

THE ART OF DYING

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Anybody who is seriously ill, but also anybody who is perfectly healthy, should prepare for the enigma of death with careful thought and wise foresight. The pathological attitude of refusing to think about death when we are healthy is something that should change. Not thinking about this unavoidable, inevitable and significant event of life indicates the presence of psychological defense mechanisms, such as denial or repression.

Although this issue cannot be approached through rigid and irrefutable models, it makes sense to ponder on it and to generate ideas and projects that we can implement when the time of the event approaches. The art of living that Psychosynthesis teaches is not separate from the art of dying, which Psychosynthesis also integrates fully. Both, the art of living and the art of dying, are parts of the evolutionary process of being human.

It is obvious that fear, anxiety, and despair result from the importance attributed to the body and the personality, and the unwillingness to detach from them. In addition, there is an innate fear of the indefinite, of the uncertain ... of the mystery. The psyche paralyzes, it transfers the problem to the unconscious and it sets borders around this life stage, confining it to the mist of the unconscious dark zones. Addressing the issue of death would mean for the psyche to face the end of human relationships and search for the meaning of closings, a closing of the areas where the personality and its sub-personalities operate every day. What will happen with the love relations, with the happiness, with the pleasures and with the sorrows and worries that occupy our lives every day? The personality leaves a known and safe environment to set off for a journey in solitude, during a stormy night, and towards an unknown destination.

Yet the uncertainty surrounding the stage of dying is probably minimal compared to what the Self has to face during the time It descends into matter and finds Itself forced into a body, then in a cradle, and next immersed in a completely different reality – denser, more liquid and restrictive than that in where It used to hover. The

Self imprisons Itself within an organism that is at first completely unfit for self-protection. For a long time the Self has no control over the sheath that absorbs It – and in some cases It will never achieve such control. A wise person should regret birth rather than death. Conception confines the Self, the Soul, to house arrest.

The infant, coming out of the womb, finds support in the psychological methods the mother has learnt. However, except for rare exceptions, the psychological methods to help the Self at the moment of coming out from the bodily prison are ephemeral, to say the least. Excluding common sense phrases, there is great inconsistency in the psychological interventions available in this case, although some psychologies, including Psychosynthesis, presuppose the Self, the Soul. These approaches might elaborate on the here and on the beyond, on matter and spirit, but do not commonly address the stages of transition. In fact, these stages are approached with uncertainty and with no definite protocols. In addition, these psychologies do not count with structured interventions to help us move towards the *better life*, perhaps because in considering this *better life*, the assumption is that it is inappropriate to look into the steps involved.

The personality of those who embark on the psychosynthetic path acknowledge the Self, integrate it in the path of earthly existence and enter into a dialogue with the Self, but forget completely about the art of dying. During the earthly pilgrimage, the Self is deemed a certainty or reality. When in the horizon looms the dark cloud that wields the sickle, however, it seems that all that is available to us is the fate portrayed in Disney's *Three Little Pigs* when the big bad wolf began to blow on their homes of straw, wood, and brick.

The art of living and the art of dying – that is, the art of the infinite and unstoppable becoming – are based on the most important concept of Psychosynthesis: disidentification-identification. This concept suggests that “in every person there is a transcendent Self that returns to the state of unmanifested entity when the cycle of life on earth has run its course and the period of manifestation has come to an end”. Psychosynthesis asserts: “I remain,” “I am a transpersonal being and I carry on my way to ...” To believe with conviction in the

Self involves, consequently, the ability to detach from all the emotional reactions and activities that give origin to the psychological defense mechanisms of denial and repression that life might trigger. As long as emotion is seated on the throne and reign over the personality, the identification with the Self remains a pure theoretical statement written in some book on display in our library. Psychosynthesis reminds that along the evolutionary path of life we reach destinations that we later abandon. We first reach the level of identification with the physical body, then with the emotional body, next with the mental body, and finally we achieve identification with the Self – all in a process of appropriation and integration that, according to the Law of Analogy, will continue well beyond the earthly existence. Disidentification-identification activates a series of incessant rebirths and deaths of all attributes. Every death lifts us to a higher level, for such is the keynote of the evolutionary process. Any unyielding identification means that death will be experienced at that same level where the identification lies. We fear death because we wrongly love an attribute rather than the essence.

Embracing the concepts of Psychosynthesis we can deduce, therefore, that it is necessary to seek the wisdom that comes from observing one's own attachments. This helps us find out where our identifications are. In this regard, we oftentimes make mistakes in our assessments. Many people, engulfed by emotional glamour, do not see or understand their attachments. Those who are blinded by emotional judgment easily make the mistake of believing they have reached the level of the Self. However, once the event of death approaches, they reject it because they are blind to the fact the event of death grants the Self the chance to regain Its freedom.

Medicine knows much about the pathology and the clinical aspects of death. To these we should add the vicissitudes of psychic death. Just as the Self deliberately chooses a sheath, the embryo, to come to life, "natural" death occurs when the Self reckons It has completed Its cycle of earthly existence and uses the means at Its disposal to continue Its plan *elsewhere*, detaching the vital currents from the personality components. If there is no intuitive relationship with the conscious Self, death comes unexpectedly, because, we might say, there is no

awareness of what the Self has planned or decided. In the period prior to the stage of detachment, the Self lives a real attraction to other spheres. To reach them the Self must (and wants to) get rid of the thick and bulky sheaths. In the last phase, in which the self finds release from the body, there gradually disappears the fear that characterized the earlier phases that are noticeable in the eyes of the dying person. All apprehension, anxiety and pain that dominated the person is transcended when the Self gradually withdraws from the physical, emotional and mental vehicles. Depending on the level of psychic identification to be left behind, this process can go on for days, weeks and, perhaps, even after the departure. Death comes, in the usual sense, when the will of the Self to live in a physical body disappears and the will-to-abstraction takes its place.

As this release takes place, the physical body, the sum of the organs and cells, is ever less responsive; it becomes insensitive to the increasingly fading integrative power of the vital energy, and feels the pull of matter's sphere of attraction. The Self returns the matter that It had borrowed from the planet to give shape and body to the personality; this is the matter the Self used to achieve its purpose, with varying degrees of success, during the earthly journey. The Self decides to "give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to give to God what belongs to God" and moves on Its way of return to the place from where It came, after having done everything possible during earthly life to fulfill the purpose planned and undertaken when It descended to earth. The physical body decays, disintegrates and returns to the big planetary source all the bodily substance that had been borrowed. As the disease progresses, friends of the dying person should learn to share serenity and gentle remembrances, no tears or groans. The Self is present and vital, even if the dying person is unconscious and even if an electroencephalogram indicates no sign of life. The emotionality of grieving relatives must not penetrate and spread within the space of the Self. Those taking care of the person would do well in considering death a more joyful event than birth. Sometimes people firmly claim their belief in immortality and indisputable eternity of the Self, but then as a matter of fact they do not stand true to this belief at the time of death.

Psychosynthesis can develop a psychological approach to dying that takes into consideration the dying person, the relatives and friends, but also offer an approach that enables us to move beyond the emotional components involved in the act of accompanying the transition into the other side of existence. Psychosynthesis can contribute a psychological methodology to deal with the aspects of the transition; a methodology based on Psychosynthesis' experience with the little deaths that are part of the everyday life. The Psychosynthesis practitioner needs concepts and techniques to use in this field in the same way that there are concepts for working with any other existential psychological issue. Any person that is on a psychological journey should be able to rely on indications that not only approach life constructively and in an evolutionary key, but also help us confront the time when the Self is abandoning the sheaths of personality, so that the moment is approached without much difficulty or obstacles to the continuation of existence.

Some of such techniques could include:

Learning to stay focused through meditation and the constant practice of concentration in the Self.

Developing the ability to live life as a king – seated on the throne while looking at the emergence and movement of the sub-personalities in daily events. The technique is to be applied consistently in daily life so that it can be utilized during the final transition.

Another technique is that of learning to shift our consciousness to the light of the Self before falling asleep. This exercise requires that we learn to observe and record the phenomena related to the process of withdrawal, both during meditation that at the time of falling asleep. The moment of falling asleep should not take place without awareness. As we enter a state of relaxation, the attention should be kept alive and projected towards the Self. The lack of awareness of the processes that precede sleep renders unconscious part of our life experience, and thus useless when the time of dying approaches. This kind of exercises need to be done consistently and over time.

Psychosynthesis suggests that, to die in peace, it is essential to learn to eliminate gradually from everyday life any control that the threefold lower self has on the psyche. Instead, we should focus on the abstract levels of the mind and on the Self as a point of radiant light and con-

sciousness. Among the daily routines, we should always make room for the exercise of dis-identification.

The common thought that death is end, unhappiness, decay, or loss, needs to be replaced with the idea of rebirth, resurrection, and relocation, and make these new notes resonate in the mind. The Self remains always the same, whether close in contact or far from the personality – in fact in this case It is less limited and conditioned. In the room of the dying person there should reign silence. Crying, feelings of grief and depression reach the dying and clog the psyche with negative and oppressive energies. The person that is in the transition phase is more alive than bystanders might think. Those who have never thought about death, or consider it an agonizing drama, will do much good to the dying if they refrained from going to pay their last respects, even after their actual death. The unconsciousness of the dying is only apparent, not real. There is awareness and perception of what is happening in the room, even if there is no ability to express through words and facial expression. If silence reigns in the environment, if there is understanding, peace and no disturbing interference, the soul that is about to depart can take care of the transition and face the tests of the time. The intense pain and the violent emotions of the onlookers create obstacles. The event of the death itself should occur during meditation and, thus, the physical environment should be adequately prepared to facilitate the meditation process. Among other characteristics, orange lights might help as orange aids developing a focus on the head. In anticipation of the event, it would be ideal if the dying person could choose some music that helps them enter in contact with the Self. Some notes of organ music are said to be effective while we should avoid emotional or dramatic music. Songs that contain the energy of fire are the most appropriate. The person who has learned to govern this stage of life is in a position of advantage over those who have not ever paid attention to it. To explore the theme of death and its process is our responsibility, a task for the psyche of each human being to be carried out during our lifetime, particularly for those interested in the message of Psychosynthesis as a life project. The fear of death must give way to the concept of continuity in the One Life.