

DEATH, A PART OF LIFE

Coming to terms with death: it may be hard to come to terms with something like death, but life, as we know it, wouldn't exist without it. If death didn't exist we wouldn't have the chance to even be born, since the planet would be populated with other organisms well before the appearance of humans. Moreover, although it is very painful losing somebody close, death, in fact, minimises overall suffering (e.g. think about a badly injured, sick or old animal).

Why it is good to accept death: denial of death enables us to temporarily avoid fear and other unpleasant feelings associated with it. However, there are several good reasons to accept death:

- Death is a part of the life cycle and denying it means denying life as it is; awareness of death enables us to perceive life in its totality.
- Sooner or later everybody has to face death (of others and finally their own), which is harder to do if unprepared. Those who accept death as a part of life are in a better position and more in control in such situations.
- Accepting death can make you more courageous.
- It puts into perspective small misfortunes and self-importance.
- It can contribute to decision making too: death reminds us that the time to accomplish our projects is not unlimited and may help us set priorities.
- Being aware of death leads to respecting life more and valuing every moment: somewhat paradoxically, it makes us more alive.

Accepting death, however, does not mean worrying, expecting, being obsessed or fantasising about it (e.g. imagining when, where and how one may die). These attitudes are not helpful and may lead to disregarding the consequences of our actions and long-term goals, resignation, and bad moods in general. Acceptance also does not mean surrendering or hastening death by reckless behaviour (which is in fact another way of denial). It just means accepting its inevitability for all, and encompassing life and death as an inseparable unity.

Dealing with fear of death

These attitudes may help with anxieties and fears relating to death:

Living in the present, focusing on here and now. Since we are alive now we cannot be dead now – we can only die in the future. The future doesn't exist yet, so by focusing on the present moment you can minimise anxiety.

Meaning of life: people who believe that life has a purpose seem to be more resilient to death anxiety; this is probably because they see themselves as a part of something greater.

Life satisfaction: research shows that people who are satisfied with their lives cope better with death anxiety. In other words, the happier you are, the less you fear death.

Personal log:

What is death, and what happens (if anything) after death? Consider three popular beliefs in this respect (nothing happens; a part of us continues living in a different reality; reincarnation). Which one resonates with you?



Consider one or more of the following issues: abortion, euthanasia, suicide, capital punishment and experiments on animals for the purpose of medical research that may save lives of humans.

Is there something that you would regret if somebody you know (a friend, family member, teacher) suddenly died? Can you do something about it now, while that person is still alive?
