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Can One prepare for Death?

"Une préparation à la mort est-elle possible?
Quel type de techniques employer?"

You know it is impossible to have any certitude about the nature of death, and even if some of us can begin to think more clearly about it, we are really not able to know what lies beyond. For this reason, we are not able to make a real preparation for death itself, but we can make a very important preparation concerning the fear of death, and this will be the topic of my article.

The last days, the last minutes, the last weeks, or the last year must be treated in a different manner and according to different ways depending upon the circumstances. If time has already passed and it is not possible to make a very long preparation, the only necessary thing is to be there, and simply take the hand of the person who is in the process of passing away and to be with him or her. Death is a passage which is like a railway station: it is very important to be on the platform when the train draws away; you understand, only with your "handkerchief", because warmth is a kind of love, and give certitude to the one who is dying that you do not fear for them. Your being there without fear, with a firm and natural acceptance of what is taking place inside the person who is leaving, while they are living, is very important for them. If you have a few days, or a few weeks of preparation, it is very important to know the five degrees that Mrs. Kubler Ross speaks about.

When the bad news has been given, or the fact of death becomes evident for the man or the woman who is dying, the first reaction is to deny it; the second, is to bargain: if I do this or that, or something else, I shall be able to escape; the third is a great depression since one realizes that no bargaining can be trusted any longer; the fourth is a deep understanding of that which is inevitable; and the fifth is the emergence in our soul of the idea that it is just as well like this, that is to say, a certain resignation, or perhaps something more than resignation - that is, some kind of great peace, and great enlightenment for the soul. These are the five degrees.

Elizabeth Kubler Ross has said that at each step of this long road, there is a way of listening, and of being present, and of being a good pupil of what is in the process of being accomplished. The person who is dying becomes the teacher and has a great role to play. It is very important to help the person make reference to what is happening to her or him; solitude, fear, and anxiety disappear, and a great peace comes with love. The transference phenomenon creates great links between these two beings. But this you can read about in the books of Elizabeth, or other writers.

I shall now try to explain my approach to the proper technical preparation

for death, and it is the same technique as the preparation for life, because there is no difference in approaching life and death.

When you look at humanity in the great city, what do you see? You see men and women running to their work, and going home; running back and forth without stopping; they are engrossed in reading their newspaper, listening to the radio or looking at television, and all that is taking them outside of themselves. Therefore it is not possible in this latter state to prepare for either life or death. It is very important to make them return to the only thing that is stable in their lives, that is the body: our body, with its flesh, its blood, its bones, with all these heavy things which constitute the essential basis of our solidity, and incarnates the law for us. Perhaps, you do not understand how it is the law for us? It is the law because it is the approach to our centre of gravity. Here is the approach of breathing, here is the approach of the link with the sun, and the link with other men and women. Here is the law of desire in us; and it is very important to be near this body which cannot lie to us.

There are three kinds of exercises which are very important in enabling us to understand what is happening here and now. And what is happening, here and now, is that which is happening at the time of our birth, or when we are making love, or at the time of our death.

The approach to this training is very simple. We are made of three centres, and these centres are in our body. The first very simple exercise is to seek sensation in our diaphragm because the diaphragm is between our chest and our stomach. You breath very fast, then you stop. After that, you take delight in a sensation of a harmony diffusing from this centre, and emanating through your whole body, right up to your hair and down to your toes. It is not the perfect accomplishment of this exercise which is important. What is essential is the notion of diffusion, that is, to create a link as strong as a harpoon inside oneself. And after having practised this for some time, you will discover that this centre makes you aware of a lot of things concerning the link between the very heavy, and the very subtle and delicate elements of our being.

After this, it is necessary to work with another centre. It is possible to use the same technique with your eyes as the one you have used with your breath. You take your thumb, bringing it towards your eyes, allowing the two to converge; and you will feel some kind of pain, and this pain recalls what you felt within your chest in the previous exercise. You press first with your thumb between the eyes; when you have felt this, you will be conscious of another slight pain when approaching your thumb. All this region will become sensitive to perception and this perception is at first painful. After some time, it becomes delightful, something which makes this region like a smooth libidinal area, that is, like an erotogenic zone. Properly speaking it is not another erotogenic zone, it is something else. You must understand that I am only giving you this as an idea. It is similar but it is not the same. It is a libidinal area.

Now, the same work will be done with the sacrum.⁽¹⁾

I summarize:

First region: the diaphragm centre

Second region: the eye centre

Third region: the sacrum centre

Of this whole region, the sacrum is the "master" of the perineum.⁽²⁾ First, you touch the last five lumbar vertebrae. You put your finger on the sacrum, on the coccyx,⁽³⁾ near the anus, and after that you keep your thumb there. You close the opening of the anus. You push on the sacrum, and you push on the perineum coming downwards and backwards with your movement. In doing this, this region becomes conscious to you as did the two previous ones, and if you pay attention, you will feel that there are many resistances controlling this region in your mind. All this area is like a garden surrounded by defenses. When pupils first begin to do this exercise, they are embarrassed. They understand very well what is going on in their chest; they also understand what is going on in their eyes, but when this exercise is executed in the lower region, they do not like it. In doing this exercise: I press with my breathing on the diaphragm, the diaphragm presses on the bowels and on the muscles, which in turn press on the levator ani,⁽⁴⁾ and this muscle pushes on the sacrum and on the coccyx. All this is done by breathing.

I do not contract. I relax. It is a relaxation of all the areas concerned, and most important is to keep it in our consciousness. It is essential to be able to keep in our consciousness these centres of our body. These points, or centres, are like jewels or seeds. This is a whole "façon d'être" which enables us to build in our body another body. I would say that this is a Little Vehicle which can be built up, or constructed, in our Larger Vehicle. This Vehicle is like the Little Vehicle of the Inyana.

After these centres are plainly felt and when we are able to make them reveal themselves, it is important to make the patient lie down.

When they are lying down, you tell him or her, to visualize an object. The object might be whatever they want: an apple, the sun, the face of a loved one. The essential thing is to look at the inner picture and to be present to the phenomenon. Here is the difficulty, to be present, to look, and to be near the object and the subject who is looking over this object. This subject is held by the constitution of the three centres.

Then we go on to another important exercise which approaches that of practically choking. Exercise.

You exhale all the air out of your chest until there is no more left. You keep doing this while seconds are passing by, and this phenomenon is creating in you a fear of death. If you do not breathe, you are condemned to death in about three minutes, since you have only three or four minutes of air available to you in your chest and in the circulation of the blood. After thirty seconds, your heart beats wildly through this anxiety. When you are able to overcome

this anxiety, something strange happens. A great peace comes upon you because you have gone beyond the first fear, and you have been the winner. After this first test, you have the possibility of extending this exercise to one minute and a half and fear appears again. But it is not the same fear, it is a deep warning of something different, it is a real danger. However you can stop it very easily, You stop the exercise and everything resumes its normal course. This is one of the many fears which could manifest itself during this period of trial.

This brings us back to the first trauma of our birth and when you do this exercise, if you are able to get beyond the first fear you will make a curious discovery. This part of you brings with it very old meanings which can be revealed to you without singing you the song of society. It is a very old and very deep experience and here it is possible to understand the meaning of "primary respiration", which is the respiration of the foetus inside the mother's womb. Here, we rediscover all the different primary movements which accompany us throughout our lives.

There are two fundamental systems. A first system which inhales and exhales, but if you pay very close attention to your body, you will feel another movement of expansion and contraction which you can perceive when you are in the process of listening to your body. This is the second system. I have told you it is "primary respiration", but it is not exactly respiration. It is the expression of another interior signification. It does not belong to the lung area.

When this sensation has gone, let the person rest a while, and you can begin another movement to make the subject and object come face to face. But it is first important to make these two stops. Otherwise, it would seem as if this were simply another gymnastic technique or a new type of yoga, like Western yoga. Not Eastern yoga. In the West all things are discredited by a process of mechanical repetition, and this is very sad. The essence of the exercise is to feel what is happening inside us after doing it. The exercise is nothing; you could do it with your will, but what is important is to feel what is going on during the internal process. The accumulation of exercises is a very dangerous method - three four or five exercises suffice.

When this work has been done for two or three months, one can begin the second part of the preparation for death. I shall try to be clear.

The principles of this exercise is to interchange the object and the subject.

Once you have been made very much aware of the three centres, it is possible to make a rotation and to displace your body. This is important. That is all I have to teach you. When you are able to really feel your body, you can also feel well in the representation of your body if you are able to place yourself in the object of your own desire. Subject and object are two parts of the same identity and you can change the place of the projectors and look at yourself as if you were your desire. You take the place of the represen-

tation. It is very important to say and to repeat: that it is the representation. It is not a mystical exercise, though it seems to be one. It is an exercise of the representation of our inner and outer world.

You can project a kind of light on your body, you can surround your face, your nose, your mouth, your eyes with this light and afterwards the chest and the whole body. Then the same light is projected behind you on the occipital, along the spine, always enlightening and nourishing these images. The arms, then the legs, the plexus, the sex organs etc. . . All this is made as a kind of reparation for the lack of love from which we are all suffering. Afterwards you visualize the stream which flows over the whole body surrounding it entirely with light. It is possible now within this projection to allow the body to go to the wall, to the door, or to the window, on the mantelpiece and to look at it from ever increasing distance; and from that point on, it is possible to take a more important trip. You go and see the town in which you did the preparatory exercises, you fly above the ocean, the forest, as far as possible, and afterwards you can fly still higher into the sky, to the sun, among all the stars.

But what is important is to pay great attention to what is happening to your patient. We must be able to feel how much they have been able to understand and to live through, and their reaction to all this. Some patients are afraid, others laugh and some leave altogether. It is very important, to understand when they are laughing, when they are afraid, and when they leave. The essential aspect of this training leads to the conversation between the teacher and the patient. The depressive feelings associated with death are now easy to handle because you are friends like fellow-travellers, and have made this trip together. And this is a great and important link.

We can now take up the last part of the preparation for death. You see that making a trip not only in space but also in time is also a preparation for life.

When we are used to travelling in space, we can project leaving yesterday, last week, last month or last year; but we can also do another exercise and project starting tomorrow or the week to come, next month or next year, and in so doing we will arrive back to the day of birth. When we have reached the point where this exercise is able to bring us to the time of our birth and to the last days of our life, it is very important to make another jump. It is essential for the patient to be able to visualize the encounter of his or her father and his or her mother. This encounter is to be looked at very realistically. It means, one is able to look at what the psychoanalysts call the "primal scene", and not being afraid of it; one must understand that beyond this "primal scene" there are still other living beings. All the desires, those of their grandparents and their ancestors have been working in order for the person to be here and now.

It is also very important for the subject to understand that he or she can look at their bodies in the grave beyond the tombstone. By enlightening the grave, they are able to look at these bodies in the process of decomposing

and so to see the beginning and the end of life, and even beyond the beginning and the end.

And in this perspective, one comprehends that during all ones life something has always been at work repeating itself. The most important aspect of this being the repetition of living and dying. What is this repetition? And where is it situated? It is found simultaneously in time and within the very heart of our own life.

What is the meaning of life? And why is it that during our life something goes on always constantly repeating itself like a scratched record? What is the nature of this scratch? And what is its meaning?

To understand it one must perceive that there is a mysterious link between the nature of our last illness and this repetition. We have been looking for it our whole life long, and finally the phenomenon of this repetition arrives to the point where it damages the mechanism of life itself and kills us. For it is a question of projecting oneself into life and being pushed forward into death.

It is then possible to hear on the part of the patient something very important to them when they realize what this is about. Something then which is understood internally as a great liberating burst of laughter. It is when the subject becomes conscious of something evident but which was buried in the depth of their being and covered over by many other things. The sudden understanding of what was keeping him or her prisoner. What had locked them in this repetitive system, always interpreting the same situation. Now at last they understand why they have been held prisoner.

Consequently, it is here, in three degrees, that Dynamic Relaxation, for that is the name of this technique, leads to the position of a Koan, of an internal question, which would have been elaborated by this slow and long preparation for death which I just spoke of.

The last part of this preparation for death has now become very simple. The man, or the woman who has integrated what constituted his, or her, interior difficulty can now face this problem in their mind as the Koan of their life. It is the Koan of the birth of this individual, and the meditation can now begin. It is a rich and intense meditation and the master has nothing more to teach to his disciple - and I have nothing more to teach you.

Notes

- (1) *the composite triangular bone forming the back of the pelvis.*
- (2) *the region of the body between the anus and vulva or scrotum.*
- (3) *the small triangular bone ending the spinal column.*
- (4) *muscle which is linked to the anal sphincter.*