DEATH'S WAKE OF OPPORTUNITY:

Cultivating A Garden of Potential

Sirens shriek. Horns blast.
People rush along streets like darts,
barely noticing one another.
Sitting behind the wheels of vehicles,
they become thoughtless and aggressive.
Obligations, deadlines, and calculated schedules
obliterate spontaneity and perceptual nuances.
Creativity is stifled.
Pressures dictate behaviors.
Clarity is lost.
Relationships suffer.
Personal encounters are far more infrequent
than we'd like them to be.
Our world is blurred by frenzy.

But when death enters the picture,
everything changes.
Suddenly, this cacophony of life
comes to a grinding halt.

When someone who has been a cherished companion
has taken the final breath,
we notice.
Everything comes to a sudden standstill…
a screeching halt.

We view our reality differently.
We wonder how that chaotic lifestyle
outside of our “bereavement bubble”
can continue when our special someone has died.
Maybe we even wish that everyone would pause
to realize the impact of our loss.

Death can be earth-shattering
for those of us who are still alive.
We yearn for a salve to sooth
the turmoil that it evokes within us.
It’s natural for us to regard someone’s death
as a toxic force
that has interrupted and contaminated our lives.
We don’t like being forced to think about
the emptiness incurred by mortality.

But is it possible for death to enrich life?
For a moment, let’s consider
how we can use this riveting loss
as a way to sustain our lives.

Most likely, each of us has been impacted
by someone’s death.
Since we represent only
a minuscule segment of the population,
think of all of the people in our world
who have experienced the same kind of loss.

What an inspiring opportunity this presents
for us to reach out to one another
in a spirit of human bonding
through compassionate alliance!
It represents the epitome
of heartfelt, authentic empathy.
It allows us to feel connected
in spite of an increasingly
impersonal and disconnected society.

Certainly, our individual life stories are unique.
Though we cross paths with others,
it would be impossible
to find two lives that are the same.
Yet the disparity of life narratives
makes no difference
when it comes to the personal anguish
of loss incurred by death.

In the glaring, searing, piercing reality of death,
we can relate to one another on the same level.
We know what it feels like.
We've been there.
Though individual circumstances differ, the essence of
separation from a beloved life companion
hearkens affective similarities.
Far from ambiguous,
reactions to the demise of loved ones
are typified by predictably ubiquitous responses.

We know that the sorrow hurts.
It is profound. It is real.
Our souls are exposed and vulnerable.
When we say to someone that we understand
the depth of this type of suffering,
we can be believed.
We bear witness to the fact
that the distress, the misery,
the utter upheaval of loss can be survived.

In this way, we have a chance
to provide caring support for one another.
Truly, this is at the root of human sharing.
It can bestow upon each of us
a sense of community and camaraderie.

But let's look beyond the personal ties
engendered by reassurances of emotional survival.
The longer we live,
the more losses we endure.
Eventually, they give us reason
to pause and ponder the meaning of life.

We question the value of our chaotic lifestyles.
We begin to see life-rendering enrichment
that we may have ignored.
In other words, our losses prompt us
to "stop and smell the roses" along the way.

Let us open the doors
that confine our souls
and observe the gardens of possibilities
that await our attention.

Look at the beauty of each flower.
Awaken your senses.
Imagine the fragrances.
Delight in the colors.
Feel the soft, velvety textures.
Marvel at nature's intricate designs.

Linger in this garden to survey its surroundings.
Capture images of birds
soaring against azure skies.
Feel the gentle breezes
as trees dance in lilting sways.
Nature reminds us of our roots
and our reasons for being.
We are constituents of the cycles of life.

So when someone who is special to us withers and dies,
we realize that this transition
is part of an earthly process.
That person who began as a seed now has been
transformed into a different earthly element.
Throughout the life we shared,
we secured lasting images
of a blossoming presence
that still remain in our mind's eyes.

We are not alone.
We walk amidst the memories
of colors, fragrances, and textures
that characterized the lives of our loved ones.
We still experience them through our thoughts.
In a changed context,
we continue to witness the beauty
of those lives symbolically represented
by flowers in our minds' gardens.
We feel their presence through our recollections.
We carry with us the bouquets of their spirits.

Through death, then, we are given
gifts of opportunity…
an opportunity to establish ties that bind,
an opportunity to capture the essence
of our physically absent companion,
and an opportunity to forge
continued connections through alternative channels
while appreciating the beauty of that person's life.

Let us hope to abandon stultifying perceptions
that blunt these moments of opportunity.
Let us be awed by the evolution of nature.
Let us joyfully recognize our loved ones' lives
in the context of natural wonders.

As a sequel to death,
let us nurture the buds of regeneration…
in ourselves and among our human comrades,
while coveting the radiant efflorescence
of lives that have passed.

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