



"I Take You," Zdenek Janda

Waiting to Live

He not busy being born is busy dying.

Bob Dylan

IT IS NOT UNUSUAL FOR PEOPLE TO spend their entire lives waiting to start living.

In fact, when asked on their deathbeds what they most regret, the great majority of the dying invariably cite some form of waiting, of indecision, of failing to seize the moment when boldness was called for.

Rare is it indeed for someone facing the end of their life to feel remorse for being too daring, too impulsive, or too reckless—whether in life, love, or their chosen career.

No doubt there are many reasons why people put their lives on hold. Some are waiting to reach the top of the corporate ladder; some for children to leave the nest; some to graduate, to complete a diet, or to finish therapy; some for their next vacation, and some for the day they can finally retire.

Others might be stuck in a rigid belief system that would cause them to feel uncaring if they were to so brazen as to pursue their own ‘selfish,’ personal dreams.

Ironically, many are unwittingly held back out of fear of actually attaining or achieving the very thing they desire: As long as it resides in some vague, indeterminate ‘future,’ whatever we dream of becoming or of experiencing can remain just that: a distant dream, incorruptible and perfect, shielding us from disappointment.

All of these various reasons—while rational and understandable—can best be thought of as forms of procrastination, to the extent that they aren’t carefully considered and necessary steps helping us move toward truly living our dreams.

Simply put, they are a result of the false belief that happiness is waiting for us in some other place, at some other time.

Too often, we unconsciously sabotage ourselves by constructing elaborate schemes to explain to ourselves why we can't fully be the person we are meant to be—right here, right now. Instead, we make living an authentic life contingent upon some prerequisite as yet unfulfilled, an unticked box on our life's imaginary resumé.

This is especially true when it involves the spiritual life, as displayed most glaringly in the never-ending search for what we call 'enlightenment.' The word itself suggests becoming 'lighter'—an apt description for unburdening ourselves of the illusion that enlightenment is something to be *attained* in the future, rather than what it is: something to be *realized* in the here and now.

As the eminent psychologist/mythologist Carl Jung wisely said, more than any other endeavor that we might seek to pursue in life, "the spiritual journey is not toward perfection, but toward wholeness."

Our true self doesn't need the right job, the perfect spouse, or enough money, fame, or status. In fact, our true self doesn't need anything, except to be recognized, honored, and lived fully in the present moment.

There will never be a more perfect time to live our lives fully than right now, because the only thing that is truly perfect *is* this moment. If we wait until we have created the perfect circumstances in which to live fully, we'll be waiting our entire lives.

This may seem like a recommendation to forsake having dreams or plans for the future, but on reflection one will see that it is anything but. Paradoxically, the quickest path to getting where one wants to go in the future is simply by 'being here, now.'

By cultivating a deep awareness of the present moment, both our past and our future will become much clearer and more meaningful—so much so, in fact, that they may even have a sense of inevitability.

If we look back on our lives, we see this pattern playing out repeatedly. Decisions that are forced are much less likely to turn out well than those made from 'gut feeling,' from times when we just 'knew' what to do, without having to give it a lot of thought.

Migratory birds don't anguish over knowing when it's time to leave. They just instinctively go when the time is right. And while brash or impulsive decisions are usually unwise, fear and over-thinking can prevent us from making any decision at all.

Living solely in our minds, we are disembodied, cut off from our ground of being. In fact, our greatest source of feedback about whether we are living fully is not found in the mind but in the body, and we can all cultivate this deeper, 'body' knowing in meditation, contemplation, and learning to just be still in the present moment, allowing the mind to rest and our attention to linger in the spaces between thoughts.

Seen in this way, waiting need not always be an obstacle to our growth or well-being; it can even be a gift. Rather than allowing the many unplanned moments of waiting in our day to be an annoyance or a hindrance, we should seize them as an opportunity to practice mindfulness, to practice just *being*.

The poet Henry David Thoreau cautioned against procrastinating in life: "You must live in the present, launch yourself on every wave, find your eternity in each moment. Fools stand on their island of opportunities and look toward another land. There is no other land; there is no other life but this."

Stop waiting. Start living. ■