

A Short Reflection

BURDEN OF LOVE

TEEN & ADULT



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Burden of Love

Last year was an infamous year for air travel. Certainly that is how it was portrayed by the news media. There seemed to be plane crashes everywhere, all the time and TV brought it home most graphically.

A few days before departure, I happened to mention to one of our neighbors that my wife and I were flying down to St. Maarten in the Caribbean for Thanksgiving. I don't recall his exact words, but they were to the effect that if we got there, we really *should* give thanks. I had never been afraid of flying; in fact I had never given it much thought -- until then! To be truthful, I became nervous about the impending flight. I didn't relish the thought of dying in a ball of flaming twisted metal that once had wings. Actually, I didn't relish the thought of dying at all. Then it dawned on me that statistically more than half of my life was already over. Perhaps the time had come to pause, ponder and reflect on living and dying.

Well it turned out that the living part was the tougher of the two to dwell on, for if you really look at life rationally, without any illusions, it does appear to be total nonsense. It's funny at its best and, on the other hand, at the worst it is truly monstrous. The mindlessness of our Universe can be very chilling. For far too many people it leads to complete despair. Personally, I prefer something on the seemingly lighter side, such as Lewis Carroll's Alice stories. It is all a laugh and inconceivably absurd, but to be sure all the grimness and incredibly complex patterns of life are there. Poor Alice, (and us too), she discovered that playtime, with the freedom from discipline and the glory of dirt, sun and air, is too much like life: fast, frantic and fleeting. The whistle blows, and it's all over much too soon. Unlike the animals, most of us, with a hope that there just may be a light beyond that final darkness, resolve to carry on bravely in spite of possessing the knowledge of our ultimate end. And if there is no light?

All of us have been reminded, even if only vicariously by means of the TV, of how vulnerable everything is, including people. It is an occasional reminder that has a nasty habit of making us adults think about endings in relation to ourselves. The thought of personal death is sobering, if not frightening, but should it be? Life has a beginning as well as an end; so there must have been a time when you and I were not. Think about it; is that scary? Where was I -- what was I before? It never gave me any pause for concern; then why should it trouble me that a time will inevitably come when I will cease to be. Incredibly the world will go on without me. Without me!

James Joyce wrote: "Death is the burden of life." Well, if that's so, then dying is just simply one more exchange in the protein chain. No big deal, right? Like hell it's no big

deal! And why? Because of knowledge and love! Death is the burden not of life, but of love, and it is borne by the gift, or curse, if you will, of knowledge. We know the mechanics of death, about the shutting down of the life processes in a dying organism. We know this breakdown ultimately results in the recycling of these basic building blocks. That's a fact; that's what death is, and it is really quite insignificant were it not for love. Love makes life more than mere existence. It is necessary to love and be loved for death to have any impact or meaning at all!

We are here for but a moment; too soon we all shall die, and for all we can know, it is only with fleeting and imperfect memories do we survive our flesh. No one remembers our striding through the land of the living if we have not loved and especially been loved. As we leave the earth, so too we leave our love. That is the only truth and meaning of our very brief appearance. Few of us are Caesars, and so that legacy of love also will pass; to be diluted by the passage of new generations to come, and we shall have had merely a smidgen of immortality.

Where had we been, and where do we go? I very much doubt if mankind will ever know, and I'm sure the answers are hardly important. It's difficult to picture mankind as lumps of complex proteins with neither racial, nor individual destinies. That demands more imagination, or perhaps much less, than I can muster, so I do hope there is light beyond that darkness -- but since death is inevitable, it seems small and wasteful and ungrateful to agonize over the uncontrollable unknown. Rather let us share all that we are and can become. We should seek to find the many kinds of love that will sustain us and others in pain, in fright and anger, and that will bring joy to the mundane, and glory

with the joy. That love will surely carry us, even be it only briefly, beyond the end of our lives seems to be the only certainty.

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