

Why change triggers a fear of dying

"Just as the tumultuous chaos of a thunderstorm brings a nurturing rain that allows life to flourish, so too in human affairs times of advancement are preceded by times of disorder. Success comes to those who can weather the storm." – I Ching No. 3

Probably the greatest obstacle to a life worth living is the fear of death – not death itself – but the fear of death. Think about the last time you chose to, or were asked to, embrace true and real change – at work, at home, at play or in relationship. What was that like for you?

Attachment

There are times during our life when we have the opportunity to meet someone who truly has no fear of dying. Exploring this other's perspective, it's often the case they came face-to-face with their own immortality through a deep and intense "life-changing" experience, e.g., illness, divorce, job loss, financial ruin, loss of a loved one, etc. In the process they most probably hit a spiritual "rock bottom." In this place, one usually let's go of their "human" identity – who they took themselves to be, their "ego identity," their mental self-images, their "human-ness" to a degree. In this heightened conscious state, dying is not seen as a typical "temporal" end with all its attendant fears: ("Gosh, I'd hate to give up all my money." "Gee my wife will still be here, and I won't be able to be with her after I divorce/leave/die." "My job/position/title was all I had and without it I'm nothing." "I'll miss so much that I had here." "I'll wither away if I can't run/work/paint/cook...any more." "I can't go on without her/him.") These fears are based on an ego attachment to life as we know it – attachments which "define me" according to my ego mind, and which the thought of loss sends fear throughout our being.

Defensiveness

When our human side, our ego self, is confronted with this type of "death," our knee-jerk reaction is to become defensive – we try to protect ourselves from change, we deny the change or even the thought of change; simply, we (our ego) doesn't want to die. It's like when we were a child and there was upset in our home and we covered our ears with our hands and yelled in order to silence the noise.

Change can be upsetting.

Consider the myriad instances of change in your life. Perhaps you're experiencing an illness, or the result of an accident, the threat or reality of a job loss, an impending divorce or separation, the loss of a loved one, a financial demise, a geographical relocation, etc. In all of these, what's underneath is some type of realization of "not knowing," and the not knowing often requires a letting go. The emotion connected to letting go arises as fear and if explored deeply, the fear is not unlike a fear of death, i.e., "I don't know what will happen"; "I don't know who I'll become"; "I don't know." And, not knowing often evokes fear and anxiety. The "future" is where death happens.

The past as antidote

When change happens, the only safe haven for many is the past – an experience we do know; an experience which we survived. So, the greater the change, the greater the fear, and the more driven we are to seek refuge, safety and security in the past, our past.

Hanging on to our past, we re-orient to our conditioning, our programming, and our habits and patterns of thinking, be-ing and do-ing. Unfortunately, the greater our fear of death and dying, the more we dig in our heels and hang on to "the familiar – "the old me."

The paradox

Our orientation to our past is the major obstacle that snuffs out the life, the vitality and potentiality of our being. We are actually denying life because we fear death. Right here and right now, we are potential, we are possibility, we are becoming. However, when we fear change and pull our self back into our past, we negate our present and our future – we choose death over life. In nature (the seasons, for example), a lack of life is – death – however, death is a requirement for new life to emerge.

The solution

Perspective. When we change our perspective, we can choose to become laser-like focused in the here and now, with an orientation towards our future. We can choose to trust that what is coming is greater, richer and more fulfilling than what was. We can choose to trust in the limitless possibilities for well-be-ing, happiness and self-fulfillment. The fact is there is a part of every living soul that does not die. When we contact this part of our self, we can access our Essential qualities and experience our True Self – a Self that is courageous, powerful, strong, steadfast, and capable. When we allow our True Self to emerge, we engage life with a dynamism, a vitality and a love that erases our fear. Love and fear are diametrically opposed to one another. They cannot exist together.

Accepting change

If we choose, we can accept change in its various shapes and forms. We can choose to become courageous, stalwart and positively view all life as opportunity. But to do so, we need to be in touch with life, not fear. In this place, nothing can stop us or harm us. In this place, endings are beginnings, upset is a blessing, and death is birth.

Our ego says that the world is a dangerous place, that life is threatening and hurtful. This is a life perspective based on fear – fear of death. Another perspective is that of welcoming the unknown, welcoming death. From this perspective, life presents a huge opportunity, life is supportive and the world is a safe place. This is the place where true aliveness, change and transformation happens.

"The call of death is a call of love. Death can be sweet if we answer it in the affirmative, if we accept it as one of the great eternal forms of life and transformation." – Hermann Hesse

So, some questions for self-reflection are:

- What significant transitions have you experienced in your life? What was the "death" involved? How were you transformed as a result? What did you see about yourself in the experience(s)?
- As you contemplate your future, can you envision positive outcomes for specific hopes and desires?
- What current life changes are you experiencing? Are you fearful? How so? Are you in denial or hanging on to old patterns and habits of resistance to change? If so, why? What does resistance get you?
- What changes in your life are you most proud of? Why?
- Do you spend much time longing for the "good old days?"

- What was change like for you/your family when you were growing up?

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