**Memento Mori**

I recently bought a new money wallet. The one I had had become very worn over the years. The old one was a rectangle, brown leather wallet. When I made the switch from the old wallet to a new one, and put the old wallet away I couldn’t help but think of my grandfather, who I never met. He passed away over ten years before I was born but my grandmother had kept his wallet in her possession, and at one point she gave it to me. My grandfather’s wallet was also a rectangle, brown leather, and almost identical from the outside to my own. Now I have them side by side in front of me, and both of them retired from usage. When my grandmother gave me his wallet I felt a sense of nostalgia towards my grandfather. Although I never met him, through this wallet I had a connection to him. It was like now I knew he had really existed. He had used this, he had held it. It was a memento of my grandfather.

In the middle ages the word memento was used, in the phrase, memento mori – remember you are mortal. I could say that my grandfather’s wallet is a memento mori. Lying beside my grandfather’s wallet and my older wallet is a gold colored watch. It’s a ‘wind-up’ older style watch, a watch that once belonged to my dad. He has also since passed on. My mother gave it to me. It is a memento of my dad, but it is also a memento mori. Therefore three generations exist in these three items.

In this respect, my older wallet has also become to me a memento mori of sorts. One day I will join the world that my father and grandfather have gone to. And one day all that will be left of me are mementos that someone else might hold onto.

Even if we do take our impermanence to heart, we find excuses to push it to the back, thinking that we will take care of it when we are old. During the middle ages people lived short lives, which could be cut shorter due to disease and violence. Therefore “memento Mori” – “Remember that you are mortal” was a very significant and appropriate reminder. But for us who live in relative comfort and security, ‘memento mori’ also has significance.

Once we are born we are on a journey toward death. Death is our 100% future.

Death can come to us at any time. No one leaves their home in the morning thinking that this will be the last time leaving their home. However people leave their homes in the morning, healthy, but don’t return home in the evening.

The Monk, Rennyo said, “Hence we may have radiant faces in the morning, but in the evening be no more than white bones.”

Public clocks in Europe in the Middle Ages were decorated with the latin words:

“Ultima Forsan” - “Perhaps the last [hour].”We don’t know when our last hour will be, but for sure it will come. And the words of a song from the Middle Ages remind us of life’s impermanence:

*Life is short and shortly it will end*

*Death comes quicker than you think.*

*It takes everything away, but takes pity on no one.*

*We hasten towards death…*

 From Ad Mortem Festinamus (Vermell de Montserrat) 1399

Death is certain, but are we prepared? This is the great question for all mankind. Once we come face to face with it, we realize what a profound issue we are dealing with. Death is the great obstacle, so great that we don’t even want to look at it. There is no solution we think. We live, and hope we live a long and happy life, and hope that something good happens to us after we die. This life lasts on average 80 years. Wouldn’t it make sense to investigate that ‘place’ we go to in the afterlife? When we go on a two-week vacation we prepare diligently. We prepare what to pack, book accommodation, we find out about sights at the destination and so on. We spend hours and hours looking at website and brochures at the possible destination. If we just booked the flight alone without any other preparation, when we arrive at the location we would end up feeling lost and unprepared for the experience. The same can be said about the afterlife. We know that we must go on a journey to the other world, and we go without preparation and without knowing what to expect, but yet we tremble in fear when confronted with a life or death situation. A student who has not prepared for an exam will, on the morning of the exam, be in a state of anxiety. Meanwhile the student who has studied diligently can walk into the exam room with confidence. People prepare for old age, which may never come, but no one prepares for death which for sure will come.

The sole purpose of listening to Buddhism is to be clear of what happens in the afterlife. On any journey, we always have a destination.

Likewise, on the journey of life, we have a destination. This destination is death.

But we don’t know where we go after we die. Therefore it is said that our destination after death is “dark.” Dark, referring to ignorance. Therefore our biggest concern is this darkness towards the afterlife. Where is that world, and what is it like? Does such a world even exist? We are not sure.

By listening to Buddhism a time will come for sure when this dark mind is cleared, and we will become clear about the future in the afterlife. This is known as the Purpose of life, and attaining a state of Absolute happiness.