

DEATH STINKS!

From the standpoint of human life, death has an overwhelming negative connotation. I was recently attending a funeral of a beloved friend. The church was filled with family and extended family members along with many long-time friends and acquaintances that included the reverend, a priest. His eulogy was heartfelt, replete with genuine episodes of poignant, often humorous antidotes vivifying my friend's long life. Everyone in attendance empathized with the reverend's terse, impassioned summary statement: Death stinks! Yes it does, most times, being decidedly unwelcomed in our lives. Technically death represents the final cessation of vital functions in an organism, the ending of life; the event that terminates life, the destruction or permanent cessation of something, anything, including spiritual death defined as the lack of spiritual faith.

An occurrence of death in one's life, especially of a loved one, universally causes change. Death comes at any time, from many sources. Sometimes abruptly from foreign or domestic terrorism, from natural calamities, fire, or from a fatal heart attack, teenagers dying in automotive accidents either related or unrelated to drug or alcohol abuse. Soldiers die in battle, civilians as well as military personnel in airliner crashes. Death preparation can be prolonged in illnesses, and in diseases that stretch over months and years. But regardless, death's disruption remains endemic to our life's routine because part of our life's fabric is torn, stretched beyond the breaking point. Death forces submission to the fact that our routine must now adjust to this loss—the permanent new situation imposed upon our life.

For the atheist, death offers nothing forever. Many other religions preach a faith of continuance into some other life extension, eventually becoming a part of something eternal. A comparative religious course would present a panoply of afterlife alternatives that would collectively present a contrasting and bewildering spiritual array. After death, most Christians, Jews, and Muslims claim there is a resurrection up into heaven amid the presence of God and His spirit beings. Muslims additionally interact with virgins for all eternity. Biblical Christians scripturally cite heaven coming down to reside on a newly refurbished earth.

Medical sciences credit the beaming light described by many in the cusp of death, the lighted tunnel acclaimed to offer such profound, overwhelmingly endearing peace, as a series of chemical-physiological reactive causes. In some of these cases, the body of the departed is described as floating over their own presumably dead bodies. There is much scientific mystery inherent in this pre-post death phenomena that we simply do not understand. There remains the old question as to what actually occurs in a person immediately before and immediately after death—what has disappeared, what has been added in that instance? Was it the soul leaving? One could speculate about this topic indefinitely.

What truly gives death its sting? Is it the process of death itself or the effects that death exerts, the loss inflicted upon a human being, and/or for many even the death of a beloved pet? Death essentially attacks our precious self. A self that covets the value of a loved one seamlessly attached to our routine. And then wham! Death comes with its emotional hammer and shatters what we feel is our sense of wellbeing. Some may regard grieving over the loss of a person as

being selfish because such remorse is founded upon the absence of the loved one that impoverishes their life. But feeling death's sorrow is not being selfish but an essential part of our humanness. In fact, many religious traditions mandate specific mourning times, including formal ceremonies, when the bereaved are purposely surrounded by loved ones and friends for mutually proffered emotional support.

As far as how life itself is structured, death remains an absolute certainty of life. The moment a living thing is born or emerges, death becomes its certainty. Think if the life within every living thing never ceased—the leaves never dying would never fall; there would be no chance for any new fruit formation, not to mention the billions of people still here would be competing with us vying for our resources. We in effect probably wouldn't even be here! A night mare! Thus death becomes the ultimate, indispensable recycler breaking down complex molecules of former living things into simple primary ingredients awaiting new combinations to build into new life. Praise Yah for such an ingenious self-actualizing creation!

This process of decay manifest in life was highlighted in what most regard as the greatest miracle in Yahshua's ministry: the rising of Lazarus from his advanced death state after four days of lying in the tomb. Although Mary, Lazarus' sister, believed that Yahshua was fully capable of successfully completing anything He set in His mind to do, she cautioned Yahshua that her brother lying dead in the tomb that amount of time would have raised quite a stink!

John 11: 35-44: Jesus wept. Then said the Jews, Behold how he loved him! And some of them said, Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died? Jesus therefor again groaning in himself cometh to the grave. It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it. Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days. Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God? Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me. And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lasarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bounded hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go.

Spiritually death is indispensable to humankind for it becomes the ultimate bridge from this carnal world into one spirit-eternal. Without death there would be no chance to resurrect into the eternal: become redeemed, changed into a perfected, completed spirit being able to associate with God and Yahshua, hopefully as first fruits. Without Yahshua's resurrection from death as a human being who gave up His perfection as God, there would be no purpose for our Christian faith; it would be in vain.

Paul in his letter to the Corinthians reasons about the crucial importance of Christ's resurrection upon our faith.

1Corinthians 15: 12-19 Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead,

then is Christ not risen: And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain, ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.

Throughout His ministry Yahshua focused on the importance of believers avoiding a spiritual death at all costs because the ramifications of such a fatally compromised position would involve an eternal separation from God. In the Book of Romans, Paul was inspired to discuss this topic in detail.

Romans 5: 10-19, 21 For if, when we were enemies, (that is living a carnal life) we were reconciled (allowed to make a spiritual peace) to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his (resurrected) life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement (past, present and future of sin covered once and for all through His shed blood). Wherefore, as by one man (Adam) sin entered into the world, and death by sin (death the penalty of sin); and so death passed (from Adam and Eve's sinning) upon all men, for that (reason, our lineage to our first parents) all have sinned: For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law, (no codified definition of a sin to be realized as being a sin). Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses (the penalty of death for sinning as defined by the law), even over them that had not sinned, (referring to Yahshua) after the similitude (resemblance?) of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him, (Yahshua), that was to come. But not as the offence, so also is the free gift (sanctifying grace, unmerited pardon). For through the offence of one (Adam) many be dead by our lineage to the sin, law breaking of Adam), but much more (far more believers saved by having their sin removed) by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded (covered many offences) unto many.

And not as it was by one that sinned, (Adam), so is the gift: for the judgment was by one (God) to condemnation, but the free gift (covers) is of many offences unto justification (making one "uprighted," in a righteous, sinless state, acceptable to being with the Creator). For if by one man's offence death reigned by one (Adam's and Eve's collective sin); much more they (believers) which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness on one (Yahshua) the free gift came upon all men unto justification (so justified by having their sins forgiven through the atonement of Yahshua's blood offering (eternal) life. For as by one man's disobedience (Adam); many were made sinners (convicted by transgressing the law) so by the obedience of one, (Yahshua to the Father) shall many be made righteous (justified through their repentance, receiving the unmerited pardon, the grace of Yahshua through his ultimate atonement, His shed blood, that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

In these verses below, Paul equates sinning as the cause of spiritual death; how baptism equates the death of our carnal self that rises from our watery grave into a new self that chooses to live in the newness of a sinless way of life that equates to Yahshua's resurrected, spiritual body.

Romans 6: 3-11, 22, 23 Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized (knew about and assumed the responsibility of) into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism unto death: that like as Christ was raised up from the death by the glory of the Father, even so, (certainly), we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted (united) together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man (our carnal person before being called to receive Yahshua as our spiritual mentor and redeemer) is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead (from the adherence or influence of sin) is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ (from sinning) we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: (his blood became the atonement for all the sin that ever was) but in that he liveth unto God. (His sinless life was in a perfect association with God.) Likewise reckon ye also yourselves (as believers in obedience to Christ's words) to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

22-23 But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God ye have your fruit (righteous actions) unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

These verses describe a time table of change, of a resurrection from death and corruption, that our Father has planned for those who remain fixed in faith, who persevere over trials bearing spiritual fruits from our actions that make us worthy in God's mind.

1Corinthians 15: 51-58 Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, (die) but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, (immune from decomposition) and we shall be changed. For this corruptible (susceptible to death and decomposition) must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law (meaning that in transgressing just one law, the full weight of the law itself falls upon the transgressor without the crucial life saying benefit of the redemptive power of our Savior's redeeming blood. That result can only result in an eternal, spiritual death. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.

Death seems destined to always take something from us. But when tintured with time, death comes to initiate a healing process set in motion without our foreknowledge. This healing process begins a continuing purpose that adds customized experiences that include entirely new individuals that sequentially enter to fulfill part of Yah's purpose in hopefully shaping our lives to choose a path for our eventual, eternal association with Him in His New Kingdom on earth.

Thus everything in God's Plan, including the often painful ingredient of death, happens to each one of us according to His known purpose in tact before the creation of the earth!

This planning reality is also mirrored in the role death plays in natural selection: When a huge tree in the forest finally succumbs to death by disease or storm, a hole in the canopy appears that for centuries had been closed by the tree's huge branches. Sunlight floods the forest floor causing new changes, rampant new growth, sprouted seedlings, instigating permanent new growth, a new direction of forest composition. That fallen tree symbolizes the moment that death intrudes into our lives, often causing a complete emotional void, a hole opened up providing new light that begins altering a life so tragically uprooted.

Physical death will come to all of us; we will additionally experience the death of family members, brethren, friends, of strangers. Sorrow, even a feeling of tragedy will be felt. But as these emotions eventually subside, we can also reflect upon the fact that our Savior as a human being reacted in a similar manner as we do regarding death as shown by Him weeping over the loss of His friend Lazarus and showing numerous bouts of compassion throughout His ministry over other misfortunes that motivated Him to resurrect individuals from the throes of death or disease. Perhaps this study may offer some comfort when we realize the role death plays as a crucial part of His Plan of Salvation.