

PERSPECTIVE: Diana's Death Can Spur Us To Act
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I watch, silently. Gruesome footage of a car wreck, the Mercedes crumpled against concrete like a cheap tin can. Princess Diana is dead, and in the moments that follow, timeless, borderless, the magnitude of this incident seeps into the cracks of all my armor — all the fallacies that encourage us to believe that youth and beauty, fame and fortune can somehow immunize us against death.

“Death is a condition of human life — no one can escape it,” SGI President Ikeda writes. “A civilization that has forgotten death, therefore has forgotten human beings. And a civilization that has forgotten human beings will not bring people happiness” (*Learning From the Goshu: The Eternal Teachings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 186).

As a culture, sadly, we neither revere life nor respect death wholeheartedly, and find ourselves strangely numbed in the stark light of both. Yes, we have rituals in place to keep time — the baby and bridal showers, commencements and graduations. Weddings, anniversaries, birthdays and funerals, these times allotted to pay our dues. Yet life and death are one intrinsic ebb and flow, a tide that cannot be contained, bottled, trundled out at the “appropriate” moments. Collectively, as a culture, we ignore death until it cannot be ignored, and then we suffer its shock waves as though for the first time.

When we speak of the injustice of a life snatched from us too soon, mourn its brevity, rage at the fleeting instant where life is transformed into death, surely it is because we cling to the illusion that life and death are separated by a chasm, an abyss that is not fathomable, that is in some mysterious way waiting to snatch us into its shadows. Would we harbor these same notions if we accepted death as a “condition” of life and prepared ourselves for both life and death equally? Would we spend as much time as we do, in the words of Shakespeare’s Hamlet, “strutting and fretting” our “hour upon the stage”? If the inescapable truth of our mortality were as palpable to us as our friends, lovers, wives and husbands, children and parents? Would we choose something greater for ourselves, moment to moment, if we lived as though each breath were priceless, an extended gift?

As I watch Diana’s life chronicled on television, I grow more and more convinced that *how* we live is everything. The significant difference lies in whether we are simply alive, or truly living. I watch, rapt, as the normally guarded and canny British public are thawed in the warmth of a woman’s life that, whether they knew her or not, deeply touched their own. This is the power inherent in a truly brilliant life. One that radiates compassion, wisdom, humor and humility. One that embraces the spirit and well-being of the people.

An Israeli tourist comments, “They are crying, they are laughing, they are speaking...” referring to the outpouring of sentiment from Diana’s countrymen. And I silently think, yes, they are living. “She moved the British people, by moving among them,” adds Ted Koppel. And again I am moved by this life-affirming statement.

The people’s princess, she is called, and the reason is apparent in the diverse masses of humanity thronging to pay their respects. There is no distinction here — all ages, ethnicities and social classes stand shoulder to shoulder. All the faces that the cameras pick up are fully keen on the moment, and there is no mistaking the rare and precious atmosphere this creates. How powerful. How noble is the condition of death when the condition of life has been embraced with integrity, with humanity.

Princess Diana rose to fairy-tale status upon wedding Prince Charles. Her wealth and beauty and newfound celebrity were lauded and dissected in every imaginable way. How easy it would have been, given the circumstances, to live a life of ease (at least on the

surface) without raising an eyebrow in undue stress.

Yet Diana's life is a testament to a dynamic seeking spirit, a true wish for the happiness of others and sincere determination to do all in her power to create value and lend comfort wherever she could. Her brother, Earl Spencer, spoke, too, of the fact that "it was her innermost feelings of suffering that made it possible to connect." By pursuing happiness for herself and others she is eternal in spirit. She will continue to inspire and encourage others by her example.

In the televised memorial service, Diana's brother, makes a straightforward, heart-rending eulogy. With simplicity, he touches on a prime point in describing his sister's bafflement at why the media so often seemed intent on causing her harm: "Genuine goodness is threatening to those at the opposite end of the moral spectrum." I am very moved by this observation, so clearly does it reflect the Latter Day of the Law where, as SGI President Ikeda states, what is false will be revered as true, and what is true will be denigrated as false. Therefore, to uplift the banner of truth in one's life, to live true to one's principles, will be met with persecution in every imaginable form. From the insidious and subtle to the vehement and even violent.

Our age embodies this seemingly impenetrable cloud of delusion, dulling and obscuring the light of humanity. Princess Diana's passing will mark this period in world history as did the deaths of John F. Kennedy, Dr. Martin Luther King, Mohandas K. Gandhi and other remarkable humanitarians.

In the parable of the good physician, the father must send word of his own death before his children will take the efficacious medicine. Only in their grief over his loss can they see their way to believing in the medicine's great healing properties. Diana's loss will spur us into action in the same way. Toward peaceful causes, toward adopting the spirit of openness that she championed, toward taking steps to illuminate our encounters with others, leaving anyone we meet the better for having known us. I believe this.

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