

Dancing With Our Death

by Professor Michael Myers

“Everyman carries his own death with him and dances with it through his life,” observed the late social critic Ivan Illich in “Medical Nemesis: The Expropriation of Health.”

The dance intensifies and becomes more intimate with each passing day, week, month, and year. The “Grim Reaper” presses upon the core of our being. He is distracting, unnerving; a reminder of the impermanence of all that we see, touch and smell, thrusting unexpected and unwanted change into our lives.

How do we react? How do we confront that which we do not wish to confront? Where do we look for comfort and shelter? Where do we seek distraction and denial?

Collectively, at an annual cost of more than \$2 trillion, Americans migrate their insurance cards in hand-to-clinics and hospitals, where they exchange money, premiums and promissory notes for the promise of extended life. Hospitals have become modern-day temples wherein we bow before the “alter of the lab test,” presenting bodies for inspection, invasion, and surgical modification by the high priests of our time: board-certified allopathic physician on the payroll of logo-marketed “health systems.”

Earlier generations danced over the graves of their dead ancestors. This generation dances to the marketing themes of Pfizer and Merck, reciting lyrics about lower cholesterol, improved sexual performance, and drug-induced sleep. It endures the poisons of chemotherapy, the burns of radiation, and some 90,000 fatal infections from hospital-borne organisms.

Yoga Master B.K.S. Iyengar, in “Light on Life,” tells us that while western thought ascribes all evil to the Devil, yoga categorizes evil into “The Five Afflictions”:

(1) Ignorance,

(2) Pride,

(3) Attachment,

(4) Aversion, and

(5) Fear of Death or Clinging to Life.

Iyengar says the fifth affliction—Fear of Death—operates at the instinctual level, arising not so much from the fear of losing our bodies, but from the fear of losing our innermost identity, the ego.

It is understandable, therefore, that in the 21st century we ask the medical establishment to interpose itself between us and death. Nevertheless, while dancing with it, we should be mindful of Illich's assertion that "The medical establishment has become a major threat to health."

Rituals in medical clinics may be no more effective than those at religious shrines.

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