should move towards death with as clean a slate as possible, and have made an attempt to become reconciled to as many people as possible. “Agree with thine adversary quickly, while thou art in the way with him: lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou has paid the uttermost farthing.” (Matthew 5:25-26).

In the prime of our days we may live for our work, often disregarding those beneath us in the professional scale. We all know that no one is indispensable, that when even renowned people retire from their work or are called away suddenly by death, they are soon replaced, and their contribution rapidly fades from the memories of those who once held them in awe. But we all too seldom apply this knowledge in our own lives. We should, if we are standing firmly in the vision of death and resurrection, be constantly flowing out in grace and blessing to those around us, encouraging the young to assume greater responsibilities, and acting ourselves more as centres of influence from a distance than as assertive leaders in the midst of others. Those who, like Jesus, speak with real authority, communicate from an inner core of authority which is the true self. They do not have to assert themselves or command the attention of their fellows. They are immutably fixed in themselves, and the Holy Spirit speaks through them, strengthening all those with whom they come into contact. It is in this way that those who are to replace us when we leave the busy scene gain inspiration and encouragement. We should strive to act in this way to our colleagues and companions even now, so that when we are called away there will be a body of responsible, dedicated people to take over the reins of authority. The relationship of Elijah to Elisha and especially Jesus to His disciples gives us the key to this proper delegation of responsibility. People who find it difficult to delegate responsibility are like little children who refuse to share their toys with others. It is indeed tragic to see how often people who are very successful in their particular work or profession fail to grow up emotionally. Though considered authorities in their particular field, they behave towards others like spoilt children. This is a measure of their inner insecurity; they tend to identify themselves entirely with the external image they show to the world, and they respond with vindictiveness to anyone whom they suspect of endangering or impugning this sense of identity. How sad is their lot when they leave all this show behind them and enter a realm in which only the deeper values of the self count for anything.

On the other hand, the person who is fixed in himself can quite spontaneously flow out in concern and goodwill to others. He does not feel threatened; on the contrary, those who challenge his views are his real friends, for they reveal new possibilities and potentialities of life to him. He does not need to hoard all his riches, but can give them out in trust to those around him. He starts to groom younger people for the work ahead, and his greatest joy is to see a younger generation proceeding apace even to the extent of modifying, if not reversing, his own approach to life. For we all learn from each other, and when we pass from death to life — whether in this world or in the next stage — we start to see many things with fresh eyes.

A person who is preparing for death should be more alive than ever. His mind should be active and alert. New interests, especially intellectual and spiritual, should be taking the place of his worldly interests as he moves towards retirement—and a mother taking leave of her grown-up children is as much “retired” as the elderly man who is obliged to leave his work. How fortunate such a person is if he has already acquired wider interests while still at the peak of his career. In the Hindu scheme of spiritual life, the aspirant proceeds from the stage of student to that of householder (which ends at the birth of his grandchildren). He then retires into the depths of the forest (either alone or with his wife) where he proceeds to contemplate the great things of existence. The last stage is one of complete renunciation, perhaps at a holy place, where death is awaited in profound meditation. But it is important to realise that God, however He may be conceived, is the centre of all phases of this four-fold scheme of life. He is with the youth in his studies no less than in the arduous work of the husband or the contemplation of the mendicant. It is interesting that the Jewish Kabbalist tradition has a similar scheme of development, and that the deepest secrets are withheld from those whose previous career has not made them worthy to receive them.

The spiritual preparation for death does not consist primarily in investigating matters psychical and “occult”. These can, even if the teachings of such “esoteric” schools are indeed accurate, serve to separate the person from his own centre and divert his attention from the living God to rarefied realms of thought that have little to do with the clamant responsibilities of his present relationships with those around him. It is the deeper realities of the great mystical tradition of the world that should be in the thoughts of all who

are moving towards the final point of earthly existence. The centre of mystical awareness is love; love alone prevails when everything else has been withered by the inroads of time, decay, and death.

Carl Jung's oft-quoted observation that amongst his older patients there was no neurosis that was not ultimately related to a search for a deeper religious meaning to life is crucial to our preparation for death. Only as we ponder the deep things of God will we come to the core of our own immortality.

3 - DYING THE PHYSICAL ASPECT

The drama of dying is man's final renunciation of all the things of this earth. We have had our fill of all the good and bad of existence and now we are ready, whether heavy-hearted or grateful, to take our leave of them. To be sure this departure is fulfilled whether we acquiesce or not, but those of us who have grown in wisdom with our span of life, learn to co-operate with the forces above us that determine our spell in this world and our final destination. "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation. . (Luke 2: 29-30).

Admittedly few, if any, have seen this salvation as clearly as did Simeon beholding the infant Christ, but those who have lived constructive lives should have been able to divine dimly within themselves and in the summing-up of their experiences some pattern and meaning to the earthly existence which sheds light on their ultimate destiny, and indeed the destiny of all created things.

We are still like little children; at a certain hour those who look after us put away our toys and carry us protesting to our beds where we almost at once fall into the sound sleep of childhood, only to awake the next day refreshed and renewed to enter into further adventures. Nevertheless, the process of being divested of our earthly belongings is not pleasant when we grow into the adult estate, and fall victim to the delusion that we really own these things instead of seeing ourselves merely as their custodians. We have no possession other than that focus of true identity, the soul or spiritual self. All else drops away from us except the experiences derived from our stewardship which add their quota to the soul's memory and consequently to its growth into greater perfection of being, so that it may mirror its divine Creator all the more perfectly in the life of the world to come.

To some death comes suddenly either as a result of an accident or through a dramatic failure of a vital function of the body, usually a heart attack. Others pass away painlessly in their sleep without having had previous forebodings of imminent dissolution. But the great majority experience the slow inroads of mortality, and have to learn to make peace with the evanescence of earthly life. "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1: 21). This is the heart of the matter: we have to return, as we came, with nothing except ourselves, trusting we have gained a little in stature through the experience of living. First I have to renounce my work, accepting the fact that I shall never go back to it again. Then I dispose of my motor-car. I quit my spacious residence for a more modest abode, until one room — and indeed one bed — is enough for me. I dispose legally of all my worldly possessions, and make my last communication with acquaintances, friends, and finally close relatives also. Soon I am fighting for mortal life itself and my whole awareness is focused on this titanic struggle. I have finally to make my greatest earthly renunciation, that of my physical body.

It is to this facing of imminent death that I now want to focus our attention. Most people would agree, whether or not they accept the possibility of an after-life, that it is the process of dying that is the most forbidding aspect of death.

However spiritual our outlook may be, we cannot evade our mortal anchorage in the physical body we inherit, and we are fully sensitive to its pain and dysfunction. In some disease processes, for instance heart trouble, the end is seldom clear-cut, for life may on some occasions terminate with dramatic suddenness and yet on others be prolonged for many years with a variable degree of incapacitation. In the degenerative diseases of the nervous system, like the common stroke and the tragic multiple sclerosis, life may be continued for a considerable time with all degrees of disability ranging from complete helplessness to only slight weakness, and indeed spontaneous remissions may occur in multiple sclerosis even on some occasions when the patient seems beyond all human help.

But it is the inexorable progress of cancer that causes the most dread. It is often not realised that this disease may sometimes kill with comparatively little discomfort, and that its course is not always as relentless as is generally assumed. There can be few medical practitioners of experience who have not seen occasional cases of inoperable cancer that have lived on for a considerable number of years with only mild discomfort, perhaps succumbing to some other disease. It is well known that some types of widespread cancer can disappear completely even without treatment. These "spontaneous remissions" are extremely uncommon,

and they cannot at present be explained satisfactorily on a medical basis. But their very existence is an eloquent testimony to the uncertainty of all human predictions about the course and termination of disease processes. The claims made by some spiritual healers must always be interpreted in the light of the inscrutable course of many chronic diseases. Only if a healer “scores” an impressive number of “successes” in such cases is his testimony valid. In my experience modern healers have not yet provided this degree of proof.

One of the most encouraging developments in recent years has been the establishment of small hospital units, sometimes called “hospices,” that cater especially for the fatally ill patient. Nearly all these institutions are staffed by believers, often Christians, who see the dying patient as someone more than a depressing medical failure to be kept out of sight and mind as much as possible. Most of these hospices would resent being regarded as mere depositories for the terminally ill cancer patient. They see their function primarily as the relief of suffering whether physical, mental, social, or spiritual. As one would expect, physical distress, such as severe pain, breathlessness, cough, or nausea, is the usual complaint bringing the patient into their orbit. But their management of the case is sometimes so effective that the patient can return home, at least for a spell, before he finally dies. To visit such a place is a spiritual experience of great radiance. Here we see patients who have been admitted in a state of extreme physical distress, mental depression (the effect of tacit rejection by their medical attendants and family as being incurable and therefore a burden on all concerned), and spiritual despair. They are welcomed by loving people, put at ease in pleasant surroundings, and treated as people once more. A regime of drug administration has been developed which annuls the pain and general physical distress of inoperable cancer without dulling the consciousness of the patient to the extent of obliterating his essential personality. In such surroundings the dying patient can begin to blossom into a fully authentic person. Indeed, for the first time in his life he may be able to face the ultimate facts of existence and move in the courage of full awareness to the next stage. Dying in such surroundings, while hardly a pleasurable experience, can nevertheless become a really creative one. While religion is never forced on the patient, he is enveloped in a community of caring people who, more by their demeanour and actions than by their words, show him something of the presence of the eternal Christ Who is incarnate in the bodies of all who do His healing work in the world around us irrespective of their theological position.

Of course, these admirable “terminal-care units” merely skim the surface of an ocean of human agony. But they point the way forward to the time when all who care for the sick and dying will be imbued with a vision of life and death that proceeds beyond dissolution to survival. This is why the topic of death cannot be too widely discussed. It is really almost too late to begin when the patient is dying and alone. This brings us to a consideration of how and when to tell a person he is dying. On the whole, this topic arouses acute embarrassment not only among the medical attendants and close relatives but also in the sufferer himself. It is well known that on many occasions both parties know the situation, but in order to spare each other distress they subtly evade the issue. Some people believe it is wrong to deny the patient the conscious experience of dying by withholding this information from him for as long as possible. On the other hand, many experienced doctors have seen patients collapse into hopelessness when insensitively confronted with the fact of their imminent death. It is evident to me that there is no one correct answer to this problem; each patient has to be treated as an individual, and the Holy Spirit has to be invoked for guidance in this delicate matter.

An instance that I will always remember concerns a dear friend of mine, a deeply spiritual man whose life had been devoted to the healing of broken young men. When in his eightieth year he fell victim to lung cancer, and he slowly deteriorated in a well-known London hospital. He seemed to have no insight into the nature of his disease despite his increasing weakness and breathlessness, and I felt constrained to bring him gently to the reality of the situation. He suddenly said to me, “I’m not going to die, am I?” I was shattered, and could only blurt out some trivial reassurance to him—and here was a deeply spiritual man, not unacquainted with death and concepts of survival. I should add that he did die ten days later, and I had the privilege of direct communion with him in prayer shortly afterwards, when he gave me important instructions about a book I was in the process of writing at that time.

This experience humbled me and made me realise how dangerous the god-like omniscience often attributed to doctors can be. No one knows the time or place of any event. God does move in a way mysterious to us mortals, and I personally thank Him for this unpredictability. Those engaged in the Ministry of Healing have an advantage over the purely materially orientated doctor. They work in terms of hope, not mortality.

A true spiritual healer brings peace and blessing to whatever situation he is called. He knows that there is a spiritual law that transcends the physical laws governing life and death of the body. Prayer, the laying-on of

hands, and the Sacraments of the Church, especially the Eucharist and Holy Unction, often have an effect little understood by the worldly-wise. While they only occasionally effect a dramatic improvement in the course of fatal diseases, they nearly always lighten the hopelessness and gloom surrounding the patient and his relatives. Death in some instances seems to be accelerated, but it is often remarkably peaceful and brings with it an atmosphere of calm benediction that plays its part in the spiritual education of those left behind. Thus, when I am confronted with a terminally ill patient, I work with supernatural hope. I naturally long for physical recovery, especially if the sufferer is young and has much to look forward to in this life. But I pray with him that God's will may be done, and that, whatever the outcome in terms of this life, he may grow into that full healing of the personality which is the salvation wrought by Christ on all those who truly believe in Him and the abundant life He eternally proclaims. In this way the passage from what we call life to what is really life, the life of the world to come, is tranquil and complete.

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4 - DYING - THE PSYCHICAL ASPECT

As a person moves beyond the field of mortal conflict with disease to the final episode of separation from his body, so his mental condition changes. Both the fear and the sense of rebellion he had felt earlier on, that caused him to fight at all costs for survival, now wane. He becomes quieter, more peaceful, and at rest. This tranquillity of the terminally ill is often due in part to the mounting doses of drugs that are administered to relieve distress. Indeed, many patients pass the end of their life in coma, due as much to the effects of drugs as to the disease itself. And this is sad; it would be far better if we could enter the new phase in a state of co-operation and awareness. The drug regimes administered at modern hospices help to retain the patient's awareness until very near the end. Their aim is to keep the patient continuously free of distress by regular doses of drugs. Once the "habit" of expecting pain has been displaced by regular drug schedules, the patient can usually be kept in a state of comfort with moderate doses of these drugs, and without any serious clouding of consciousness.

In fact, these patients especially experience a blessed peace. This is due mostly to frank exhaustion following the long dire battle for survival which is being slowly but inexorably lost. As the time of withdrawal approaches, so an attitude of quiet acceptance emanates from the person. Even those whose death is accompanied by conspicuous signs, such as congestion of the lungs which culminates in the rather repulsive death-rattle, are more at peace within themselves than the outsider would accept. The soul has probably become progressively loosened from its encompassing body during the last stages of life, and the body alone is registering severe dysfunction. To those around the patient the effect is much more distressing than, in all probability, it is to him personally.

The attitude we should have to those very near death is one of silent respect. We should not be putting forward our religious views to them or conjuring up our own special visions of the afterlife. Indeed, the more I am in contact with the dying, the more silent and humble do I feel. At an earlier stage of the process they may ask philosophical or theological questions about the fundamental cause of their disease and about the possibility of an after-life state. If they do, I impart my own insights to them as humbly and tentatively as possible, but I prefer to await the coming mystery with them, supporting them at all times in the deepest caring. When a person who is a committed religionist dies young, he sometimes feels that he has committed a serious sin and his premature death is God's punishment for his wickedness. I do not believe this myself for one moment, for how could God, whose nature it is always to have mercy and whose very being is love, punish one of His creatures so cruelly! But I encourage such a person to confess to me all that troubles him about his past life, and then I assure him of God's forgiveness. In many cases of this type the person's life has been so conspicuously pure, with little if anything to regret in the way of selfishness or misdemeanours, that I am put to shame in his presence. And so, if he is a Christian, I remind him of Jesus's redeeming sacrifice on the Cross for the sins of the whole world, and how it is the duty and the privilege of all who follow Him to partake of His suffering in order to experience His resurrection, and also to help in resurrecting this unhappy, sinful world we are all born into. St. Paul said of his own suffering, "It makes me happy to suffer for you, as I am suffering now, and in my own body to do what I can to make up all that has still to be undergone by Christ for the sake of his body, the Church" (Colossians 1: 24). But as the dying person slowly relinquishes his body, so other perceptions may become available to him, encouraging him on his mysterious journey, and assuring him that he is not alone.

Death-Bed Visions

It has been known for a long time that dying people sometimes have hallucinations of their friends and associates who are already dead. Cases have been reported in which the dying patient actually "saw" someone "on the other side," whom he still believed to be alive in the flesh, and who had in fact died only recently and unknown to all those present with the patient. Of course, these cases are usually dismissed out of hand by agnostic observers as the products of a diseased brain, damaged by drugs and internal toxins that accumulate as the body's metabolism fails. Others would attribute them to wish-fulfilling fantasies in people who cannot bear the obvious, logical fact of annihilation of the personality with physical death.

However, the pendulum is beginning to swing in favour of those who take these experiences seriously. One of the chief investigators in this field is Dr. Karlis Osis, who is currently the Director of Research of the American Society for Psychical Research. His interest dates from 1961 when he published his first pilot study of death-bed hallucinations, and recently he has extended his original research and substantiated its findings. He has sent a detailed questionnaire to a large number of doctors and nurses about the deathbed visions described by their patients. Of course, only patients who were conscious during their last hours of earthly life are suitable for this investigation. It should be noted that the word "hallucination" does not

necessarily mean that the perception is false; it simply means that it occurs in the absence of a material object obvious to others present, and is therefore a private experience and not a public reality.

In the patients studied, apparitions from the life beyond death were common. They could not be attributed to medical factors, since those who had obvious brain damage, drug overdosage, or toxæmia did not register this type of hallucination. The types of hallucinations seen amongst such patients were rambling, confused, and above all related to this world (such as reliving past memories, for example a quarrel with a close relative). Those who had other-worldly visions were clear-brained notwithstanding their proximity to death. Nor could the visions be attributed to wish-fulfilment. They were spontaneous, and occurred as often in patients who expected to recover as in those who thought that they were going to die. A wish-fulfilling vision might have been expected to conjure up the image of a living relative who was too far away to visit the dying patient. In only a very small proportion of cases was a desired living person hallucinated.

One of the most interesting features of the figure who appeared from "the other side" was that it often came with the definite purpose of taking the dying person away with it. Osiris calls this a "take-away" figure, and he found that in those cases where death occurred within ten minutes of seeing the apparition, the "take-away" figure strongly predominated. Usually the "take-away" figure was someone the patient knew, and he was glad to receive its beckoning call, but sometimes he shrank from it in terror, being violently opposed to going away with the "visitor." Nevertheless, he invariably was taken away.

There was no relationship between these hallucinations and the patient's inner conflicts or his emotional preoccupations on the day preceding the hallucination; thus Freud's day-residue principle (imagery reflecting memories of previous experience) could not be satisfactorily invoked as an explanation for this interesting phenomenon. Studies were conducted in the United States with its predominantly Judeo-Christian world-view, and in India where Hinduism and Islam predominated. The apparitions of death, especially the "take-away" figure, occurred similarly in both cultures, though neither the Bible nor Bhagavadgita mentions this aspect of dying.

Osiris also found that these death-bed visions tended to evoke an inner illumination in the patient. While his relatives wept, he was "lit up". Some showed a serenity suggesting "the peace which passes all understanding," which one might expect to find in association with an other-worldly awareness. Many psychical research workers believe that this type of experience is one of the most suggestive pointers to the probability of survival of death. Furthermore, it has to be taken into consideration with another important type of experience, that of the person who almost passes beyond the point of no return but is then called back to earth.

Near-Death Experiences

A number of us are destined to have encounters with sudden death: it may be in a drowning episode, a motor-car accident, a mountaineering disaster, during an operation, or simply through the inroads of a sudden severe illness such as a heart attack or a fulminating infection. A series of such cases of people who lived to tell the tale was analysed by Dr. Russell Noyes and three successive phases of experience were described. First, as might be expected, there was a brief period of resistance in which the person recognised the danger and was full of fear. He struggled briefly and then accepted the inevitable course of events. At this stage the second phase might occur, a fleeting review of the significant episodes of his past life, accompanied by a feeling of calm or even ecstasy. This experience finally merged into the third and final phase, which was one of transcendence of time, space, and personal identity. There was a sense of "oneness", or unity, with other people and with the whole created universe, similar to that described by the mystics. Not all the cases showed these three phases, nor did every one follow this distinct sequence, but the trend was clear enough.

Another research worker, Dr. Raymond A. Moody, who has written a book on the subject of life after death, made a similar analysis of more than 200 cases. He found that at the point of death the person heard a strange sound in his ears, rather like buzzing or even music, and at the same time had the experience of moving along a dark tunnel or valley. At the end he found himself outside his old body, but in a new type of body, perhaps watching the death-bed scene from a distance. He might be floating near the ceiling of the room. The emotions might start with confusion and upset, but they were soon replaced by a feeling of peace and lightness. Indeed, there was a great lucidity of awareness and a heightened degree of perception. He might be able to read into the minds of those tending him down below. At the same time his feeling of isolation was relieved by the appearance of deceased friends and relatives who came to welcome him. A typical experience in these cases was that of a brilliant light, white and clear, which impressed the person as a being with a definite personality. It was warm and loving, and it seemed to surround him and take him up.

This appearance was obviously a very holy one, and was identified as God, Christ, or an angel according to the person's religious background. This being effected telepathic communication with the person, and helped him to evaluate his past life by showing him a panoramic playback of the major events of that life. The effect was not so much a judgment as an understanding of the learning value of life's vicissitudes and his own reaction to them. The two important things in life were seen to be learning to love others and acquiring knowledge.

And yet the person found he had to return to the world of the living. It might be automatic; or he might be "told" that his time had not yet come. In the end the person was re-united with his physical body. As with all deep spiritual experiences, the person found great difficulty in communicating them to those around him, who seldom believed him in any case. But the experience usually had a profound effect on his future life. Those who had attempted suicide came back with the inner knowledge that they had been breaking the "rules" of the game, and that there was indeed a purpose to fulfil in continuing to live out their full span in this world.

These findings correlate extremely well with the spontaneous out-of-the-body experiences that occur from time to time in healthy people. A considerable literature about these not very uncommon experiences is now available. The basis of an out-of-the-body experience is the sudden awareness of a centre of identity outside the physical body. In the most uncomplicated cases the person is aware of looking down on his body from a point of height, and he may occasionally be able to perceive things out of the range of his normal sense organs. More rarely he may claim contact with personalities known to be deceased. But the most exalted of such experiences carries the percipient into a new realm entirely, one of spaceless communion with the totality of life in which ineffable love and uncreated light are the dominant features. This is clearly allied to the experience of the great mystics, if indeed it is not identical with mystical illumination. Such experiences are necessarily private, but no one who has had them can remain imprisoned in a materialistic view of life. The view that the physical body is alone real, and that a person's identity is limited to it and therefore ceases when that body dies, is seen to be no longer tenable. It does not fit the facts of higher consciousness.

Sceptics will, of course, question this. It is well known that diseases of the temporal lobes of the brain can produce sensations of being detached from one's true identity—this is called "depersonalisation." Such a state can lead to a feeling of being separated from one's body. Could not out-of-the-body experiences and those described by the nearly-dead be simply manifestations of brain dysfunction? In our present state of knowledge it is wise not to make a categorical statement, for we still know far too little about the brain's functioning, to say nothing about its relationship to the mind. The materialist believes that what we call "mind" is simply a product, or an epiphenomenon, of the brain's activity. The psychical research worker would, on the whole, tend to see brain and mind as two separate categories of reality, but working in the closest collaboration during the person's earthly life. I personally favour the second view unreservedly, and I can see a world of difference between the *out-of-the-body feeling* described by people with brain disease and the *out-of-the-body experience* that I have described in these pages. The first is merely a *sensation*; the second is an *experience* that brings enlightenment and knowledge with it. The percipient leaves it a wiser, more mature person, and his life is enriched by it. Far from becoming depersonalised, he begins, perhaps for the first time in his life, to understand what it is to be a real person.

St. Paul says of a supreme mystical experience he had, "I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such a one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) how that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter" (II Corinthians 12: 2-4). This does not sound to me like mental disease or an epileptic attack; the intellect and spiritual genius of St. Paul speak of an infinitely more exalted illumination. The same man could write, "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8: 18), and again, "For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8: 39).

And I am persuaded that the man who wrote this knew what he was talking about. To his spiritual gift of *faith* was added the *knowledge* of eternal things by divine grace.

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5 - BEREAVEMENT

Those who have died move on into a new realm of existence. What this entails we still do not properly know, but faith and direct communion afford us a glimpse of the celestial abode of blessed spirits and of the ceaseless activity of all towards greater sanctification.

But what of those who are left behind? There are few of us living to adult life who will be spared the agony of bereavement.

If those who have gone through this bitter experience were questioned, it is doubtful whether they could give a coherent account of their anguish or of the circumstances that finally saw their emergence from the pit of travail.

C. S. Lewis wrote a short account of his own bitter bereavement following the death of his wife Joy Davidman. It is called "A Grief Observed" and makes harrowing, but essential reading. Here was a man, a noted writer and Christian apologist, who married only in middle life. His wife was already marked by her fatal malady before they were united, and they spent only a few years of bliss together. And when death finally severed the physical union, he was utterly bereft. The clichés of traditional Christianity were of little use to him, but he eschewed the consolation offered by Spiritualism. At times he was almost suicidal with grief, and could get no relief from any source. And then suddenly, after many months, the darkness lifted, and his life returned again, renewed and enhanced. In fact, he had attained union with his beloved on the deepest level of personality, and he could enter the autumnal period of his life, a few years later to be terminated by his death also.

From this very typical case-history we can learn much about bereavement. It is a period of death for the one left behind no less than for the one who has moved on. He has lost his most priceless asset, the loved one, around whom his whole life had centred. The bottom has fallen out of his existence, and he has been forced back on to himself in the most inescapable fashion.

Some cannot face this period of total abandonment, and either try to end their lives by their own hand or else fall victim to a fatal disease soon after the death of the loved one. In this respect the lot of a widow is usually more tragic than that of a widower, who being a man, is more likely to be entertained by his friends, and often has, in any case, some outside work to occupy his attention. Furthermore, he is much more likely to remarry.

But all this is superficial; true bereavement cannot be assuaged by worldly adjustments. It leaves a scar that, like the wounds of Christ, remains forever.

The period of immediate bereavement is often one of emotional numbing. Just as, immediately after injuring ourselves, there is a moment of relief before the real suffering begins, so the bereaved may not be completely aware of the reality of the loss. At this early stage there is the distraction of the funeral arrangements (and possibly a later service of thanksgiving for the life of the departed one), and the bereaved is surrounded by concerned friends and relatives. It is a good thing if there can be emotional release early on.

The advice about mourning given in Ecclesiasticus 38: 16-23 is humane and realistic. Religions that encourage a full show of grief shortly after the death of a loved one, are able to integrate death and bereavement into the full pattern of life. Nothing then needs to be pushed under the carpet and all is seen to have its place in the scheme of things.

Judaism and Catholic Christianity have, in their separate ways, learned to come to terms with death in the context of life, and it is noteworthy that their flock includes all strata of society, from the unlettered to the intellectually proficient, from the artisan to the professional worker. It is the misfortune of our post-Christian Western civilisation that death has been divorced from life, and that those who mourn form an amphibious group that disturbs the hollow conviviality of the living, and is consequently removed as far as possible from their gaze.

Once the dead person's remains have been disposed of, the comforters depart, and the bereaved one is left alone. Now at last the depth of the wound is apparent; where there was once a companion at the dinner table or before the fire, there is now only an empty chair. There is no one to awaken in the morning, and no one to welcome home in the evening, lithe departed was a dear friend, there is no more sharing of mutual joys and confidences, and no one to visit any more. Instead there is a void, a void which cannot be filled artificially. Ultimately only the expanding life and concern of the person himself can fill this void by a greater identification with a larger body of mankind. Where once he was snug in the embrace of a loved one, he has now to offer his embrace to the unloved, the unwanted, the derelict, and the diseased. I believe that the loved one in the greater life beyond mortal death is an agent accelerating this movement towards service and selfgiving. Depending on how the bereaved uses his remaining life on earth, so will he be

judged in the life of the world to come, as well as by his companions in this life. The movement must be away from selfishness to a greater participation in all life.

From this we can deduce guide-lines both for the future happiness of the bereaved and for those concerned in their welfare. First of all there must be no retreat into memories or fantasies. These afford only evanescent relief, and the inevitable return to the present is devastating. The law is, "No one who sets his hand to the plough and then keeps looking back is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 6 : 61). Every tragedy is the stepping-stone to a greater appreciation of life for those who are receptive to understanding and can transcend a purely personal view of happiness. It follows that the future life of the bereaved person must be devoted to his fellow men, not so much to acquire new friends as to escape from the imprisonment of old, outmoded ways of thinking and acting. To be sure, the greater concern with the world around him will bring him into relationship with an ever-widening variety of people and so help to assuage his loneliness, but this is to be regarded as a by-product of his changing attitude. If one does any type of work solely to acquire friends, one emerges disillusioned and more alone than before. As in all endeavours, it is the attitude which inspires them that is of crucial importance.

This movement to self-giving should be gradual. It cannot be effective at the abyss of bereavement when one's bearings are lost. At that stage quietness, and, if possible, a change of scene such as is afforded by a holiday or change in residence, is most desirable. But in due course a fresh start has to be made, and then courage and patience are mandatory.

This is where the friends of the bereaved person play a vital role. During the early stages they should be in constant attendance, if not in person, at least on the telephone, and above all in their thoughts. If we think with loving concern about a person, we are praying for him. Both by personal contact on the one hand, and by loving thoughts on the other, we are bearing up the bereaved one during the nadir of his distress. It is not necessary, or even advisable, to fill him with uplifting thoughts during the early stage. He would be in no condition to respond to them; indeed, it is more probable that he would react violently against them. The main thing is simply to be alongside him in his agony, bearing his burden as best one can. To be aware that one is cared for in the state of bereavement (or in any other situation of crisis or suffering) is of inestimable value. It is far more helpful than having the Scriptures quoted at one, and then being left to one's own devices.

As soon as possible, the bereaved person should be invited into a friendly group. Early on this would probably be impossible for him, but as the first paroxysms of grief subside, he will be more receptive to the company of like-minded people. If he has some connexion with a church or a religious organisation, this could prove a helpful outlet, not so much through the routine services as by the more intimate fellowship of a prayer group meeting in someone's home.

In all such groups the bereaved one should be informally introduced, and his tragedy should not be especially alluded to. In due course he will tend to lay his soul bare, and then he will have the support of a loving group. At the same time he will discover other members of the group who are, or have been involved in a similar, if not worse situation, and in this way he will gain a degree of perspective about his own suffering.

It takes fully two years for the worst pain of bereavement to subside. During this period the victim may behave quite irrationally at times and even lose contact with his surroundings. The psychopathology of bereavement is now a subject in its own right, and numerous books have been written about it. But in the end what matters most is the general attitude of the sufferer to life. If he is basically a life-affirming person, he will pass through the valley of the shadow of death and emerge stronger and more compassionate. If he tends to deny life, he will fall into the dark ness of self-pity and give up the struggle. While life-affirmation is compatible with an atheistic humanistic world view, there is no doubt that a religious metaphysic is of great value in facing life's storms and calamities. Even when one's abode is falling around one, and one is bereft of all outer help, there is a centre within one that is in continuity with the guiding force of the universe. This centre, where the love of God is known, is one with His transcendent majesty. And it can never be extinguished, for its nature is eternal life.

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6 - COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNION

The dead move in their appointed orbits and rest in their apportioned places. We know little about the after-life; what the conventional Christian believes has come down from the authority of Scripture (Luke 20: 27-38 is the teaching of Jesus, and 1 Corinthians 15 and 2 Corinthians 4: 16 to 5: 10 is the classical Pauline view) and the teaching of the Church. Those who have a broader, more comprehensive view of life are wise to study the teachings of other religions also; the Bhagavadgita and the Tibetan Book of the Dead shed much light on the Hindu and Buddhist approaches to survival of death. But in the end man is satisfied only with personal experience, which is the nearest he can come to proof. There are, of course, some believers whose faith is so strong that it would not occur to them to seek outside evidence, but I suspect that if these fortunate people were interrogated intimately, they would be found to be natural mystics who were in constant communion with the unseen realms of eternity. I am less impressed by the type of person who parades his "faith" ostentatiously, and pities those unfortunate people who cannot believe without some evidence. The apostle Thomas came into this unbelieving category, and when he was shown as much as was right for any mortal to apprehend, he was able to say, "My Lord and my God" (John 20: 24-29). Let us never look down on those who have difficulty in believing, lest we become like the Pharisee who thanked God that he was so much better than other men (Luke 18: 9-14). Such "faith" without love is a dead thing.

In recent years a number of books have appeared which are claimed to have been dictated by definite individuals on the other side of life. Some of these have been transmitted by automatic handwriting and others by direct telepathic communication with the mind of the "sensitive". These productions are of interest in that they present a fairly uniform picture of the soul growing into greater knowledge as it discards past prejudices and becomes more open to love and understanding. They are eminently worthy of study, as much for their content, which is both a salutary warning to those who lead selfish lives while on earth and edifying to those who accept the law of retribution for past actions, as for their style. But it must be admitted that the people who respond most positively to their message are those who already accept survival of death. The agnostic seeker may get help, but his sceptical mind rightly questions the origin of the communication: is it really from a discarnate source or is it merely the product of a fertile creative imagination? Personally I accept much of their content as a genuine communication from the realm beyond physical death, but I know how much the transmitting mind can distort the message. In addition, the authority of the communicator must always remain in some doubt, no matter how edifying the message.

Mediumistic Communication

The same criticism applies to those who attempt communication with their loved one through "mediums", or "sensitives" as some prefer to be called. The subject of mediumship is one that evokes strong emotional reactions. On the one hand, there is the biblical fundamentalist who, quoting the Deuteronomic prohibition of occult practices (Deuteronomy 18: 9-12), condemns all medium-ship indiscriminately; on the other, there is the Spiritualist whose credulity is often so extreme that he invests the medium (or more correctly the "control" who works through the medium) with an almost god-like authority. It is sufficient to say of the scriptural objections that these were aimed essentially at the pagan occult practices that disastrously damaged the moral and religious life of the children of Israel. These practices are not to be equated with the benignly-used extrasensory gifts of most modern sensitives; the great condemnation of pagan occultism was that it bypassed the grace of God by the selfish and malicious use of psychic power, being similar to what is nowadays called "black magic".

But reliance on the powers of communication exhibited by mediums is unfortunately misplaced. Much of the material evoked by a medium is derived from the mind of the sitter. This is not to be equated with fraud, an accusation loved by all hostile witnesses. It is simply due to good attunement with the sitter's mind, and is an example of telepathy. Even if past events are recounted which were unknown to the sitter, there is always the possibility of retrocognition. If details are described at a distance, this may be due to clairvoyance. Those who are emotionally distraught—and this is inevitable during the early stages of bereavement—are particularly liable to "give" the medium the message, as also did, in all probability, Saul in his famous visit to the woman of Endor (1 Samuel 28: 7-25). Incidentally, this woman does not appear to have been a "witch" who trafficked in evil things, but was probably an honest, kind-hearted medium whose hospitality to the doomed Saul was exemplary. Any criticism of this episode must be directed at Saul, who, having been denied the guidance of God directly or by one of His prophets, went to a medium, as alas do many people today also, in order to get self-enhancing advice about the future.

In evaluating the material brought up by a medium, the sitter should be sympathetic (hostility has a deadening effect) but also as detached as it is possible for any of us to be. The recently bereaved (and here I would define recent bereavement as anything up to two years of the death of the loved one) cannot have this degree of detachment, and are most likely to be presented with the hopes and memories of their own minds. Personally I believe that some of the material evoked by mediums does indeed come from the person in question beyond death, but it is often seriously distorted by the medium's own personality; even an entranced medium's mind is not completely occluded. Furthermore, there is always the added complication of interference by other entities in the psychic realm. Some of these may be mischievous and a few frankly evil. It is for this reason that all investigations into psychic reality are fraught not only with delusion but also, on some occasions, with great danger. I am not suggesting, on this account, that psychical research into mediumship should be abandoned, but that it should be undertaken by clear-headed, dedicated workers searching for the truth with the detachment of a trained scientist. Those who seek reassurance and comfort from mediumistic communication do not satisfy these strict demands, and are very liable to be the victims of delusion, even if the early encounters seem genuine enough. Furthermore, the psychic powers of sensitives vary even from day to day; impressive as they may be on some occasions, they cannot be relied on at all times. It is this fluctuating quality of psychism that tempts the medium to eke out the message with guess-work or even frank fraud (by finding out details of the sitter beforehand). Of course, the finest mediums shrink from such deception and are completely frank when there is no communication, but there are many in the lower grades who subsist on a "mixed diet" of genuine communication, mind-reading, guess-work, and fraud.

It is for these reasons that I cannot recommend the bereaved to attempt communication with their loved ones through the agency of a medium. I appreciate the comfort that such visits can produce, but I suspect most of this is due to the warm compassion of the medium rather than the alleged communication. At its very best this is a second-hand type of contact, and no matter how convincing the encounter may be at the time, the sitter returns to his lonely solitude still tormented by doubts and spiritually unsatisfied.

True Communion with the Departed

At one point in the Eucharist the celebrant says, "Therefore with Angels and Archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify thy glorious name; evermore praising thee, and saying (together with the congregation)

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts, heaven and earth are full of thy glory. Glory be to thee, O Lord most High. Amen."

The whole company of heaven includes our loved ones; this is the Communion of Saints, and we proclaim the essential unity of the living and the dead in this sacrament of thanksgiving. Indeed, when our hearts and minds are lifted up beyond personal craving and mortal concern to the realm of eternity, we are in fellowship with those we love whether on earth or in the life beyond death.

I would not suggest from this that we can effect true communion with the departed only by means of the Eucharist. It is rather to be seen as the pattern of true fellowship; if we want to communicate with the dead, we must first learn how to communicate with the living. To do this we must learn how to pay attention to others and listen to them instead of being imprisoned in a private world of selfish speculations and emotions. If only our minds were at rest and in stillness we would know something of the "peace of God which passes all understanding" and in this state "our hearts and minds would be kept in the knowledge and love of God, and of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord." And in this knowledge and love we would also be aware of our departed ones. It follows from this that that way of communion is by meditation and prayer, both in the discipline of silence and in self-giving service to those around us in our daily lives. The more we lose ourselves in love for others, the more easily our loved ones can effect communication with us. And the communication is real; it leaves us in no doubt, so that we do not need constant reassurance that we have not been deceived.

We have to face the fact that the death of our loved ones is a necessary part of our own growth into full maturity. It was necessary for Jesus to leave His disciples for this very reason: until he had gone away the Holy Spirit could not dwell fully in them (John 16: 6-7). There is a centre in all men, which we call the spirit, from which truth can be perceived, because the Spirit of God, Whom we call the Holy Spirit, dwells in the spirit of man made whole in the service of God. If only we were in contact with this spirit we would know the truth, and we would be liberated from all illusions and ignorance. It is in living and dying in the power of Jesus Christ that this spirit is fully awakened within man. And this spirit is in communion with all

things, whether living or dead, whether past or future, whether in this world or in the world to come, because it is no longer bound to time or space but is the one eternal reality.

The practice of the presence of God is also the practice of communion with all life. It means no less than the unfolding of personality from the merely human to the fully divine. This is the only authentic way of communication between the living and the departed. It is love made tangible in action; love alone transcends all things, even death. Until we know that love and show it in our actions in the world, we can never see our departed brethren face to face. But when we can love as God loves us, we will be in full communion with all life. This is the meaning of our lives, and why any communication that is real between the living and the departed must be personal. When we become authentic persons we will finally have moved from death to life, for then we will really love the brethren, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (I John 3: 2).

To sum up, authentic communication between this side of life and the other is by personal fellowship. This means listening in silence and giving oneself in loving service to the world. The fruit of this dedication is the growth of the person into something of the measure of a full human being, typified in the person of Jesus Christ. In such a person the spirit is in communion with God and with all life. The veil between the living and the dead can now be rent asunder, and all life seen to be one.

It is man's privilege to traverse this path to self-realisation in Christ; through the crucifixion of the lower nature that same nature is finally resurrected in glory, and corruptible matter is transfigured in eternal spirit. The fruits of this journey to completion are envisaged in Plotinus' marvellous vision of Heaven:— "A pleasant life is theirs in heaven; they have the truth for mother, nurse, real being, and nutriment. They see all things, not the things that are born and die, but those which have real being; and they see themselves in others. For them all things are transparent, and there is nothing dark or impenetrable, but everyone is manifest to every one internally; for light is manifest to light. For every one has all things in himself and sees all things in another; so that all things are everywhere and all is all and each is all, and the glory is infinite. Each of them is great, since Yonder the small is also great. In heaven the sun is all the stars, and again each and all are the sun. One thing in each is prominent above all the rest; but it also shows forth all. There pure movement reigns; for that which produces the movement, not being a stranger to it, does not trouble it. Rest is also perfect there because no principle of agitation mingles with it."

(Ennead 5, 8, 4, Translated by W. R. Inge)

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7-WHITHER DEATH?

It is rather sad to have to conclude this survey about death on a mundane note, having moved far into spiritual truth. But death today is not as well defined as it was in days gone by.

At one time it was accepted that when the heart had stopped beating and the lungs breathed no longer, the person's body was dead and fit for interment or cremation. But now we can keep a body alive artificially even when the brain's function is destroyed. The current definition of death is based on the absence of discernible brain activity even if the heart and the lungs are still kept alive by artificial means. Indeed, a new word has been coined, the “neomort”, to describe this living body of a dead person. At present such a body can be kept alive for only a few hours, but it is possible that future research may be able to prolong its survival for many months. This fascinates the medical research worker who sees the body as a source of “spare parts”, but it must fill the sensitive person with sinister forebodings. Admittedly only a few of us would ever be eligible for such “treatment”—those who were the victims of severe head injuries—but even then the prospect is not attractive

Carl Jung has described four psychological functions in man: sensation, thinking, feeling, and intuition. Of these functions it is sensation and thinking that predominate in our present world. Thus our society is a hedonistic, materialistic one with great technical skill and intellectual brilliance. The feeling function is closely allied to the appreciation of values, and value judgment is dismissed by many intellectuals as a merely subjective means of attaining truth. As for intuition, this is the preserve especially of the mystic and those who are psychically attuned. It is scarcely recognised by the materialist or the unscrupulous type of intellectual theorist

We live in a world in which immediate gratification of the senses is the summum bonum of life. Thousands of fetuses are aborted each year simply to satisfy the selfish convenience of thoughtless people. On the other hand, it may be that some of us will be kept alive in a “neomort” state, again simply for the selfish use of a soulless society. I do not at this point intend digressing into a consideration of medical ethics: this is the function of the medico-legal experts. But it must also be the field of enlightened theologians. And no theology is adequate that is ignorant of psychical research. If body and mind are separate realities, as is implicit in the world-view of all the higher religions, at what point do they unite to form a single person? And when do they separate, so that “the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it” (Ecclesiastes 12: 7)? I suspect that these vital questions will be answered only when the feeling and intuitive side of man's psyche is given its due recognition, and when man ceases to be merely a technically expert animal and starts to become a living spirit. Indeed, if this spiritual awakening of man does not come soon, the human race is doomed to extinction. Man's justification lies in his creation in the image of God. If he repudiates that image, he will disappear in the sands of time. But fortunately there is also a higher ideal leading him on to full humanity, “the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.” That light shines eternally in the darkness, and we believe that the darkness will never be able to overpower it.