

## **A Positive Attitude Towards Death**

By Susan Gammage <sup>1</sup>

How we think about death has an effect on us. If we believe death is the end of life, it will negatively impact the way we live our lives, causing degradation and leading us to activities which debase us, bringing us down and weakening our thoughts.

The conception of annihilation is a factor in human degradation, a cause of human debasement and lowliness, a source of human fear and abjection. It has been conducive to the dispersion and weakening of human thought ... ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í World Faith, p. 265)

Why is it important for us to understand this? If we believe in the existence of another world beyond this one, it will cause us to develop virtues enabling us to advance upward to higher spiritual perceptions instead of becoming incompetent, weak-willed and stop developing spiritually:

...the realization of existence and continuity has upraised man to sublimity of ideals, established the foundations of human progress and stimulated the development of heavenly virtues; therefore it behoves man to abandon thoughts of non-existence and death which are absolutely imaginary and see himself ever living, everlasting in the divine purpose of his creation. He must turn away from ideas which degrade the human soul, so that day by day and hour by hour he may advance upward and higher to spiritual perception of the continuity of the human reality. If he dwells upon the thought of non-existence he will become utterly incompetent; with weakened will-power his ambition for progress will be lessened and the acquisition of human virtues will cease. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í World Faith, pp. 265-266)

We often think that being given a diagnosis which suggests that death is imminent, is the worst possible news, so it's comforting to know that our physical death isn't the end of life.

If your days on earth are numbered, you know that everlasting life awaits you. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 111)

We often think that when someone is killed, that's it's the greatest tragedy, but we know that there is another life which holds greater hope and happiness.

All men are in God's hands, and even if they do get killed we know there is another life beyond this that can hold great hope and happiness for the soul. (Shoghi Effendi, Lights of Guidance, p. 237, #791)

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<sup>1</sup> Prepared by David Bowie (2023) for posting, with permission of author, at [https://bahai-library.com/gammage\\_various\\_essays](https://bahai-library.com/gammage_various_essays)

Many people are particularly distressed when a small child dies. The following two stories are recounted by Lady Blomfield in her book *The Chosen Highway*

- 1) Riḍváníyyíh Khánum related that when her child was ill, the Master came and gave two pink roses to the little one, then, turning to the mother, He said in His musical voice so full of love: "Be patient."  
That evening the child passed away.  
"Riḍváníyyíh," said the Master, "there is a Garden of God. Human beings are trees growing therein. The Gardener is Our Father. When He sees a little tree in a place too small for her development, He prepares a suitable and more beautiful place, where she may grow and bear fruit. Then He transplants that little tree. The other trees marvel, saying: 'This is a lovely little tree. For what reason does the Gardener uproot it?'  
"The Divine Gardener, alone, knows the reason.  
"You are weeping, Riḍváníyyíh, but if you could see the beauty of the place where she is, you would no longer be sad.  
"Your child is now free, and, like a bird, is chanting divine joyous melodies.  
"If you could see that sacred Garden, you would not be content to remain here on earth. Yet this is where your duty now lies." p. 216)
  
- 2) When my own mother made the "great change" from one world of God to another, 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote a very beautiful tablet to me, in which He spoke of my mother as being "in the garden of rejuvenation." One day a friend, who had not yet heard of the tablet of the Master, told me of a vivid dream she had of my mother, whom she had known and loved. "I seemed to be in a marvellous garden, where every type of rare and beautiful flower was in bloom. Moving about among the flowers was a young girl. She seemed to be in a state of inexpressible joy over the loveliness of her garden. Her voice, as she chanted, was full of the ecstasy of a complete happiness. She listened to the song of birds, and inhaled the odour of the flowers as though she were filling her soul with their fragrance. Suddenly she turned towards me, as though conscious that someone was there beside herself. The young girl facing me with an enchanting smile was your mother, in the full beauty of youth." (pp. 216-217)

Why do we fear death? Because we don't understand what will happen next, so our imaginations fill in the rest.

Through his ignorance, man fears death; but the death he shrinks from is imaginary and absolutely unreal; it is only human imagination. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í World Faith, p. 264)

As our lives in this world come to an end, and we remember what's in store for us next, we can be full of joy:

When our days are drawing to a close let us think of the eternal worlds, and we shall be full of joy! ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 111)

If we can look at death as if someone has gone on a trip and we'll see them again, but we just don't know when, it will help.

The time has come when we must part, but the separation is only of our bodies; in spirit we are united forever. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í Scriptures, p. 503)

Baha'u'llah tells us that death should be a messenger of joy:

O SON OF THE SUPREME! I have made death a messenger of joy to thee.  
Wherefore dost thou grieve? (Baha'u'llah, The Arabic Hidden Words #32)

I think what He means is that death offers a better quality of life:

Death proffereth unto every confident believer the cup that is life indeed. It bestoweth joy, and is the bearer of gladness. It conferreth the gift of everlasting life. (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CLXV, p. 345)

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A story and a poem about death to end with.

### 1) Death - What A Wonderful Way To Explain It

A sick man turned to his doctor as he was preparing to leave the examination room and said, "Doctor, I am afraid to die. Tell me what lies on the other side."

Very quietly, the doctor said, "I don't know."

"You don't know? You're, a Christian man, and don't know what's on the other side?"

The doctor was holding the handle of the door; on the other side came a sound of scratching and whining, and as he opened the door, a dog sprang into the room and leaped on him with an eager show of gladness.

Turning to the patient, the doctor said, "Did you notice my dog? He's never been in this room before. He didn't know what was inside. He knew nothing except that his master was here, and when the door opened, he sprang in without fear. I know little of what is on the other side of death, but I do know one thing ... I know my Master is there and that is enough." <https://academictips.org/blogs/what-lies-on-the-other-side-of-life/>

### 2) A Letter from Heaven

To my dearest family, some things I'd like to say.

But first of all, to let you know, that I arrived okay.  
I'm writing this from heaven.  
Here I dwell with God above.

Here, there's no more tears of sadness;  
Here is just eternal love.

Please do not be unhappy just because I'm out of sight.  
Remember that I am with you every morning, noon and night.  
That day I had to leave you when my life on earth was through.  
God picked me up and hugged me and He said, "I welcome you."  
"It's good to have you back again,  
you were missed while you were gone.  
As for your dearest family,  
they'll be here later on.  
I need you here so badly, you are part of my plan.  
There is so much that we can do, to help our mortal man."

God gave me a list of things, that he wished for me to do.  
And foremost on the list, was to watch and care for you.  
And when you lie in bed at night the day's chores put to flight.  
God and I are closest to you.... in the middle of the night.

When you think of my life on earth, and all those loving years.  
Because you are only human, they are bound to bring you tears.  
But do not be afraid to cry; it does relieve the pain.  
Remember there would be no flowers, unless there was some rain.  
I wish that I could tell you all that God has planned.  
But if I were to tell you, you wouldn't understand.  
But one thing is for certain, though my life on earth is over.  
I'm closer to you now, than I ever was before.

There are rocky roads ahead of you and many hills to climb;  
But together we can do it by taking one day at a time.  
It was always my philosophy and I'd like it for you too;  
That as you give unto the world, the world will give to you.  
If you can help somebody who is in sorrow and pain;  
Then you can say to God at night. "My day was not in vain.

And now I am contented - that my life was worthwhile.  
Knowing as I passed along the way I made somebody smile."  
So if you meet somebody who is sad and low;  
Just lend a hand to pick them up, as on your way you go.  
When you're walking down the street and you've got me on your mind;  
I'm walking in your footsteps only half a step behind.

And when it's time for you to go...from that body to be free.  
Remember you're not going...you're coming here with me.  
(Author Ruth Ann Mahaffey. <https://fastfuneralprinting.com/a-letter-from-heaven/>)