

## **Dying While Living**

The process of withdrawal of the soul current from the lower part of the body to the eye center has also been called by saints and mystics, 'dying while living.' This is so, because the process of vacating the body of all consciousness is akin to the process of dying. In natural death, the soul vacates the body starting from the lower extremities, and gradually moves upwards. As the process of withdrawal proceeds, the parts vacated become senseless. And when the body has been entirely vacated, we say that the person has died. Now, the same process is gone through in "dying while living," but with two significant differences. In spiritual practice the process is voluntary, unlike the natural death, which is involuntary. In "dying while living" death is induced by the practitioner's own will. He can bring back the soul within the body when he likes, as he can withdraw it at his will. Secondly, the process of involuntary death is extremely painful, but the voluntary death of the spiritual practitioner is as blissful as the other is painful. Says Bullah in a *kafi*:

People in whose bones love makes its abode,  
They verily die while they are still living.  
Ecstasy seeps into every pore of their body,  
And nothing remains hidden from their eyes.

Again, in a couplet he writes :

O Bullah, in Islam I ever find  
 special comfort in hijrat :<sup>1</sup>  
 I die daily and I daily come to life.  
 I am daily in transit.

There are numerous examples from other mystics which convey the same truth. St. Paul says in the *Bible*, "I die daily."<sup>2</sup> Also, in the Gospel according to St. John it is written, "I say unto thee except a man be born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God."<sup>3</sup> To rise above the physical body and to enter the spiritual realms within, is what is implied by the expression 'to be born again'. Since this is possible only through spiritual practice and consequent spiritual growth, after being initiated by a Master, the real birth occurs only when one is connected with the Word by the Master at the time of initiation. In this sense, 'being born again' also refers to the day of initiation by a Master. Kabir says in one of his poems that those who have mastered the practice of dying while living become free from the delusion of this world, and are liberated forever from the bondage of transmigration. "He dies while living and comes back to life again, thus merging into the *Void*."<sup>4</sup> Living in the sense-world, he rises above it, and is thrown not in the turbulent ocean

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1. Muslims have given the name *hijrat* to the departure of prophet Mohammed from Mecca to Medina. The Muslim calendar commences from this date. Bulleh Shah, in his Sufi style, considers the withdrawal of the soul from the nine sense outlets to the tenth hidden door as *hijrat*. And, rising from the realm of duality to enter the unity of God is called by him, 'entering Islam'.
  2. I Corinthians 15:31
  3. John 3:3
  4. 'Void' here means the pre-creation stage.

of existence.”<sup>1</sup> In the Dialogue, “Phaedo,” Socrates has defined a philosopher as one who pursues the art of dying while living: “For as many as rightly apply themselves to Philosophy aim at nothing else than to die.”<sup>2</sup> Continuing, to clarify what he means— withdrawing the soul from the body—he remarks that ordinary people do not understand the true import of his statement: “They are ignorant of the sense in which true philosophers desire to die.”<sup>3</sup> The House of Guru Nanak in the *Adi Granth* imparts identical teaching: “Where one has to go after death, attain that state while still living.”<sup>4</sup> “If one dies while living, and from death comes back to life, he attains to salvation indeed.”<sup>5</sup> The process of withdrawing the soul current from the rest of the body to the eye center does not only result in an extremely blissful experience, but also in emancipation from delusion, from duality. Soami Ji says :

Abide thou in the eyes after collecting  
 yourself as a unity.  
 Duality will vanish here when you fix  
 your gaze on the Light.

*Sar Bachan p. 152*

Some Persian mystics have dwelt on this theme in even greater detail. Says Shams-i-Tabriz: “The lovers die of their own free will. And this death, before their Beloved, is like sugar to them. Their Master opens their

1. *Adi Granth*: p. 332

2. *Five Dialogues of Plato*, Everyman's Library, edited by Ernest Rhys: pp. 131 and 132.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Adi Granth*: M.1., p. 25.

5. *Adi Granth*: M.3., p. 550.

hidden eye, whereas all the rest die as stark-blind. The mystics go to the Beloved with great delight; the ignorant depart in darkness and in disgrace. And, those in-looking lovers who waste not their nights in slumber, die without fear and without separation. In great joy and ecstasy they depart from this world to be in His presence." And, Rumi has this to say on such a death: "Die, O friend, before your death, if you seek life everlasting. Yea, die before dying, O , you of good sense, and give your life to the Beloved. It is not a death, which takes you into the grave; indeed it is the death which takes you to light from darkness. It is not a death, which takes you into the grave, it is a change which takes you to a banquet. You are one who has a body without a body. Be not afraid, therefore, of coming out of your body and departing from this life." Saint Paltu, the well-known north Indian mystic says in this context: "All people die, but rare is the one who knows how to do it. O Paltu, the one who dies while living, dies in bliss, of his own free will."<sup>1</sup> "While still living, he dies, but comes back to life again. Whosoever can do this, gets released from the bonds of transmigration."<sup>2</sup>

Quoting from the *Qura'n*, Bulleh Shah brings out the true import of the holy verse :

"Die thou before thy death," says the *Qura'n*;  
 Bring me back to life from death, O Friend.  
 O Bullah, the Lord has come to my house,  
 Entertain Him with a sequence of dances, O friend.

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1. *Saint Paltu*: Part 3, Sakhi 99.

2. *Saint Paltu*: Part 1, Kundali 72

In another *kafi* he says :

I give you sound advice, if only you were  
to set your heart on it.

The dead will rise on the day of resurrection,<sup>1</sup>  
but the lover will never die.

If you die before your death, such a death will  
indeed be priceless.