

Pathwork on
Learning How to Die and Thereby Learning How to Live

This quote from Pathwork Lecture 81 *Conflicts In the World of Duality*, shows us how to approach our inevitable death in a healthy way. The entire lecture is a beautiful explanation of our entry into dualistic consciousness and how it came about. I found these words from Pathwork Lecture 81 very practical to my day-to-day living on the dualistic plane, inviting me, in my daily review practice, to discover how I really look at death – where do I run toward it, where do I run from it? The metaphor that arose for me was that of the sea anemone – beautiful when open, but so quick to close up when danger arrives. Can I be that rare sea anemone that dares to stay open, undefended, and vulnerable in the presence of all the little deaths in my daily life, these little deaths being my moment-to-moment disharmonies? In learning to do so I learn how to die. And in learning how to die, this lecture says, I learn how to live.

18	When I use the word "death," I do not mean merely physical death. I refer to all the negative aspects of life, everything that opposes your pleasure drive. In that sense death also means loss, change, and the unknown that may actually contain something better than the state you are in, but by the very fact that it is unknown, it becomes terrifying. There is no human being who does not die many little deaths every day.
19	Your attitude toward death in all its aspects determines your ability to live and experience pleasure. The healthier your attitude toward death, the more the life force can flow through you, and therefore the more healthy and enduring will be the gratification of your pleasure drive.

26	Needless to say, you do not have to wait to experience actual physical death in order to learn how to die. Not only can your occasional conscious fear of anything that connotes death help you, but also all the other aspects of death that comprise daily living. If you do not know how to die, you cannot live because you cannot reconcile the opposites that constitute the dualism in your own soul. Hence you cannot free the life force that lies within unutilized.
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31	Many aspects of civilized life stand in the way of the supreme bliss that could be had to some degree even on earth. They are a direct result of the inner duality, which in turn comes from the inability to die. Civilized life constantly imposes on you the alternatives of pleasure and unpleasure. Let us consider, for instance, work that is not always according to your creative abilities and inclinations, and therefore not according to your liking or pleasure. Moreover, the conditions of working, with all their "musts" which stem from political, economic and sociological factors, which again are themselves a result of the
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	<p>inner duality, necessitate a struggle for living. This encourages ambitiousness, drives, and compulsions. In addition, these often confront one with obligations which may only be necessary within the framework of your present life on earth. In these ways a reality principle is created that stands in clear opposition to the longing for and fulfillment of the happiness that could be yours. Here individual inner problems have collectively brought about a state of civilization that makes life unnecessarily difficult. Thus your often unpleasant reality is in many respects unnecessary, and shows up as a collective manifestation of the inner duality. As each person begins to face this problem within, he or she helps to change the world and these conditions in ever so subtle but nonetheless decisive ways. As you focus on these problems within yourself, you become able to cope with the unnecessary duality in a much healthier way. Simultaneously you also help to change the overly harsh collective reality principle.</p>
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37	<p>When your longing for happiness is not instantly fulfilled, this, too, appears as a kind of death. It can often feel like bleak misery, and in that sense seems like death to you. When you give up instant gratification but retain the attitude of keeping alive, in principle, the wish to obtain what you seek, you are using the healthy way of coping with death. The giving up of the wish itself is really an unhealthy acceptance of death. As you become stronger in the healthy way, you are bound to experience that you do obtain what you want eventually. You cannot help but become aware also of the illusion of actual physical death, not by intellectual superimposition, but by the strength that comes from coping with dying everyday, little by little, and confronting it in the healthy manner. Once you overcome this conflict, the pathway will be smoothed toward that real strength of living which lies in the strength of dying.</p>
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42	<p>As to the practical approach in learning to face death in your everyday life, it is so self-explanatory that I hardly need to go into it. Work first toward the recognition and awareness of the basic current of your longing for pleasure supreme, as well as your apprehension of death in all its facets. This is not too difficult; it is a matter of focusing your attention. By looking at your various moods, emotions, fears, apprehensions, and anxieties -- which all represent a form of personal death -- you will see how you really react to death. Find out which of the two wrong ways of coping you use in your emotional response. Learn to become aware of everything from which you cringe; do not repress this fear.</p>
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43	<p>You will then begin to see that you fear not only the negative, but also change, because it is unknown to you. This is the great battle between another pair of opposites. One is the surging spirit going forward, the other is the supposed safety in sameness. Stagnation is a distortion of the timeless element of being.</p>
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44	<p>You may say that you are aware of your longing for happiness as well as of your fear of the negative. No, my friends, not one of you is aware of even the slightest degree to which these two currents exist within you. So much is "conditioned away," if I may use this expression. This work brings into clearer focus the awareness of that for which you basically long, and also what you fear. As this awareness grows, you will understand what I have been talking about.</p>
47	<p>QUESTION: Can you explain a little more clearly how healthy acceptance differs from unhealthy acceptance, for instance in a martyr?</p>
48	<p>ANSWER: The unhealthy way contains, above all, a spirit of defeatism. As I indicated before, the very fear of something makes you rush into it. Your repressed desire for the exact opposite of what you fear, whether or not it is avoidable, makes you abandon the very desire. The healthy way is to say, "Yes, death is unwelcome. I really do not know what will happen and therefore I do not like it. But it is part of life, and when it comes my way, I will be strong enough to accept it. Others have gone through it, and so will I. I will meet it in full awareness of my uncertainty. I am now aware that I still fear it, but I will learn to accept what cannot be avoided, and thus I will eventually lose my fear." This applies also to every other negative facet of life, and can be practiced every day. It is very difficult to put into words. Perhaps it will help you to understand by visualizing a soul movement of tensing and letting go. When you struggle away from something frightening, you tense up and pull away. This very pull in tension pushes you into it. Courage, an honest facing of the self, and a relaxed attitude will produce the necessary strength. The lack of these attributes will either push you into what you fear or make you run from it. Both have the same result, namely, negation.</p>