

## **“Is death real?” by Didier Weiss**

\*Extracts in italics from “*Non-dual explorations, Return to Paradise Lost*” published by Editions Accarias L'Originel – 2016

From our first breath to our last, the gloomy threat of death prowls tirelessly like a vulture above our human condition.

*“Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return.” (Genesis 3:19)*

What terrible anguish and suffering are generated by this unambiguous phrase, which sounds like a death sentence! What clever manoeuvres to avert the lethal destiny! What endless negotiations to deny, forget, defy, escape the divine error! What unlimited means to delay the irrevocable deadline, day after day, throughout a whole lifetime, which we call a "human life".

Death is a theme that fascinates the “human beings” we think we are. The ever-present death may even slowly but surely consume us without anyone realizing it. Whether it is hidden or not, this existential anguish is the very fuel of each of our actions. It makes us feel really alive; better still, “bon vivant”. Our end is coming! Oh dear... this premonition is a powerful stimulus for non-stop action. We ensure our survival in total amnesia; entertain ourselves into oblivion in order to stay away from the abyss. We relentlessly oust the unnameable to better escape the scary black chasm that is waiting for us to fall in at any moment.

Ironically, death against all odds is a fairly buoyant topic, a prolific generator of stories, an almost inexhaustible source of energy to stay alive and keep shifting further and further away the border of the beyond.

How many blockbusters are based on this frantic attempt to flee the horror of the grim reaper? Isn't our abundant leisure and consumption-oriented society largely here to specifically avoid the one central question of our life: *“What about my death? What about my own disappearance from the face of the Earth?”*

Our choices at every moment are always about “more life and less death” in an effort to dismiss the prospect of our death; this damned death apparently taking us, always closer, one step at a time, to the final resting place.

Let's acknowledge that we usually see the world only through the filter of our thoughts. On the other hand, a non-dual perspective might allow to decode our experience in a completely new and refreshing way, calling into question the inevitable lethal fate of the human condition.

This perspective is a life game-changer that may further demystify the dark threat altogether. This has been described in numerous Hindu, Sufi, Buddhist, Christian traditions, to name a few, because it is often the so-called "mystics" that deal with life and death.

These traditions stay away from assumptions and beliefs, and do not advocate a blind faith in a message, whatever its source. They only refer themselves to a totally radical possibility, which is neither conceptual nor intellectual, but 100% lived, not imagined, 100% alive.

My purpose here is not to review the classic or contemporary non-dual approach or its tools in general, but to try to describe how non-duality may solve the apparent mystery of the nature of death. Let me be direct here. We are not trying to find the mere beginnings of an answer. We are talking about revolutionizing the thinking process, to allow the enigma to dissolve fully, to consume itself forever. We are simply and uniquely concerned with its outright dissolution, nothing less!

The well-known tools such as prayers, meditations, japa recitations, mantras and self-enquiry investigations may have perhaps so far proved to be limited, inadequate, even at times utterly useless. So how to proceed?

My proposal is to start with the basic parameters themselves. We might discover that the impossibility of finding a reliable answer to the question of the nature of death rests essentially and only in the way we ask the question itself!

Isn't it rather awkward to try to define the nature of death? By naming it, we make it real. By making death real, aren't we misreading life? So let's ask ourselves: "*Is death real?*"

First let's draw a parallel. Is it not vain, or even absurd, to elaborate wise theories based on our very limited vision of the horizon of human life, this thin, illusory line which separates life and death, with a before and after, in the same way the "flat-earthers" rested their beliefs in the illusory border of a flat and not round earth? It can of course be argued that the frontier between life and death is not an illusion. Granted, the moments of death and birth are landmarks with a before and after life.

However, each life story concerns, let's say, a well-defined and labelled object. To find the border of any object, it has first to be defined. Conversely, this border defines the object itself.

Consider a piece of pottery placed on a table. We can easily identify both materials, clay and wood. When we single out the piece of pottery, we can outline and describe it accurately: "It is a glazed ceramic cup with a handle. Its shape is flawless." Now, if I happen to drop the earthenware cup, there is a fair chance it will break. Before the fall, the cup was perfect and had a purpose. After the fall, if it is damaged beyond repair, we could say that the cup is "dead" because it now unusable as a cup.

Now watch the white clouds move across the sky. At one moment, you catch a glimpse of the shape of a rabbit. It looks real! The shape evolves with time and turns into the shape of the head of a bear. It really looks like a bear's head to you. For a while, you watch the bear's head moving here and there. There comes a strong gale and all shapes vanish.

What happened to the rabbit, or to the bear's head? You just have to face the obvious: the vision of the rabbit and the bear's head were born ... from your very own imagination. Did they look real? Yes, they did! Were they real? No, they were not.

If we really want to be honest here about death, when it comes to the reality of death, our only concern boils down to this: "*What about me, myself?*" The real question that haunts us revolves around this one question: "*What about my own disappearance?*"

To speak without ambiguity of a state of death or life, we need to isolate and define precisely what - or who - we are referring to as ourselves. What do I call "me, myself" when I say "I"? Otherwise these are mere words and sounds that point to nothing real!

If we look closely enough, "who we think we are" might be nothing more than an undefined, fleeting state as fuzzy as a cloud; or even worse we might go as far as believing to be a "soul".

Coming to this, here is an exchange with Pierre on this concept of soul:

***Pierre:** What is death objectively? A body decomposes and returns to the ground. But what happens to the "soul" of the deceased?*

***Didier:** The "soul" of the deceased was never more than an appearance. So where would it go after death? Are you talking about the character that is dead? Sorry, I can only play the round earth game that has no edge! Understand that I have not seen an edge since I stopped imagining it, just as our elders gave up the vision of a flat earth for a round earth. Nothing changed and the elders invented nothing when they went from flat to round earth. But at one key point, they simply stopped imagining. Now of course, there is "something" that is born and dies, but the good news ... it's not "you"!*

***Pierre:** Have you lost the power of imagination?*

***Didier:** Yes, in a way, I only see the world as it is. And it's so simple, rich and mysterious at the same time. What is mysterious does not rest on speculation about the afterlife; it is in the perfection of the present moment, whatever it appears to be.*

The amount of words that mutually echo each other in the world of ideas and which, by this very movement, seem to prove each other right is rather astounding. These mirrored constructions, including mental reflections, give the illusion of a reality existing there, outside of ourselves here. The first - and perhaps the only - illusion to examine with scrutiny would be the belief that we are individual beings: "*Is there really a 'me' here?*"; "*Are there really 'others' there?*"; "*Are there really independent subjects in a world of objects?*"

This exercise is done by very few seekers for it is not very popular! We intuitively feel that if we go down this road, we might lose everything and rightly so: we will lose all reason!

So what? What would happen if we dared to lose our reason? Has ever an act of reason once and for all stormed the fortress of death? Not that there haven't been many attempts over the millennia. The thing is, they mostly failed ...

At the experimental level, near death experiences – NDEs - are exactly what they are said to be: life experiences bringing a physical body close to death, but in no way do they unravel the mystery.

Forget about our good old common sense. Let's be bold and unreasonable and go exploring, guided by the perfume of the “unspeakable” that is already and always here, but was never even acknowledged.

What if our definition of "myself" merely was simply an imaginary collection of objects; a big pile of arbitrary concepts, thoughts and assumptions, beliefs and certainties, feelings and emotions, memories and associations, fears and prejudices, desires or aversions, hopes and illusions, opinions and ideas, and so forth and so on ... As a result, "myself" turns out to be one more concept ... and no longer is - as we could not anticipate earlier - a reality!

We will not list here all the tools available for this specific exploration; the non-dual message is readily available and quite abundant these days, mainly thanks to Internet. But when you are done with all basic explorations, one single but fundamental question remains: *"When a person dies, whose death is it?"*

This is not an easy question that comes with an easy answer. We could more easily answer the question: *"What dies?"*

When a person dies, the brain stops functioning upon the last breath and the physical body starts breaking down. The body-object shows no more brain activity. It is considered dead. Basically, that's it.

However, if we are to be honest, the questions that concern us are: *"What about My own death?"*; *"What about the death of the people 'I' care for and who care for 'Me'?"*; *"What will happen to 'Me' after 'My' death?"*

This is when we go astray looking for answers in everything and anything ... and we get completely lost.

Let's instead ask this question: *"What would happen if the 'body' object, and even the 'mind' object – our set of thoughts - returned to their world of objects, and ceased to be of any real concern?"*

Here is another exchange with Pierre on this topic:

**Pierre:** *What happens after the death of the physical envelope of individuals like you, who woke up to their true nature beyond concepts?*

**Didier:** *Who we really are is not concerned about the physical death of the individual.*

**Pierre:** *Agreed, since we are the Universal Consciousness, unique and immortal. But what about the little individual consciousness temporally assigned to an individual for the play of lîlâ, not only on the physical plane, but also on other planes?*

**Didier:** *Does a ripple believe it is separated from the ocean? Perhaps it does through sustained mental effort and imagination.*

*Now if/when this imaginary effort stops - which is not strictly speaking an action - separation no longer needs to be imagined.*

**Pierre:** *You say: "What is mysterious does not rest on speculation about the afterlife, it is in the perfection of the present moment, whatever it appears to be." That's surely the ideal way to live our lives. But if nature has provided us with an intellect, it seems only natural to me to ponder about "before and after life."*

**Didier:** *Through the intellect, we can ask questions about zillions of things. Why not question things? This questioning is part of the celebration of life, it is important. But my take would be to stop applying an intellectual logic to the questions. The moment we confuse these intellectual fantasies for reality, and identify with them as separate individuals forgetting our essential nature, we metaphorically have one foot in hell. That's up to you, use your intellect or don't use it, but know that if you do, it will most often be at your own expense ...*

**Pierre:** *Why is this information about the after-death not available?*

**Didier:** *It is not available for the simple reason that it does not describe anything real. It is totally relative here and now, and does not point to any reality there and later.*

*A total lack of imagination leads to only "What is".. Essentially, "What is" is, on one side, all that appears in the field of consciousness and on the other side, this obviousness full of all possibilities: "I am". That's all and it's huge.*

*Now, once this is known, why not elaborate crazy stories of evolution, becoming, birth and death, and come up with unlimited works of literature and esoteric concepts that might keep us busy and entertained?*

*Pierre: So, no clairvoyance, no broader vision?*

*Didier: Sorry for disappointing you, no such thing!*

*Pierre: Do you mean that what you cannot see does not exist, but is only a possibility?*

*Didier: Indeed.*

Let's not stop here, let's continue exploring! Beyond the objects of body and mind, let's now ask again the question: *"What about 'me' after death?"*; and let's try then to find an aspect that remains ever unchanged about this "me".

The systematic analytical method "Not this, not that", otherwise known as "Neti-Neti", is particularly well suited here. If the qualities of honesty and courage are combined with the fearlessness of an explorer, the answer to this pressing question looks like this: there is nothing objective; that is to say, from the world of objects – i.e., perceptions, emotions, and thoughts - that "I" can consider "me", for these keep on changing.

Bereft of my sense of identification, as personal as it is imaginary, with these objects - my body, my mind, my memories, my knowledge, my emotions, my moods, my habits, my traumas and so forth and so on - the list can go forever - the fact remains that "I exist"! There is indeed "something" which I cannot name but seems to be like a presence when I hear the sound "I". And this "I" has always been there, has always been the same when it is stripped of its zillions of identifications.

Let's go back to 10 minutes ago, 10 hours ago, 10 years ago. Let's rewind to our very first memory of "I". If it is not confused with the slightest object, "I" has always been ... the same, intimate and immediate ! Fascinating, isn't it?

But - and here is the quantum leap - is this invisible, unlimited and immutable presence really engaged in time and space? To define a duration and a dimension, you need landmarks and a movement. None of this is found in this obvious "I exist". Presence is always constant, always the same. Presence is always at the same time - now - and it is always in the same place - here.

In a complex chaotic world, filled with births and deaths, engaged in time and space, where would we locate a "me"? Could it be inside a body? Where precisely? In a head? How could we possibly squeeze this timeless non-dimensional presence into any box; inside a human skull for that matter?!

The answer is much simpler and astounding. The so-called "exterior world" is only a modulation of this Presence, a modulation of this evidence that we exist, expressed in our language by this word and sound: "I".

In our direct experience, concepts such as “interior world” and “exterior world” are invalidated. They are proved completely erroneous once and for all. There is That, whose visible aspect is perhaps chaotic human stories and whose tangible yet invisible aspect is this Presence, the one and only "fabric " of the universe, Consciousness.

*"In peace and silence, the skin of the 'I' dissolves and the interior and exterior become One."* Nisargadatta Maharaj

Now let's come back to the question: "*Whose death are we talking about?*"

There is a dissolution, not of the individual, but of the question itself. Once the enigma is solved by the dissolution of the question, life continues, as it has always been, with this paradox: "Nothing is changed, yet everything is changed". It is seen that the individual never really existed except in imagination.

The horrible death that was dreaded all our life turns out to be a metaphysical scam. No one dies for no one was ever born. There has never been anyone and ... oh surprise! Life goes on. And full on!

We can - without waiting! - “rest in peace” and experience life fully without the heavy burden of the separate existence of a "me". This is the real possibility of life flowing spontaneously without a centre, free from an imaginary fear of death.

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*Originally published in the French magazine “3ème millénaire” - Autumn 2016.*