



The Five Invitations

by Frank Ostaseski

Discovering What Death Can
Teach Us About Living Fully

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Love and death are the great gifts that
are given to us: mostly, they are
passed on unopened.

Rainer Maria Rilke

Death is not waiting for us at the end of the road.

Death is always with us, in the marrow of every passing moment. She is the secret teacher hiding in plain sight. She helps us discover what matters most. And the good news is we don't have to wait until the end of our lives to realize the wisdom that death has to offer us.

Frank Ostaseski (p.1)

The Five Invitations

1. Don't Wait
2. Welcome everything, push away nothing
3. Bring your whole self to the experience
4. Find a place of rest in the middle of things
5. Cultivate don't know mind

Don't Wait

- “Our lives are not solid or fixed. Knowing this intimately is how we prepare for death, for loss of any kind, and how we come to fully embrace constant change.” (p.26)
- “We are not just our past; we are becoming. We can release grudges. We can forgive. We can free ourselves of resentment and regret before we die.” (p.26)
- “Don't wait. Everything we need is right in front of us. Impermanence is the doorway to possibility. Embracing it is where true freedom lies.” (p.26)
- “Luckily, we don't have to wait until we are sick or dying to embrace our own impermanence. Any major life-changing event provides us with this opportunity.” (p. 41)

Welcome Everything, Push Away Nothing

- “Accepting life *as is* means that we make peace with things as they are rather than trying to force them to be the way we want them to be (and getting frustrated that we can’t). Instead of spinning a story that we then try to live into, we open to a way things are and accept that we are completely human.” (p. 85)
- “Pain + Resistance = Suffering.” (p. 91)
- “Love is the human quality that allows us to welcome everything, not just what we prefer most...In love there is no separation...Love breeds love.” (p. 114)

Bring Your Whole Self to the Experience

- “To be whole, we need to include, accept, and connect all parts of ourselves. We need acceptance of our conflicting qualities and the seeming incongruity of our inner and outer worlds.” (p. 116)
- “Wholeness does not mean perfection. It means no part left out.” (p. 116)
- “With acceptance, what emerges is a deep trust in what is. We release ourselves completely from the comparison, assessment, and rejection of the inner critic. We stop blaming ourselves for having desires and wants, and instead accept these desires as a flavor of love, one that expresses our hearts’ deepest longing for what is true and real.” (p. 148)

Find a Place of Rest in the Middle of Things

- “We often think of rest as something that will come to us when everything else in our lives is complete: at the end of the day, when we take a bath; once we go on holiday or get through all our to-do lists. We imagine that we can only find rest by changing our circumstances.” (p. 182.)
- “Finding a place of rest isn’t about adding another task to your already too-long to-do list. Nor does it mean napping more during your workday (though this may prove helpful).” (p. 184)
- “Rest is a choice—a choice to be alert, to bring your attention to this moment.” (p. 184)
- “Multitasking is a myth that only serves to seize our attention and exhaust us. At the end of the day, it is neither enjoyable nor productive. Let’s face it: none of us have that superpower; we can only live in one moment at a time.” (p. 184)
- “Resting in this open awareness, we release ourselves from the habits of managing our circumstances and striving for control as ways to avoid pain and gain pleasure. We have more space, more freedom from reactivity. We are not denying, justifying, or rationalizing; we are allowing.” (p. 189)

The Three Poisons – Root Causes of Suffering

Wheel of Samsara (Cycle of life and death) and Insights from Martin Aylward, Buddhist Teacher, France (p. 190-191)

- Demand - Craving (greed)
 - “That the objects of our desire provide us with lasting satisfaction, so we feel fulfilled, whole, and complete... We mistakenly believe our happiness is dependent on reaching our goal.”
- Defense - Aversion (hatred)
 - “Shows up as anger, hatred, bullying, loneliness, intolerance, or fear.”
 - “We habitually resist, deny, and avoid unpleasant feeling, circumstances, and people, whatever we do not like or want. Defense traps us in a vicious cycle of finding conflict and enemies everywhere. It reinforces our mistaken perceptions that we are separate from everything and everyone.”
- Distract - Ignorance (delusion)
 - “It blinds us to the way reality works, giving rise to the tendency to pull (demand) and push (defend) against life. We misperceive the nature of things, which is that they are both interdependent and impermanent. Instead, we get lost in a loop of distractions as a way of disconnecting from our pain.”

Cultivate Don't Know Mind

- “Ignorance is usually thought of as the absence of information, being unaware. But it’s more than just “not knowing.” It means that we know something, but it is the wrong thing. Ignorance is misperception. The ‘don’t know’ mind represents something else entirely. It is beyond knowing and not knowing. As Zen master Suzuki Roshi famously said, “In the beginner’s mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert’s there are few.” (p. 234)
- “The ‘don’t know’ mind is not limited by agendas, roles, and expectations. It is free to discover. When we are filled with knowing, when our minds are made up, it narrows our vision, obscures our ability to see the whole picture, and limits our capacity to act. The wise person is both compassionate and humble and knows that she does not know.” (p. 234)
- “This moment right here before us, this problem we are tackling, this person who is dying, this task we are completing, this relationship we are building, this pain and beauty we are facing—we have never experienced it before. When we enter a situation with the ‘don’t know’ mind, we have a pure willingness to do so, without attachment to a particular view or outcome. We don’t throw our knowledge away but we let go of fixed ideas. We let go of control. Don’t know mind is an invitation to enter life with fresh eyes, to empty our minds and open our hearts.” (p. 234-235)

Small Group Questions

(each person shares for 3 minutes or can pass, no feedback)

- What stirred inside you as we discussed The Five Invitations?
 - Don't Wait
 - Welcome everything, push away nothing
 - Bring your whole self to the experience
 - Find a place of rest in the middle of things
 - Cultivate don't know mind
- Will you try out any of The Five Invitations? How do you envision doing that?