

Death will stop for you: A Letter



a father of 80 advise a son of 50 to prepare for his death at a time when 50, as they say, is only the beginning of the mid age. You have every right to be. But remember, you may be here for the next 30 years, I may be gone in the next 30 days. So that's why I am giving you this untimely advice. Start thinking about the following to ensure your good death:

Where do you want to die? In the USA or in Bangladesh? A lot of first-generation Bangladeshi want to die in the country where they settle in and then want to be buried in the land of their birth. Circles full. I don't always understand the logic. Why don't people just come back home when they get the indication that death is near? But don't feel guilty to prefer to die and be buried in the USA. Your children and their children will be there. You may want to be with them rather than with us; after all home is not only where we are born, it is also where we finally rest. Think hard and decide.

Who do you want to be with when you die?

Think of which five books you want to read or hear in the audio before you die. Remember, we only have one life. If you don't read the books in this life, chances are little that you'd ever read them. Heaven doesn't have libraries and hell does not fare very well either.

Don't jump to the conclusion that you would like to be with your beloved wife and children. Although I sincerely hope you do. But you may want to be alone, or you may want your robot—I assume you'll have one by then—beside you. I hear robots are catching up with human emotions and can give a lot of comfort. Humans can be quite distressing at a time of death. They make too much noise, crying, praying, counting.

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Plan the music you want to listen to in the last few days. Don't go for too dull or too classical music. You may now realise why I always want to listen to Kishore Kumar and Muhammad Rafi. Their songs remind me of my youth and make me thankful for the life I had. Choose songs that you loved when you were young so that you can relive through music.

Finally, from now on, live each day as though death is here. Death will be here. But life is what you have. Live good so that you die majestically.

Happy birthday once again.

Your father

You have a good life. But do you know how you want to die? Have you planned for a good death? I know in the west people plan for everything—they can pre-book their funeral, can choose the wood of their coffin, the car that will carry the coffin. They can even decide what music they want to listen to when they die. I read about how to plan for a good death in a magazine when I was at your place.

RIFAT MAHBUB

Dear son,
Today is your 50th birthday. Happy Birthday to you.

This is my last letter to you. I wrote it the day I realised I'd not last long. Cancer, after all, is a disease of internal rottenness. By the time it surfaces, it might have killed you inside. A stage 4 prostate cancer at my age is the last human suffering on earth. So, I decided to use the lost form of letter writing to say my final words. But when I had my pen and paper, I got stuck.

What can a frail father of 80 write to his soon-to-be 50 son? What is there that I did and you did not? You always were more successful than I was. I was a school teacher, teaching geography in class 9 and 10, maths in class 6 and 7, and acted as a proxy English teacher for all classes. You're an engineer. You decided on your own path and studied at the best institution of the country. Like countless fresh graduate engineers, you left your country for the USA and you earned your American dream. Your mother and I were poor at family planning and had four children, when we actually should have had two. But because struggle was the norm rather than an exception when you were growing up, we are fortunate that our children never blamed us. Rather you and your siblings always respected us for being simple, honest, and modest middle class; when in truth, we probably were naive and

foolish. You did not repeat my mistake. You and your wife were smart and went with the mantra of a perfect familyhood—two children, one boy and a girl. Both of you earn enough to make everyone proud or envious depending on who the person is. Hence nothing I can write about your life plan.

I spent 10 minutes thinking. I became anxious because time was running out. Out of desperation, I thought about writing on the most immediate question I was pondering on. You have a good life. But do you know how you want to die? Have you planned for a good death? I know in the west people plan for everything—they can pre-book their funeral, can choose the wood of their coffin, the car that will carry the coffin. They can even decide what music they want to listen to when they die. I read about how to plan for a good death in a magazine when I was at your place. At that time, I sneered and joked about it with your mother—another example of western craziness, I said. Death just comes. Who can plan for it? And we all want to have an ideal death—peaceful in sleep, couched up by our dearest person, swift and painless. There is no way we can have an ideal death—if we had, we would have probably lost our faith in the higher up.

But as you reach 50, maybe you want to ensure a good death matching your good life? You may be irritated thinking, how can

SHAMIM REZA

The Ethics of the Sacred in a mystic Poet

ENRIQUE BERNALES

Shamim Reza's poetry is defined by an ethical and religious soul, an undoubtedly attribute of the legendary mystics of India. Gods not only summon us to sing to them, but they also ask us to share such ethics where love and sensuality are fused. That is, precisely, the great contribution of the Sufis and the Baülis. The poetry and artistic language proposed by Reza expresses the affections of a mystical land, its gods, its love for the sacred word and the sacred life that is the human life. Love is a way of expressing feelings, but also is a mechanism of philosophical and poetic knowledge. Love is a way of life: Poetry and music thus constitute an ethical way of living in community.

The poetry written by Shamin Reza means to believe in a better world, ironically, more human where we can share the gifts of the gods, a world that embraces the true life and our true nature that is our divine nature: a life that is the Yoga of being and affection. In addition, Shamin Reza's poetry recreates a realm of nostalgia, of a time that is gone, simultaneously, that precisely generates an ethics of life, to persevere in our humanity in search of the fires of the divine in this world, to persevere in the fires of the Immanence of the world:

I have smeared the viviparous liquid of Radha in the sleeping shoots of red ochre soil

And have painted the curiosity of Vishnu on my textured brows.

Yet on invisible wings of pyre, love

has been eroded

In a shadowy episode the long wings vibrate through Santal dawns in hymns. ("On the Invisible Wings of Pyre").

In *The Religion of Man*, another ecumenical voice of love and affection, Rabindranath Tagore, states on the



Baül poets, in the same tune and frequency in which I suggest reading the beautiful poems of Shamim Reza:

The Baüls do not believe in aloofness from, or renunciation of, any person or thing; their central idea is yoga, attachment to and communion with the divine and its manifestations, as the means of realization. We fail to recognize the temple of God in the bodily life of man, they explain, because its lamp is not alight (211).

Recognize the temple of God in the human form, as Rabindranath Tagore recommends, it is not only a metaphorical statement: the temple of God in the form of the human being also means to recognize the divine in the art of the humans like poetry and music. Precisely, this tradition always trendy in the oriental poetic system of thought is something that has been largely lost in the West, with

few revivals in the American lyric of the sixties with the influence of the

the senses: "I've seen God asleep inside me, an innocent prey / pierced with the trident of Shiva" ("God and Myself").

Reza's poetry expresses the song of a people seeking to live in peace and harmony, it is a baroque poetry that invites us to dream of the time of the sacred and the beauty of its elements from a foot to the waters of a river. The eroticism of the poetry of Shamim Reza reminds me of the eroticism of the poetry of Octavio Paz, a great love poet and cultist of literary eroticism that he, precisely, discovered in the poetic tradition of the East. Poetry is universal and communicates and unites cultures:

Shiva and Parvati:
the woman who is my wife
and I
ask you for nothing, nothing
that comes from the other world:
only
the light on the sea,
the barefoot light on the sleeping
land and sea. ("Invocation," Octavio Paz)

This poetic breath where the sacred and the erotic merge to propose an ethics and pedagogy is very similar to the great poetry of Shamim Reza. The poetry of Shamim Reza is rich in cultural references of the different confessions of the Indian Subcontinent, but also is generous in metaphors and images that invite us to dance and merge with our fellow human beings in a culture of peace and sensitivity that is the reflection of the other, of our brothers, the community of human beings.

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POETRY

Dear Mrs. Dalloway, I Will Be There

SUMAYA MASHRUFA

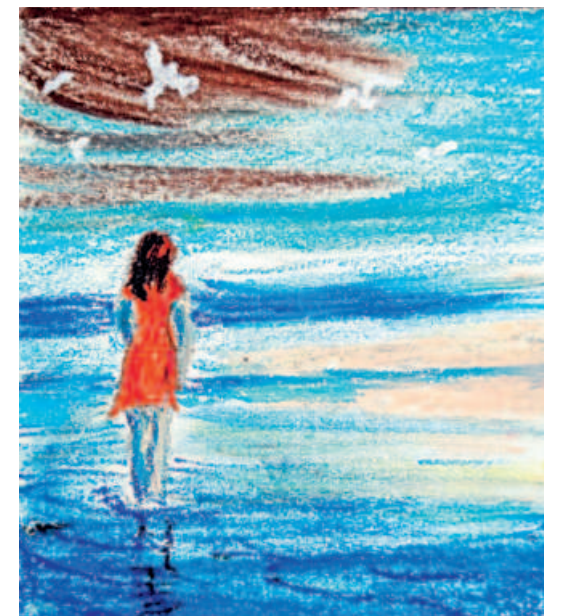
I am not ready to be a failure yet.

Still, the surreal smell of unborn sunshine clings to my sleeves like a child.
Still, I see me bare feet on a sandy beach in the summer of my discontent.
Still, water rubs on my arms like it has things to tell.
Still, in the pit of my stomach fear lives like a beautiful agony.
Still, I want love that'll never be chocolate and flowers.
Still, I see friendship that'll survive.

I am not ready to be a failure yet.
The world's too ravishing, the sky's too much.

I have things to catch up on, Mrs. Dalloway's party and such. I can't bail on her. The purity of happiness, she holds that.

Sumaya Mashrufa is a writer and poet based in Dhaka.



TWO POEMS BY ASHRAFUL KABIR

Perennial waters

Then it is time to return!
At sunset the train of time departs;
Morning goes, noon passes, and gradually night leaves too.

The train of time goes away at once
A rattling noise just falls behind.
There remain some emotions quite intact;
The waves of hope make a consolation for
upcoming days
Accompanying the perennial waters.



Minstrel

Much time has passed!
A bunch of spear-grass have withered away in pride
I feel like an unwanted alien on a familiar path.

I heave sighs! In the changing dust,
I've moved a few pages slowly
Do not hesitate to say, dear bard -
I've lost again to your sultry tone.

Ashraful Kabir is a poet, essayist, literary critic and professionally a banker based in Dhaka Bangladesh.

