

What It Takes To Be Human

To begin to say anything about what it means to be human is difficult, for only personal experience can tell us individually the meaning of the word "human". So, I shall attempt to say what it means to be human, to me.

We've heard over and over again that to be human means to be an individual, alive, independent, spontaneous, rather than passive, dependent, inactive, unborn, and if effect, dead. We have the words and the thoughts, but do we really know what it means? Perhaps we do, but it only seems that we don't. So, it is being alive that I want to talk about.

One of the main things which keeps us from being fully alive is that it is ourselves that we are most afraid of resembling. We accept the patterns given to us and do not dare to deviate from this path. There is always a fear of finding ourselves alone. But the most interesting thing is this: Each of us has a special part which is different from other people, and this rare part is just the part we suppress. In other words, that special value of ours is suppressed so that we may be more like other people, and this concludes that basically we are the same except for those rare qualities and talents. To be alive is to bring out those qualities which make you the individual you are, without any fear of being "different". It also means having the courage to show just what we feel, and admitting to ourselves and others what we are truly like. So, rather than follow the easy way out by being secure in our sameness, let us become alive and real.

There is a famous quote in Le Cid, which asks: "Rodrigue, as-tu du coeur? (Art thou courageous?)", or better still, do you have a heart? Why is it that we lack what the Saints call the Soul and Poets the Heart? Yes, we have the right conventional attitudes, and all that will superficially let us just be accepted in the eyes of others, yet we forget the heart. Once we can know ourselves enough to forget ourselves, then only can we be understanding of others. Part of "aliveness" is loving, and as Ivan, in the Brothers Karamazov says: "It's not a matter of logic or intellect, it's loving with one's inside, with one's stomach!" It is loving life more than the meaning of it, which means that our sadness is our happiness, our moment of depression is our truth, our vulnerability is our strength, our cowardice is our courage, and our anger is our lesson. Even in our anger or depression, we are feeling and are far from being indifferent. Loving with one's inside may imply also

that we must feel every phase of our lives with our inside, with our stomach. Haven't you ever felt that you wanted to run over the borders of conventionality, and say what you really wanted to say, but instead have been afraid of reproach, ridicule or laughter? That is a rationalization out of being alive. When and only when it is possible for us to bring all our sides together by seeing ourselves in our true light, only then can we become truly alive.

Isn't it true that when we are in love with another, we are alive, and everything is alive to us? We see a lot of things we had never seen before, smell things we hadn't smelled before, and heard more; and all our senses are alive. Though outwardly nothing may be seen, inside, the world is yours. But too often we need to have a reason for being alive, some motive or stimulation. Being without a goal leads us to dissatisfaction and unrest, and sometimes "deadness" as we wait for something to come along. We are then like lumps sitting behind desks in crowded rooms. But then, why is it that men like Hans Hoffman, for example, laugh and are happy until it seems that they might burst? They have found what it means to be human and alive. And I say, you can be alive without the need of a specific stimulus, like being in love or being dependent on another. Part of that must come from the serious realization of what we are. But it's a funny thing! If we really thought about our state of affairs, in other words, our deadness, we could do something about it. Haven't you ever been depressed or indifferent to everything around you? And then, haven't you perhaps gone up the stairs and thought of something that made you happy? It doesn't matter what it is, it can even be something little and insignificant to others, but it has made you think and be a little happier. But if you can pause for a moment, in no matter what circumstances, if you can find one golden moment of joy and happiness, then you can say you have lived and are alive. What I am trying to say is that there is a certain joy in the heart of life which can be understood if only we allow ourselves to be true to ourselves; it does not have to come from that conventional "everydayness" that we put ourselves into because of our insecurity. We feel so much better in the safe masses. And this is NOT being alive.

The more we see, the more we want to see, and the more we are dissatisfied with seeing little. Part of aliveness is trying to understand other peoples and their customs, those that are unlike ourselves in many ways. But they should also be accepted for what they are, and as they are. By being able to see and understand as much as we can means that

soon we can become a part of the varied whole, which means the world and all that it holds. It means not only this little world of ours here, but also beyond that. When we feel discontent with the present, it is only ourselves that have caused that. We make the present what we want it to be and must put ourselves where we are fulfilling our capacities in totality.

I would like to read a passage from Thomas Wolfe's book, You Can't Go Home Again, from the chapter, The Locusts Have No King. Here he sums up briefly what man is.

"For there is one belief, one faith that is man's glory, his triumph, his immortality -- and that is his belief in life. Man loves life, and, loving life, hates death, and because of this he is great, he is glorious, he is beautiful, and his beauty is everlasting. He lives below the senseless stars and writes his meaning in them. He lives in fear, in toil -- in agony and in unending tumult, but if the blood foamed bubbling from his wounded lungs at every breath he drew, he would still love life more than the end of breathing. Dying, his eyes burn beautifully and the old hunger shines more fiercely in them -- he has endured all the hard and purposeless suffering, and still, he wants to live. Thus it is impossible to scorn this creature. For out of his strong belief in life, this puny man made love. At best, he is love. Without him there can be no love, no hunger, no desire.

So this is man, the worst and the best of him -- this frail and petty thing who lives his day and dies like all the other animals, and is forgotten. And yet, he is immortal too, for both the good and the evil that he does live after him. Why, then, should any living man ally himself with death, and in his greed and blindness, thrive on his brother's blood?"

This is not all that man has. He does have life and love, hunger and desire, but if he truly wants, he can make himself into more than the pessimist cares to offer. He can become alive through his serious realization that this life is all that he has and that each present moment holds something.

We so often lack the music, we so often lack the thought. But even having these, we also lack an irrevocable resolution to do what we must. We must finally allow ourselves to flow unleashed. Aliveness is a state of mind, owned by few, honored by less, revered by only two for life. But not only physically, spiritually. So, this is my meager explanation of what it means to be alive and human. It can have eternal beauty and truth.