



## *We Live with Impermanence*

To enjoy this life, you must come to grips with impermanence. There is no getting around it. You, in your body, will not live forever. According to the thought of India, we live in the fourth (Kali Yuga) period in the ultra-long Kalpa of untold length, the degenerate period in which man rarely lives to be 100. In previous periods the length of life of mankind was much greater. You have known that your loved ones and you both were scheduled for death; there was no mystery about it. So, you must learn to accept the inevitable — and, in Zen and Yogic practice, to understand it. When one military leader in Japan, a Zen adept, held a knife above the head of his foe, also a Zen adept, the latter fended off the blow, meanwhile stating, “A snowflake in a burning fire.” It was no big deal, his dying, said the leader who had been attacked. From history we know that the Spartans were like that.

Death is not the only fact of life. If wise, you will learn to “expect the unexpected.” When we are fortunate enough to arrive at a stable period of relative happiness in our lives, we must not assume it will always be that way. Prosperity, happiness, good health and relative contentment are good fortune, but they can change overnight. The I Ching, the Book of Changes, says that there is nothing permanent but change. To understand and accept this fact demands a certain amount of “Vairagya,” non-attachment. This goes against human instincts, where we become greatly attached to our families and our habitual way of life; but this invites future sorrow. Zen demands that sentiment and human emotion be controlled, but how many are willing to do so?

The scene is all too familiar: we dig a hole, and then, when we fall into it, we look to the sky and demand, “Why me? Why me?”

The enlightened person sees things from a universal standpoint, but a self-centered one. He identifies with the whole, hence the talk of “the One.” The egotistical, self-centered one digs the hole and makes sure of future suffering.

One time, driving home from the cleaners with several pairs of pants, I noticed that the cleaner had given me too much change. I turned around and returned to his store. Upon receiving back the money, he exclaimed, disparagingly, “Fifty cents? I’d have never noticed it!” “But I did,” I answered. He thought I was crazy, not understanding my point of view at all.

Chinese sages wrote, “The wise man goes to his triumph like a funeral.” Others dance in the streets, feeling they have gotten something for nothing. There is no Free Lunch, however. We get what we deserve.

Try to understand the sudden adverse development and feel, like the Japanese military commander, that it is nothing but “a snowflake in a raging fire.” The practice of T'ai Chi Chih will go a long way toward preparing us for what is to come.

Gratitude for each day, and for this life, is the antidote for unhappiness.

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