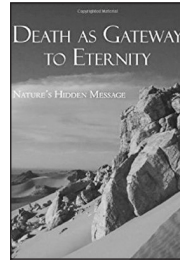


Death as Gateway to Eternity: Nature's Hidden Message

By Hans Küry, Translated by Gillian Harris
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Reviewed by Samuel Bendeck Sotillos

“This great, unborn Self [*Ātmā*], undecaying, undying, immortal, fearless, is indeed *Brahman* [Absolute].”
- *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 4.4.25



Where do we go and what occurs when the physical body is no longer? This question is just as vital as asking where we have come from prior to obtaining this human form. Such existential and metaphysical questions have captivated the human mind the world over since time immemorial. On the whole, contemporary life ignores the reality of any continuation beyond death and dismisses reminders of the impermanence of life. It prefers to give the impression that life on earth is permanent and that there is no reality save physical existence. This goes against the natural order and nothing could be further from the truth. It is in relationship with the whole of existence—with the mountains, stars, animals, plants and fellow human beings—that we can glean the meaning of the enigma of life and death. Enigma permeates the entirety of human existence, “We are born in mystery, we live in mystery, and we die in mystery.”¹ All

¹ Huston Smith, “The Way Things Are: An Interview with Timothy Beneke,” in *The Way Things Are: Conversations with Huston Smith on the Spiritual Life*, ed. Phil Cousineau (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2003), p. 30.

of time is contained in the present moment—what has been termed the “eternal now” which connects the ephemeral to the eternal or time to the timeless. “[I]n that supreme moment all moments are contained”.² From this point of view, life and death are inseparable like two facets of one seamless Reality known to the ancients as a doorway—but a doorway to where?

The mystery of the present moment transcends the spatio-temporal sequence of normal interpretations of chronological time:

Eternal Now of God-remembrance:
See how for man time passes by.
In spiritual life there is no time:
Only the Now in the Divine, only Eternity.
The outer man experiences the fullness of existence;
The inner man reposes in God’s stillness.
The Path: what is the last word of the song?
The melody of Paradise: Peace, Peace.³

It is through the timeless and universal wisdom found across the diverse cultures of the world, known as the perennial philosophy that the phenomenon of life, death and the posthumous states beyond the physical existence of the body are illuminated. This wisdom is “the *philosophia perennis*—the primordial doctrine that transcends every articulated definition, lying behind all the diverse traditional forms and illuminating them from within.” (p. 105)

The sapiential traditions ask a central question of all human beings that directs consciousness to a transcendent reality beyond the corporeal realm:

“[W]hen one realizes his own true nature he will be free from birth and death... if you free yourself from birth and death, you should know where you are. Now your body separates into the four elements. Where are you?”⁴

² Śrī Ānandamayī Mā, quoted in *The Essential Śrī Ānandamayī Mā: Life and Teachings of a 20th Century Indian Saint*, trans. Ātmānanda, ed. Joseph A. Fitzgerald (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2007), p. 91.

³ Frithjof Schuon, “Now,” in *Adastra and Stella Maris* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2003), p. 55.

⁴ “Three Gates of Tosotsu,” in *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones: A Collection of Zen and Pre-Zen Writings*, ed. Paul Reps (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 1989), p. 126.

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