

PASSAGES

By BERNIE SIEGEL, MD

Life is like a mountain railroad with an engineer that's brave
We must make the trip successful from the cradle to the grave
Watch the curves, the hills and tunnels, do not falter, do not fail
Keep your hand upon the throttle and your eye upon the rail
Blessed Savior's love will guide us
'Til we reach that distant shore
Where the angels wait to join us
In that great for ever more.

Gospel Song *Life's Railway To Heaven*

"Life is no brief candle to me, it is a sort of splendid torch which I've got hold of for the moment and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations"

George Bernard Shaw

All my life's a circle, sunrise and sundown,
Moon rolls through the night time, 'til the daybreak comes around
All my life's a circle, though I can't tell you why
Seasons spinning 'round again, the years keep rolling by
Harry Chapin

And we ourselves shall be loved for a while and forgotten. But the love will have been enough. All those impulses of love return to the love that made them. Even memory is not necessary for love. There is a land of the living and a land of the dead and the bridge is love, the only survival the only meaning.

Thornton Wilder *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*

Life is a series of passages and it is indeed a circle through which we will all pass more than once. I shall discuss how I know this later in the article. Life is meant to be a chance to obtain an education, like going to school, and hopefully not being left back but advancing through the grades. When you give a report in Heaven, which I often do since I am an outside consultant to the Board of Directors, you conclude your report with the words, "The Beginning." The first time I was told to do that I asked why we weren't saying, "The End." God's response was that when you graduate from school it is called a commencement, not a termination, and the Bible ends in a Revelation and not a conclusion. So life is a series of beginnings or passages and whether we learn something, experience a change or lose something we are to begin a new life.

God reminded me that a perfect world is not creation. It is a magic trick and so we are all here to live and learn and hopefully move up through the grades as we acquire wisdom and then when our bodies cease to exist we can pass on through our consciousness, which

never ceases to exist, what we have learned and experienced and hopefully enhance life rather than detract from it. But remember becoming angry at third graders accomplishes nothing. We must help to educate everyone and lift the level of consciousness of all beings. Animals are already complete and do not need to learn from experiences as we do. So let your curses become blessings and keep beginning as you pass through life.

My life has been filled with many interesting passages. The first being my passage through the birth canal into the world. Due to an illness, and my mother's state of health, she was told not to become pregnant since it would be a threat to her life. Her mother decided otherwise, however, and had her lie down on the couch while she fed her constantly. When my mother gained thirty pounds I was conceived. The next problem was a multitude of complications of the pregnancy and prolonged labor with no child appearing. After telling my mother she might not survive a Cesarean Section my mother tells me, "They reached in and pulled you out."

So my first passage was a very traumatic one and I was born an ugly duckling. "Your father and I wrapped you in kerchiefs and put you in a carriage which we covered and hid you behind the house. So know one would see you and be upset." When I asked my mom why I didn't turn out to be an addict or alcoholic, which infants treated this way do become, she said, "My mother took you, poured oil all over your body and pushed everything back where it belonged." An infant massaged in this way gains weight fifty percent faster than an infant fed the same amount but not touched. And in orphanages in the 1800's infants were not touched to avoid spreading infections and ninety percent died because they were not touched. So to pass through life successfully we need to experience love.

I realize that if we all had loving grandmothers there wouldn't be any ugly ducklings who have to struggle to discover their beauty. Something which most of us never accomplish. So when in doubt act like a loving grandparent to ease the passages of others. Let your eyes be the mirrors which reflect love and beauty back to those who look into them. Experience reveals when someone you love is present during labor or any painful experience the pain experienced is dramatically reduced.

The next passage, which as a surgeon I cannot overlook, is simply passing urine, gas and feces. If you are born with an intestinal atresia, imperforate anus or other anomaly you will learn very quickly what a blessing it is to not have an obstruction to these vital organs and functions. When the anatomical passages are open and functioning one can then focus on the mental and spiritual ones.

When you do, you realize all of life is a labor pain. The experiences we confront, or which are prescribed for us, when confronted with life threatening illnesses are like the labor pains of self birth. I tell all my patients and the people I counsel to not do something because someone else prescribes it but because it is what is right for you. When you do you can go through surgery and other treatments with far fewer side affects. Seeing chemotherapy as poison, or surgery as a mutilation, leads to your having more problems than the person who sees them as life saving gifts from God.

So remember life is difficult but not unfair. How do I know that? Because every one is complaining so it must be fair. If you want to help your children, prepare them for the difficult passages which we all must confront. If you don't know what to do here's my mother's advice. Whenever someone you know runs into trouble say, "It was meant to be. God is redirecting you. Something good will come of this." It took me a while to buy the package as a teenager but I realized many curses did turn into blessings and redirected my life. It also changed my view of the future and I did not always visualize the worst things happening when problems arose. Norman Vincent Peale's mom used to say, "Norman, if God slams one door further down the corridor another will be opened." No wonder he became the man he was.

The message, that he who seeks to save his life will lose it while he who is willing to lose his life will save it speaks the message as do the words that the son of man comes not to be served but to serve and to ransom his life for the good of the many. What these words speak about is how many of us lose our lives to please everyone else. We become what they want when we should be choosing to serve and love the world in a way that will make us happy. So once again remember my mother's message. Whenever you have a decision to make and ask my mom what to do she says, "Do what will make you happy." Then you will choose what passages you will experience in this life's time.

Now let me conclude with how I know we pass through life more than once. At age four, while sitting on my bed at home due to an ear infection, I almost choked to death on some toy parts I had put into my mouth and then aspirated. I had a NDE, a near death experience, and left my body. I was free of the physical struggle to breathe and it was a fantastic experience for a four year old which left me with no fear of death. I can recall wanting to be dead rather than going back because of the guilt I felt over my parents finding my dead body. Then the boy on the bed vomited and all the toys came flying out and he began to breathe again and I was back in his body mad as hell that I did not get my choice. I can remember yelling, "Who did that?" and thinking there must be somebody else in charge of the schedule of passages. I don't have the space to discuss who or what is seeing and thinking when one is out of one's body but the truth is that even the blind see when they have a NDE. I know this from my patients and the research of others. So when you pass from this body you will become dreamless, unalive and perfect again.

I have also had a past life experience spontaneously created when a friend, who heard how busy my schedule and life were, asked me over the phone, "Why are you living this life?" To make a long story short I saw myself killing with a sword, when told to do so by my lord, out of fear that if I did not follow his orders and kill I would be killed.

From that life I learned about the importance of faith and having the right Lord as Abraham, Jesus, Noah and Job did. I also realize that my love of animals and people comes from this past life as I try to make up for what I did then by using a knife in this life to heal people.

What else convinces me that life is the problem and that death, and leaving one's body, is not the worst outcome or passage? A conversation I had with Noah which was very simple for me to do because of my Board position. I asked him how come he didn't argue with God or bargain with God to save more than his family and some animals. He said because he knew he was being given the raw deal so to speak; because he was being called upon to go on living with and experiencing all of life's difficulties while everyone else was allowed to pass on and begin again with a clean slate and greater wisdom.

So enjoy the experience of life, as painful as it may be, utilize your opportunities and burn your candle up and not out before your time. If you want to avoid passing on then remember the only thing which is immortal and of permanence is love and it is the bridge between the land of the living and the land of the dead.