

The Journey of Life



What is life? It is a question that has been asked and pondered upon by philosophers, writers and many others. Despite centuries of meditation, there is no standard answer, considering that all individuals are unique and they perceive their lives in their own way. The meaning of life is open to interpretation.

“Everything flows and nothing stays... You can’t step twice into the same river.” This is one of the famous aphorisms of Heraclitus (540-480 BC). The Greek philosopher suggests that nothing lasts forever and hence nothing can transcend time. Life is like a body of flowing water which is constantly changing. When we step into the river again, it appears to be the same as before. Yet, it is no longer the same river that has wet our feet because the water is ever flowing. By the same token, we are different from the “we” that stepped into the water some time ago. Life never repeats itself. It can be lived only once and every moment of it should be treasured.

“Time and tide wait for no man.” This English proverb echoes the words of wisdom of Russian writer Maxim Gorky (1868-1936): “Time is the most fair and reasonable — it never gives more to anyone.” Time flies like an arrow and no one can wind back the clock. There are so many things we need to look after in our daily lives that sometimes we have no time to catch our breath. Life is long if we live it meaningfully; life is transient if we just idle away our time. Instead of waiting for opportunities to emerge, we should seize our time and make the best out of it. Procrastination is the thief of time, and making up for lost time is not easy.

Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) says in *Stray Birds*, a collection of his poems, “The best does not come alone. It comes with the company of the all.” Though not as dramatic as a roller coaster ride, life is often marked by many ups and downs. Good times and bad times come in the same way as the tide ebbs and flows. At certain points in our life, the sea may be rough. As long as we do not lose heart in adversity, we should be able to overcome the

hurdles. Sooner or later, the trying times will be behind us. Every cloud surely has a silver lining.

Life involves choices. We might make mistakes in the process, knowingly or unknowingly. To err is human, as the saying goes. This is elaborated by German writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832): “Man errs as long as he strives.” Of course, if we just sit back doing nothing, we will not risk making errors. But there are times in our life when we find ourselves at a crossroads where decision-making is unavoidable. Positive thinking is a way to guide us towards a solution. While looking ahead for a new path, we also look back to learn lessons. Life is a learning process, and the sands of time have much to tell and teach us. As English playwright Thomas Middleton (1580-1627) puts it, “A man is never too old to learn.” The longer we live, the more we should learn. The fullness of life is largely decided by our quest for knowledge. Even people at a ripe old age should have a zeal to learn.

American President John F. Kennedy (1917-1963) draws the following comparison between life and racing: “Life is not a 100-yard dash, but more a cross-country run.” True enough, life is like a marathon that calls for persistence. In this long race, some run faster, some slower, and the finish line is different for each participant. But at whatever pace, we should stride ahead with a clear direction. We all have a goal in life, whether lofty or not. The heart of the matter is not how fast we are moving towards this destination, but how hard we are trying to get there. It is in the course of running that we truly understand the substance of life.

Like a leaf of blank paper, our life can become either just black and white or as colourful as a mass of flowers. Our life is in our own hands. It is up to ourselves to decide what to draw on this paper. While some work with their own hands, some invite the partnership of another. An accompanied journey is sometimes more heart-warming and fulfilling. In whichever case, this paper is a record of our history, from the cradle to the grave, as well as a memoir for those that come after us. So no matter what we are going to draw on it, we should put our heart and soul into it.

