

*Philo Café September 3rd, 2013 - Summary*

*Topic for discussion:*

*"Death may be the greatest of all Human Blessings" Socrates.*



*Dear All,*

*Why fear Death ? This was the first question that leapt from the group on that evening. Nearly one and a half hours later something made me put the following question to the group:*

*What state would you wish to find yourself in at the time of your own death?*

*The answers:*

- Aware of sound mind*
- At home and with family*
- Having made peace*
- Having said goodbyes but without being drawn out*
- Physically painless and emotionally calm*
- Not lingering*
- But I don't want to die...*
- Always be prepared*

*The mood was sombre at the thought of the stranger's arrival. Clearly no-one relished the prospect of suffering at that moment, whether by affliction, infliction or intrusion. After opening up our own limited Kaleidoscope on death, the jury was definitely out as to whether it was indeed a blessing.*

*Death conjured up fear of the unknown, a painless or helpless dissolution into annihilation. We need to be prepared - but what if there's just a big black hole waiting for us? Considering the example of one of history's most famous deaths: Jesus, we have good reason to be fearful. However, do we ask appropriately of God? Is it the case that God should intervene helpfully? Clearly Death can be an ugly, undignified matter whether by public crucifixion or for that matter disease or any form of disaster- natural or man-made.*

*Does responsibility for this rest with God or with Man?*

*If a lucid after-death state awaits us, could the baggage of a lifetime leave us in a helpless state of suffering- powerless to make amends as one is forced to re-live and reflect on one's life's failings. Might we be unable to make amends?*

*In the West, Catholicism was noted for its hierarchy of punishment and suffering in the afterlife. Some good news though: limbo has been disbanded. However, please remember that apparently Purgatory is still with us and that "the gate to heaven is narrow" so empowerment in the afterlife might be in short supply if you've been "bad".*

*On a more positive note, Repentance gives us a "life-line". Perhaps if sincerely felt, it could allow for freedom even at a murderer's deathbed.*

*From the East we have Re-incarnation. Such a cycle of learning was felt as a relief - much less frightening than some of our western ways. For the Yogis, Death is an integral part of Life. Going deeper into the nature of Death before we actually die gives us an opportunity to open a door onto other dimensions altogether.*

*There was some friction over Forgiveness/Grace and Karma. Some felt that the act of Forgiveness/Grace could take away the burden of one's own bad or harmful actions. For example, through prayers we can give support to the dead.*

*With Karma the equation is more taut: I forgive you - you forgive me. In such a scenario there is a dynamic at work between both parties. Only this occurrence between the two brings about true release.*

*(On the occasion of 9/11 there was a meeting of sorts between East and West. This did not find its way into our discussion that night but I feel the need to mention it myself since it is resonating insistently between my ears as I am writing this. Perhaps since it is so pertinent, it might be something we could give attention to on another evening.)*

*Socrates' own death was a highly charged affair. If only he could send back word. He was forced to reflect deeply on his own demise. Clearly, the stone-cold certainty of death did not haunt him. Perhaps the stone-cold certainty of re-birth did?*

*"The hour of departure has arrived and we go our ways - I to die and you to live. Which is the better, only god knows."*

*In The Iliad, Homer talks of how the Immortal Gods envy us. Our human lives are short and we can move on.*

*From: Death Before Dying - The Sufi Poems of Sultan Bahu*

*Where one gram of love is sold, there one should give tons of faith,*

*Books, prayers and liturgies should be heaped on top.  
Nothing is gained without a guide, even if one stays up nights in study,  
Let us die before dying, Bahu, only then is the Lord attained.*

*From: The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying - Sogyal Rinpoche - Chapter two . Impermanence*

*The only thing we really have is nowness, is now.*

*Sometimes when I teach these things a person will come up to me...and say: "All this seems obvious!..... Tell me something new".....*

*Ask yourself these two questions:*

*Do I remember at every moment that I am dying and everyone and everything else is and so treat all beings at all times with compassion?*

*Has my understanding of death and impermanence become so keen and so urgent that I am devoting every second to the pursuit of enlightenment ?*

*If you can answer 'yes' to both of these, then you have really understood impermanence.*

*How to end such a vast topic of discussion...?*

*Recently, here in Ireland the poet Seamus Heaney passed on. His stature and the great esteem in which he was held lead us to put great value on his every word. His last words sent in a text message to his wife were:*

*"nolle timere" ('don't be afraid')*

*Namaste.*

*Peter*