

Letting Go

I came across a passage in the "Hagakure : The Book of the Samurai" that states; "Meditation on inevitable death should be performed daily. Every day when one's body and mind are at peace, one should meditate on being ripped apart by arrows, rifles, spears, and swords, being carried away by surging waves, being thrown into the midst of a great fire, being struck by lightning, being shaken to death by a great earthquake, falling from thousand foot cliffs, dying of disease or committing seppuku at the death of one's master. And every day without fail, one should consider himself as dead." At first I thought, "Wow, how depressing!" and tried to forget what I had just read. Yet, to my bewilderment, this was a passage that would not leave me, it became like one of those nagging songs that somehow just gets itself stuck in one's head. So, since it seemed bound to persist in my head, I determined to indulge it and do what the book said. I meditated on it to see where it would take me.

Being incarcerated, and on death row, constantly watched over by a guy with a gun, surrounded by signs that say "No Warning Shots" in big bright red letters, this idea of thinking about death wasn't very hard at all. But, it was the last part of the quote that really impacted me, the part that says, "and every day without fail, one should consider himself as dead" really hit me hardest.

In Japan's medieval warring times, meditating on death served to prepare a samurai to die a painful, violent, yet horrible death, and to fight fearlessly always facing the enemy. Though to consider myself already dead, seemed alien and strange to me, after all this isn't medieval, feudal, warring Japan, and what about life, love, compassion and happiness - all the good stuff in life?

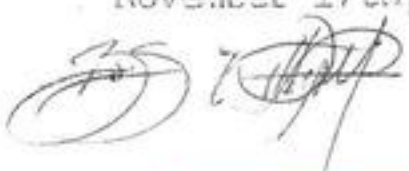
Due to sometimes slow nature of mind, and after about two weeks, it all hit me like a sword strike to the throat! We are all going to die, that is a simple fact of physical existence. As for me, I'm already on Death Row which puts death, my death, right there in my face. Why not just accept it, live life like a dead man, simply let go of life? I did just that. It didn't mean grabbing a sheet and hanging myself, shutting off my feelings and becoming some soul-less, emotionless zombie or anything drastic, no, living as a dead man, realizing that I die a thousand times a day, did something most amazing to me. My mind became clear and focused, my hearing intensified, sense of smell increased, vision became alluringly acute, colors got brighter, sound more beautiful, and melodious, smells amazing. I was suddenly freed from prison, transported to this awesome world I didn't even realize existed where the constant noise of restless convicts became the exquisite music of nature, once

dull, drab, muted colors became airy, bright ~~==~~ splashes of artistic expression. It was like I had just been reborn to the world, or the world reborn to me. In death I found life, peace, happiness, and contentment. A great burden was lifted from my shoulders and every single moment became new and exciting, so much worth living for -- worth dying for. The next moment of existence no longer mattered, all that did matter was this one precious everlasting nano-second in time, living each and every heartbeat for all that it was worth, like it would be the last --- because it was / is the last.

I had spent 15 years exploring the world's great religious and spiritual traditions, and in giving up life, in living as a dead man, it all came together in this oddly strange, profound, contradictory.... something, where I yearned for the serene release that death brings, even though I am already dead.... yet so alive.... I yearned now for life with a newfound love and passion for just living as a simple spiritual entity in this vast, wonderful and magical universe, surrounded by peace and in perfect harmony with it ALL.... as a dead man.

I guess that the message, the lesson that I learned, was taught, and am trying to pass along to those of us who are locked away, to those who are imprisoned by minds restraints, and surrounded by the chaos that incarceration fosters and breeds, is to simply let go, embrace each and every dying moment, and in that death, find newborn vibrant life. If you can find that behind violent walls, then anywhere you turn in this life and the next it can be found. You will die an honorable death a thousand times a day, mindful of all things, smiling at everybody, at everything, even smiling at death.

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