

SPECTRUM

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What happens when I die? - contemplations on mortality

I lost my father at an early age. When he died my world seemed to collapse. Gone was a loving parent and role model. But I remember distinctly one great comfort. It was the belief, as I put it then, that "my father was in heaven with Jesus".

I have re-evaluated that belief numerous times. Not because I have since had doubts about my father as a person. Rather, I wondered often what really happens to us the moment our life (on earth) expires.

Some possibilities come to mind. Perhaps an individual ceases to exist totally at the point of death. When the soul or spirit ceases to be and the physical, fleshy body slowly disintegrates, that's the end. In fact, no distinction as such is made between body and soul. One would have hoped for a good life on earth, and something meaningful to pass on. But the end is the end of the individual. No after-life, no heaven, no hell, no God: "when your dead, your dead."

On the other hand, though the body dies perhaps the soul, essence (or whatever else it is called) does not. But, what happens then to the soul? One view, Eastern in origin, is that the soul survives, but its individuality does not. The soul survives only to the extent that it becomes absorbed into the universal soul (God), like a drop of water in the ocean.

If that is somewhat impersonal, there is also the (Platonic) view that the soul does survive as an individual entity. Death signals its "release" from the prison of the body, to enjoy an eternal, blissful "existence".

In these views on the immortality of the soul there appears to be a radical discontinuity between this life and the life (of the soul) after death. Life here on earth is considerably devalued. It is to be endured. Even if one has enjoyed a "good life", it can never be fulfilling. Physical existence hinders the soul from enjoying the ideal: the perfect, the beautiful, (God?). They can not be had here on earth. Any natural beauty and grandeur of the earth and of human living is still second rate.

There is yet a third possibility. Perhaps at some point after death (we don't know when) a reuniting of the soul with the resurrected body occurs. Sounds far-fetched? Maybe.

The sociologist Peter Berger has maintained that we cannot really conceive of our own individual demise. We like to think of some personal, individual demise. We like to think of some personal, individual existence after death. That

METANOIA WITH JOHN VALK

existence would, of course, have to be a marked improvement from what we experience here. Life is a struggle: joy mixed with pain, successes with failures. Even the "good life" has its wrinkles, rough edges and sorrows.

Where will that renewed existence be? Surely not any pie-in-the-sky. But, might there be some continuity with life this side of death and a renewed life on the other side? That would

The politics of outing

Outing is one hell of a touchy subject, isn't it? My friends and I have been arguing about it for a while now. There is debate both inside, and outside the Gay community, and in the media which takes both sides depending on who is outed, whether you can get headlines from the Outing itself or from the information, the time of day, the season and whether the editorial staff likes that particular actor/politician/social activist/preacher.

Like all other great ideas for social change, Outing has a tremendous capacity to go horribly wrong. Its original intention was to expose prominent closet-cases who use their positions for furthering homophobia because they buy into the guilt/taboo nonsense and want to stay on their power trip. It was also intended to enlighten straights who don't think they know and gays - there can't be that many out there - and to make life miserable for gay family and friends.

I agree wholeheartedly with the first use of Outing. People who use their positions of power to trample other people - especially if they're being hypocritical - should get both barrels of the media bullhorn. Equal rights for gays are being held back by politicians who spend their days kissing-up to narrow-minded conservative bigots, and their nights cruising for those gays who take the risk to be who they are without the safety of those rights. I just don't have enough faith in our illustrious race to believe us capable of limiting our targets to these puppets and liars.

"Witch-hunt" is getting to be a really over-used accusation, but I think it applies here. What if said politician isn't trying to

surely give meaning and hope to what we experience, or endure, in the "here and now".

If such life after death were the case then one does not cease to exist at the point of death. One would continue in a spiritual, bodily, fleshy form that retains its individuality, personality, etc., but in a transformed future time and place. That place would be a renewed earth, and a full presence of God. I would think also there would be the presence of nature: flowers, trees, birds, rivers and mountains.

One other thing. I would think that one's struggle for peace, justice and happiness this side of eternity would also not have been for nought. In fact, one's struggle might even hasten that

THE BLACK TRIANGLE BY TRISTAS BHAIRD

block rights for gays? What if they have other important issues that they feel have to be dealt with, and are concentrating on those? Who are we to demand that their attention be focused on our interests, and because they're not to see that as justification for forcing them to, through outing? What if they are just doing their political thing, and have been slowly coming to the conclusion they may be gay (or that their daughter or son is gay)? Sometimes this takes a while to surface. It may take a long while to work through, especially if they are already married, etc. These people are in danger of being outed before they get the chance to come to grips with all the wonders and dangers for themselves.

It is at this point my friends and I usually start into heated battle, and it comes around to the second reason for outing with which I cannot agree.

If there is a problem with being gay, my friend say, it is because it's seen as this big bad taboo thing that poor straight souls have to come to grips with, rather than just being a fact of life. Exposing the huge numbers of prominent gay people in the world would force everyone to see that it's not some isolated deviant behaviour that typically accompanies child molestation and alcoholism. If these gays are outed now they will be role models for future gays, and education models for straights.

I seriously doubt it. First of all, good role models are the

day. That future existence would also have a communal rather than a merely individual focus. People will be living in harmony, as never thought possible. Imagine, for example, radical feminists and determined chauvinists living in harmony, as never thought possible. Imagine, for example, radical feminists and determined chauvinists living and working side by side, in peace, justice and equality, both minus their rough edges, narrowed perspectives and arrogant attitudes.

Does all of this sound too fanciful? Perhaps, particularly if everything we do is so unrelated to anything future. Maybe that's a concern.

ones who stand up themselves and say who they are. These are people to admire, because of their strength and confidence as well as their expression. These people know exactly what is going on in their lives or they wouldn't have said anything. They've reached a state where it all makes sense to them.

Let's face it, that is a sometimes nasty world out there. If my politician example is not given the time to get a grip on what is happening (s)he may suffer internal as well as external damage from being forced out. They won't care if it's good for them or for society tomorrow, they'll only see the nastiness of today.

Think of this whole coming out business as going for a dip in the ocean. Wonderful stuff, you're going to enjoy the swim, but the water's a little cold, and you've heard the stories about sharks all your life. Many ease their way in, looking around carefully with every step, but they get down to it. A few jump in without hesitation - brave, happy, souls that they are. Then there are the ones who mill around on the shore, just getting their feet wet, or going in up to knees and midriffs. Some of these may not wish to go further. Most probably do, but are chilled or scared. The swimmers are harassed by yahoos in boats (they like the water too, but want to stay dry so the folks on shore won't see them sitting in the sand with wet bathing suits) so some of these fools get hauled in. Then the victors set their sights on the waders, too. Even some of the swimmers who eased in slowly, grab hold of waders and toss them in over their heads. Bad sportspersonship, folks.

The Sesame Street Syndrome

The other day I was talking to this famous professor here at UNB. I asked this professor, of great wisdom, "... are you glad to see all the students back, Dr. Know?"

Dr. Know nodded and said, "yes, except for this one little thing..."

Dr. Know went on to explain that it was like watching the David Letterman show. It was sort of a combination of "stupid pet tricks" and the "top ten lists". Seeing the puzzled look on my

WELL, THIS IS WHAT I THINK.... WITH D.J. ECKENRODE

face, s/he added that it wasn't the student's fault. It was the 'SESAME STREET SYNDROME' These poor young people are taught to be "passive learners". They expect to be spoon fed their educations and can't even take time to read! And some probably have trouble merely reading. Then Dr. Know gave me this list of "TOP TEN STUPID STUDENT QUESTIONS" In rough order:

1. "Did you talk about anything (important) in class today (yesterday etc.)?"
2. "How long do you want the paper to be?"
3. "Are you going to curve the exam?"
4. "Are you going to talk anything in class that's not in the book?"
5. "What's going to be on the test?"
6. "Do you want us to include (cite) where we got our information?" (as on a term paper)
7. "Do I have to read a lot for your class?"
8. "What do I need to get on the final to get a(n) (fill-in-the-grade needed to stay in university)?"
9. "Is the next test going to be as hard as the last one?"

Here is where David Letterman would have the infamous drum roll...

10. "Do you want us to turn in our assignments on time?"

After looking over the list, I told Dr. Know that I'd overheard number eleven after a class the other day. It was his/her turn to peer at me quizzically. Yes, Dr. Know, essentially a student said to the professor,

"I've not bothered (for one reason for another) to attend your class for the first two weeks of

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