



Body, Mind & Spirit

The End of Fear: A Spiritual Path for Realists

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The plaintive cry, “Is this all there is?” may come, according to authors Richard and Bonney Schaub, when the uneasy realization that “we live on borrowed time” brings with it the aching reminder that something that was “supposed to have happened” has not yet occurred; a significant, symbolic birthday may give notice to the fact that “life no longer stretches out into an end-less horizon of possibilities.” Daily events point to the fact of life’s fragility and impermanence, and the “assumption of immortality,” so common to the adolescent years, has become a faint memory. The Buddha himself was shocked into his spiritual quest by such awareness.

The authors have identified the predominant Western world-views that attempt to deny impermanence and vulnerability, and offer cogent reasoning as to why these attempts must fail. The first, religion, says that “Change, loss, and death happen, yes—but they are all happening within God’s world, so there is ultimately nothing to fear.” The Schaub describe this as “a supremely attractive view, one that captivates the hearts and minds of millions around the world.” But, they say, this view only holds up as long as one can continue to believe in a “benevolent God,” a belief that is often eroded by world, or personal, events; in Europe, the horrors of World War II and the deaths of over 40 million people posed a challenge to the belief in a protective God. The second world-view, that of the skeptic, holds that one’s own mind has the power to perceive the truth about life. This view is also flawed because it ignores the limits imposed by one’s subjectivity, lack of knowledge, and faulty perceptions. The third, that of the materialist, collapses when one observes that those who have created shelter for themselves in their wealth may see their vast fortunes wiped out; those who hide in relationships may lose lovers and friends; those obsessed with physical beauty and fitness also age, suffer, and die.

The Schaub ask, “Where do you turn when your primary defense has left you and the

answers it gave you have failed?” Although they recognize that one could not function if overwhelmed by awareness of the fragility of one’s own life, they assert that the instinct to deny one’s vulnerability takes another kind of toll, resulting in failed relationships and self-soothing addictions to food, alcohol, drugs, or sex. They suggest taking a close, compassionate, and grateful look at one’s own fear, recognizing that it is part of the survival mechanism of the species, and an honest response to the fact that one’s life is “subject to change and loss at any moment.” Rather than offering magical solutions or illusory protection, the Schaub offer the “Way of Vulnerability,” a practice that faces the fact of the fragility and impermanence of all living beings with courage and serenity. They offer an exercise to help soften and strip away defenses and denial of one’s impermanent state, suggesting that one go about the day looking at each human being as “a soul briefly here.” Such practice leads to the realization that one inhabits a community of impermanence, and that accepting one’s full membership in this community allows one to feel “more human, more soulful, more real,” and experience the world as at once more painful and more precious.

The authors present research that gives evidence of a brain-state called “absolute unitary being,” and confirms that one’s innate awareness that “there is more to life” is accurate; further research may take the mystery out of higher-level brain functioning and demonstrate how one can access it to enhance one’s life. Sharing stories of people who have experienced life-threatening or near-death events and have come to the realization that, “Beyond all the change and loss in life, the ground of being is love.” The authors suggest that death has no power over one who has experienced this love, and that even a momentary taste of it can change a life.

Richard Schaub, PhD, and his wife Bonney Gulino Schaub, RN, MS, are international teachers of professional and self-development, and serve as guides on sacred art and meditation retreats. They co-founded the New York Psychosynthesis Institute and are on the faculty of the Italian Society for Psychosynthesis Therapy in Florence. They are the authors of *Dante’s Path*, and *Healing Addictions: The Vulnerability Model of Recovery*; Bonney Schaub is a contributor to *Holistic Nursing: A Handbook for Practice*.