

## **Healthy Death: Understanding the nature of Pain and aging Vs. Suffering.**

Is there such a thing as a healthy death? How can death be healthy? Why would these words even be in the same sentence?

We have a clear idea of subjects that are taboo and death seems to be the greatest. Death is always associated with dis-ease with the process of life coming to an end and therefore death is associated with “bad” and all the things that go towards the negative.

Many of us will know death in the form of a close family relation or friend dying, but in fact death, occurs with the endings that there are, in everything we do. For every breath in there is a breath out, for every bite of a sandwich there is an eventual defecation, for every sexual climax there is an aftermath. These are all deaths, small deaths, within life. Therefore far from “defying gravity”, in relation to these endings, we are at one with them. The nature of the human is really similar to a florescent light bulb that constantly flickers at a high rate, although we are not aware of it; gradually as time passes, the flicking becomes more and more pronounced, till it is visible, then eventually the light goes out. This is not dis-ease. In fact, if we look at the word “pathology”, it means the study of “suffering”, not of death. Death is the end product, really, physical death being when the light just stops. The light, or life, has been emanating from the bulb all of its existence. It has been influencing the world and universe, through its outward expression, as a part of its “celebration of life”, but now it has receded.

So if death and the process of death is not dis-ease, this also means that aging is not a dis-ease; it is a normal and natural process. It seems normal however to associate dis-ease with the elderly. The young are assumed to be “fitter” or “healthier” and the old more “decrepit and dis-ease ridden”. But this cannot be the case, if death does not equate to dis-ease; it makes no difference who is closer to it or further away, in terms of years; this has nothing to do with dis-ease. So what is it when the body breaks down, the small aspects of “necrosis” of the tissues, which constitutes the movement towards the rotting away of the body, during the ending process of life? What is this natural entropy about? Well we can call it what it feels like.... pain. It is painful; there is definitely pain involved, (moving often to numbness, when regions of the body are dead or dying). So then the next question really is: if there is pain can we call this “pathological”? Is something that is painful associated with suffering?

This is probably the ultimate question, for it really focuses on what we consider to be important in life and makes us look directly at what is going on. The only way to unravel the answer is to see what happens in nature. Do pain and suffering occur there? What constitutes suffering? What constitutes pain? Let us look at a situation in which we might find ourselves; we may discern the difference:

A man is driving his Landover down the roads near his home at night. He sees a flash of movement, and then he suddenly hits something hard. He quickly stops the car and jumps out of the vehicle. To his horror he sees he has hit a deer! The animal is in a great deal of pain and the wound it has sustained is not something it could live through. It lies at the edge of the road breathing with difficulty and in intense pain. The driver is grief struck; he is a conservationist and would never harm an animal; he always protects them. He is

in great anguish. He remembers when he was young and when his mother ran over his pet cat and the great sorrow which he felt for the animal then; it's the same grief that hits him now. His heart beats faster, his hands sweat, he stomps up and down, seeing the animal in pain and he then quickly decides what to do. He has been taught "put the animal out of its suffering"; he thinks, . . . he *knows* this must be the *right* thing to do here. With a great sigh, he quickly uses a rock to knock the animal out. The deer immediately stops breathing and dies.

The man collapses to the ground. He touches the deer to see it is dead and then breathes a sigh of relief. His pulse rate normalizes, he feels calmer, although still shaken by the whole situation. He gets back into the car and drives away.

In this situation we can see directly what the difference between pain and suffering is. The deer experiences a rush of energy as the car hits or just before, then immense pain, but this pain is directly felt and accepted, there is no resistance to it. All there is, is that there is pain and that there is a person there. Then all there is, is no-thing. This is what happens to the deer.

The man is experiencing no actual physical injury but the emotions that occur are very powerful; they affect his physiology, making his stomach churn, his head ache, his pulse race and his thoughts go wild. Yet he had no physical injury or pain to the body. Considering there is total Oneness, it could be said that he feels the pain of the deer, but even then, all the add-ons to this are nothing to do with what the deer is experiencing.

From this we can determine the nature of suffering. Suffering is an add-on to the state of pain. Suffering is also only experienced by humans; it is in fact the human condition. This established, we can understand why medicine developed, why religion developed and many other things, too. The main thing that seems to separate us from the animal kingdom is this process of mental-emotional add-on of past experience onto current events. This is in-built, reactive and basically part of the human continuum, passed on from mother to child, through the process of human beings learning to stand, in early pre-history, creating great lack of connection to the earth and therefore also to our innate natural sense. It is nobody's fault; it is utterly the way it is, but it also gives us the need for something called medicine to literally bring us back to our senses.

So to be healthy, in the deepest sense of the term, is to be free from the process of suffering. We could say that the deer had a perfectly healthy life and death. The human body generally is only ever without the process of suffering where there is death of the body, so all death is really healthy! Or, that during life, somehow the idea of a separate self dissolves and is seen (by No-one) to be illusive. Then there is a kind of death of the "idea of death" or suffering, for there is no-one to suffer any longer; there is no centre to the suffering. However, it is most people's experience that this doesn't happen much during their lives. Moments of great beauty or great tragedy and disaster . . . peak points can sometimes break through to something else underneath the surface. Meditation practices help to calm the sense of suffering and for the add-ons to be less, but often, in anxiety, back they can come again, with full force.

Age has nothing to do with suffering; one can suffer very deeply as a teenager in the midst of a "break-up" with a girlfriend or boyfriend, to the point of wanting "to die",

meaning that one wants the suffering to stop. Whereas a man in his nineties can be incapacitated, with a fractured spine, from falling down stairs but is making “inappropriate” jokes with the nurses on his ward!

With disabled children or those with debilitating injury, we very often find a total lack of suffering, children managing to simply accept what is, whereas if the same situation was happening to an adult, it would be totally “ruinous” to a “self” perception and therefore being able to cope might involve much suffering. So, interestingly, physical injury doesn’t have to do with suffering, however severe; it is something else...something seemingly (though not) lost in childhood and sometimes re-acknowledged towards death and dying; an acceptance of what is happening, without adding on.

When the man knocked out the deer, was he stopping the deer’s suffering? No, he was attempting to stop his own. The deer was never suffering. The only way he could stop his suffering was to see that the deer was no longer in pain, to annihilate the pain from the process, because there is a strong connection made with pain and suffering. From the human perspective, there can easily be associations made between pain and separation, because separation is the foundation point from which humans views the world from an early age; pain is anti-life. The body can take so much pain, then it dies, hence pain and death are tied and as the separate sense of self wants to stay alive, pain, death and suffering are all joined together into a mish-mash of connections. For example, issues such as the death of the man's cat, in our short story: there a sense of separation and the cat’s death is the cause. Hence the idea that death equals separation is hard-wired in. This is also the same with specific fears and phobias. Some people move *towards* pain in order to actually break the cycle of suffering and feel more alive.... so pain can be used in this way, associated with the “self – flagellation” of various religious experiences, the self-harming of depressives and even those who have a certain addiction to painful experiences.... all these expressions are to break out of the cycle of suffering. Again we see how pain and suffering are utterly different. Other people might try to go the other way, into hedonistic pleasure, as a resort to bring the senses out of suffering. This is the most common and is associated with some form of drug taking and also with sexual activity, to move the body from suffering to sense. In every way, all of the so called “bad” habits of society are not “bad” at all but are methods, however warped, of moving from a state of suffering into a re-sensing of the body. It is well known that smokers breathe more deeply when smoking than at any other time; in fact it could be said to be a form of meditation! It is a way of getting back to the body which can be so highly important for the smoker under stress and is far harder to give up than the nicotine. This is not a pro-smoking campaign but a non-judgmental racket if you like! The point is to understand why things are happening, basically, because it is interesting!

To gauge the very human process of suffering, all we need to do is to look at our closest cousins in the primate family. We are primates, who have the particular skill of memory, and dexterity in tool manufacture. These two features are particular adaptations made most probably as a result of environmental changes and food requirements. However, they are no more or less an adaptation than the crocodile, with its lightning responses and powerful jaw structure. Everything alive, at this point in time, is on the same page as humans. We are all as evolved as each other, so let’s take off the “higher spiritual level” crown of ego, that really is a “crown of thorns” that humans have been

carrying for millennia. We no more rule the earth than the ants, and they are far more exuberant and able to do so. If we look at nature and look at our nearest and most similar ancestors for “spiritual advice”, so to speak, if, instead of looking down at these animals, we listen to them on the same level, then we will realize our own predicament and how to really learn about life, rather than having fantasies that it is “like this” or should be “like that”. Let’s take off the rose tinted shades and actually look at the facts. If we look at the life cycle of a chimpanzees, bonobos or similar primates, they are born, they live in harmony within a group, they see all females as mothers, all males as fathers, all of different qualities and varieties, they play and express themselves when there is energy, they rest and sleep when they are tired, they follow the cycles of nature. When the energy is exuberant they mate, as a celebration of life, not personal and yet deeply intimate, not with a “special one”, with an “exclusivity” of ideological value placed upon each other, but simply as it is in the moment and for no “reason”. There is no connotation of “making love” because everything, absolutely everything, is “in-love-with’ life”. There is no ‘should do, must be, might be’, in terms of relationships; there is just what there is, there is no abandonment, shame, deceit, hurt and all the other ideologies in between. All of life is a sharing, a sharing of feelings, of bodies, of food, of shelter, of oneness in a community. There are shows of dominance and a push to leadership but this is simply a display of exuberant energy. There are sometimes seemingly violent episodes, where what seems like attacks to members of the tribe occur but this only occurs when the population size of the primate family has risen beyond sustainability, and so the whole nature of the expression becomes over-heated and in such a situation, these are expressions of energy. No primate who is the “attacker” or “victim” holds grudges, or sees themselves in such roles; the whole situation is part of a whole. No individual is thought of as being “to blame”. In this society which we erroneously call “primitive”, we see that the whole balance is much like a field of energy, which is part of the greater field of the planet, and ultimately of the whole universe. It is utterly connected to this. All actions within this society are Righteous actions, right for the whole of everything, not with the intended individual in mind. They are actions not bound by intention and ideas but through the whole of the will of nature.

When we look upon nature we are looking into the deep expression of Truth, without any addition. Pure Observation without analysis renders all the answers we require, but they come not specifically through cognition. At the point of death, for these primates, there is a total letting go, as with life. These are our teachers/ our guides. There is nothing we can do about being what we are, having the adaptation that we have, but to realize that this cycle of life, which is the same with all animals, in their various expressions of it, is the big picture. What occurs with humans in the process of suffering is literally an add-on to this overall picture of total and universal health. To modern humans, the phrase “like an animal” is seen as being derogatory and yet animal society is many times more peaceful, more settled, loving, without prejudice and superstition, utterly pragmatic and totally in love with life. Yet humans believe that there is something “higher” about us. We stand proud of the earth, looking upwards towards the sky, and consider the “meaning of it all”; we build rockets to escape the earth, not to go back to it, and as a result we lose our sensation; we separate from the Gaia that we are and as a result, there is maladaptation.

From time immemorial, such madness it was to believe that “civilized” society had come to “help” the poor heathen peoples, to show them the “right way”, enslaving huge populations and forcing ideology and mad structuralism, that didn't mean a thing. This has been done all over the world, through the North American and South American Indians, African tribes, the aboriginals and more recently, the Maoris. All these peoples have ties to nature, ties to the earth, and they were seen to be “ignorant”. Soon, and not too far away, as Bob Dylan suggests, “the loser will later win; the times they are a changing”.....not that this issue is about “winning” or “losing” but those who have been told that theirs is the way of ignorance and weakness will be seen to have the only root left, the only possible way for human to live and be in connection with the earth, in contentment and peace. Those who run closest to the ways of the animals, who live and die in health and not in dis-ease, who don't need medicine, ideas of enlightenment or ways “out” but love the way-in, that love the earth and the expression of it, this is the way home, as expressed by all those who deeply knew, for example, Lao Tzu in the Tao Te Ching Chapter 80:-

*Reduce the size of the population of the state. Though there are machines of war that are 10 or 100 times greater than a single man, they are not needed. The people will be reluctant to travel long distances without reason for they know longevity.*

*Even if they have ships and carts, they will have no use for them; weapons and armour have no occasion to be worn.*

*Bring it about that people return to the use of knotting strings and using them, They will relish in their food,*

*And in the beauty in their simple cloths,*

*And will be content in their simple abode,*

*And happy in the simplicity of natural existence.*

*Though neighbouring states are within the sight of one another, and the sound of dogs barking and cocks crowing in one state can be heard in another, yet the people of the one state will grow old and die without having any dealings with those of another.*

The recent James Cameron film, *Avatar*, attracted a huge number of people to it, maybe wanting and needing this “return” towards the tribal instinct of our inner nature, which is so powerful. Given the opportunity to jump into an *Avatar* body, most of the western world population would do it, in a blink of an eye. Why.... because there is an instinct, which causes films like this to be seen as the “way forward”. We have thought to ourselves, that the way of metal and mechanical destruction is something that feels wrong to our deepest sense of self. No, *Avatar* is not real and it is “just” a fantasy, but the ideology is as deep as the split from Eden, and is the process of moving down a track which is a big dead-end for humans, the track of “self” belief and “self” knowledge, of the “higher” not the lower, or the flower and not the roots. When people have been doing something that makes them sick for a long time, they are used to the sickness and believe it to be real. It is only a few that are deeply sick of being sick. The movement thereafter become about finding a way to connect to life, such as the life of Christopher

McCandless, portrayed in the film, *Into the wild*, where there is a fundamental recognition of something “being wrong” and a deep want to go “home” but not knowing how to get there. To the modern human, being so long in the cage of intensity with thoughts, going back to the wild, to the roots, to love, it seems a brutal journey, but only, as McCandless realizes towards the end of his life, if the journey is taken on by an “individual”, something that cannot ever allow fulfillment.

This article does not try to give the answer to the introductory questions because life is really a natural phenomenon that is occurring through us, and it ends when it ends; there is no force that can be applied to change it, either way. What I am attempting to explain is that there is a clear differentiation made between pain and suffering, in medicine. When involved in any kind of treatment process the focus needs always to be on the suffering not the pain. The pain is a response of nature; it is like death, utterly in tune with nature. Suffering however can make pain 100 times stronger. Thought is a great focusing, powerful mental-emotional resistance to what is going on and thus affects the body, a massive contraction, which blocks the energy flows, through the whole system. If there is pain one can be sure that nature will attempt to resolve it, through its own action. If there is energy too, the pain will always be in proportion to what the organism can take, and beyond this point is death. Pain can never go beyond certain levels, just as yang always reverts to yin and visa versa, at highest polarity. This occurs unhampered, when natural energy flow is allowed, i.e. there is no resistance. Hence suffering is the root of dis-ease. There can be pain with panic or pain without panic, that's the key difference. When suffering drops away, then the energy flows and the person is healthy, even though they may be aging and in pain, or dying. Health is derived from the word “wholeness”, hence when there is a sense of wholeness, one is in the hands of mother-nature, and as a result, there is no fear, there is no additional mental-emotional creation, there just is what there is; it is not begrudged but accepted universally; this is called healthy death.

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