

**PERSPECTIVE: LIFE IS ALWAYS READY TO START —
A PERSPECTIVE ON DEATH
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During the month of February, I lost three significant individuals to death. My cousin, someone I loved deeply; an old, old friend who used to be my “second” mother as a child, and my mother-in-law (for 32 years). Like so many people in my age bracket, late 50s, people are dying all of the time. It can be unsettling.

SGI President Daisaku Ikeda says in his book *Unlocking the Mysteries of Birth and Death*, “We should be more concerned with how much we live, rather than how long we live.” That makes perfect sense, yet most of us like to be alive now, on this earth. So I search out the wisdom of Nichiren Daishonin through his writings, President Ikeda’s lectures and I chant. Still, it all seems like such a mystery.

Nichiren Daishonin said: “Life is the most precious of all treasures. Even one extra day of life is worth more than ten million *ryo* of gold” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 230). I believe he refers to quality and the opportunity to change one’s karma. It also allows us to reach others. What keeps coming through is that what happens next is mysterious and what we need to do is live each day as if it were our last, to savor our lives and help others chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

Stephen Levine wrote a book, *Who Dies*. His ideas seem to support those of our mentor’s. One idea: “Death puts life in perspective. A great gift which if received in love and wisdom allows the clinging mind to dissolve so that nothing remains but the truth. And we become just the light entering the light” (p. 290). He quotes Walt Whitman: “All goes onward and outward, / Nothing collapses / And to die is different from / What anyone supposes / And luckier.”

In a sense, life is always ready to start. Just when it seems that things are dead within ourselves, things become alive once more. Perhaps our physical death is like our sleep and we reawaken. I put this idea of new beginning — *hon’nin myo* — into haiku: Light on cold water / Running swiftly over stones; / Leaves gone, buds forming.

We are one with everything. We are here now and gone, but even though evidence is removed, we, or they were here. When the tree falls in the forest and we were not there to hear it fall, the effects are still there. When we walk on a beach, the waves may come up and wash our footprints away, but we were there all the same. Life goes on. My poem: Rolling hills, vast sky, / Ocean beyond the horizon, / Footsteps washed away.

My understanding of life and death is that I really *know* nothing, but I expect that it is a great wonder. I hope that fear and narrow thought never bind up my mind. This understanding takes wisdom, not just learning. I like the idea that we must open up the treasures of the heart before we can expand our life. Another poem: Singing, chanting, flying / Dancing new steps / Across unknown time and space.

Thanks, it is just nice to share my thoughts.

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