

Rabbi Wine says:

The best way to deal with death is by happiness

By SUSAN AVERILL

When you die, you die. You don't expire and you don't pass away; those terms are a salve for the living, a way of easing a tormenting wound.

"People don't like to say 'die,'" Rabbi Sherwin Wine said. "There's something so final about death." Man has dealt with the problem by dismissing or denying it. That doesn't make it any less inevitable.

Some persons, the Birmingham Temple rabbi said, have wrapped their whole life philosophy around death, deeming it more meaningful than life. To them, he said, it's a privilege to a "better life."

Others have rejected death, most of them unable to justify it in religious terms—partly because a scientific revolution has discouraged people from faith in the unknown. Sift, others have accepted the fact of death without making an attempt to explain or interpret it. Such are the existentialists, who define death as meaningless in terms of life.

DEATH—PERISH THE thought, and you may have to face it the hard way. One woman went from the hospital to the rabbi. She had cancer, he said. At 37, she had to deal with something that she had never faced before. A Jesus freak from Ann Arbor took the rabbi aside. "Look, I want to tell you something. So many people are saving for this life. They're going to live. I'm not. I shall continue to live with my Father in Heaven."

Sitting alone in her apartment, a widow wondered if anyone would notice if she took sick and lay dying. "Everyone has a fear of death. The person who says he doesn't have it is a liar," Rabbi Wine said.

Mourning, too, is very difficult. People don't want to face death, to recognize it. That's why morticians do their best to create an aura of life around a cold corpse.

Why fear death? The old explanations won't do. Increasing secularism has made death difficult to believe while couched in religious terms. Instead, hoping to live vicariously, many people regard their children as their immortality... their children who've moved 3,000 miles away.

People come into our lives and leave, the rabbi said. It's terrifying to live in a world of strangeness and strangers. The possibility of dying alone without friends and relatives near, makes the experience all the more poignant.

"DEATH IS REAL," Rabbi Wine said. "Let's face it. Death is personal. Nobody else can do your dying for you."

"The world is not just. Good people die young and bad people live longer."

But there are ways of coping with this.

It's very important to believe that you deserve to live, the rabbi said. "Many believe we deserve to die. It's the old Adam and Eve story: we deserve to be condemned and only are we rescued by God's mercy."

Another affirmation: "I prefer happiness to mere survival." Living for survival's sake can mean drugery, pressure, and a special kind of panic. Often, he said, those whose existence is survival only say they feel dead. "To feel dead is to be dead. The purpose of life is happiness, and you can learn skills for happiness."

Stress quality of life over quantity. The rabbi talked of a man who lived to be 91. His last 30 years, the rabbi said, were spent in front of a television. "As far as I'm concerned, he lived a very short life. I'd rather die at 60 with excitement than at 90, watching TV."

Work towards good health. People who worry about exercise usually get theirs by shifting their weight while watching television. At the same time, they exercise their jaws by eating and increase their lung power by smoking.

Know that there is always risk involved if you want to live fully. Risk-taking was exemplified by a man who wanted to quit his job at 52 and go to law school.

HIS WIFE THOUGHT he was crazy. She wanted him to stay put and collect enough pension to go to Florida after his retirement.

Know also, that you can choose the time of your own death, the rabbi said. "You shouldn't say that, Sherwin." Recently, an executive and his wife committed suicide together. By doing that, the rabbi said, they weren't victims of someone else's life scripts.

When death comes close, remember the living. A man whose wife died, decided to take a vacation. The rabbi said he did not want to sit and see people grieving. He wasn't feeling them—he just wasn't prepared.

"There is nothing more I can do for my wife. She is dead," the rabbi quoted the man. "You cannot help the dead in the house of the living. I admired his guts. I admired his integrity... and I told him that."

"We deserve to live with pleasure and with happiness. That is the destiny of our own desire," Rabbi Wine concluded.

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Candidates' night set by Democrats

A candidates' night for City of Farmington council candidates will be conducted by the Farmington Democratic Club on Oct. 2, in the Farmington Community Center at 8:15 p.m. Invited to participate are the five candidates running for the three seats to be filled at the Nov. 4 election. Candidates are incumbents Ralph Yoder and William Hartsock, and challengers Alton Bennett, James Moore and Albert Holm.

The meeting is open to the public and non-members are invited to attend. The format will be the same as past club candidates' nights. There will be an opening statement by each candidate followed by questions from the audience and from a panel of club members who live in the city.

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