

What's the Meaning of Life?

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The journey of life and death is unique to each and every one of us. We share the journey with our friends and loved ones but each of us walk away with a different interpretation and so, we make do with different meanings. At journey's end, the path changes all of us, for better or for worse. Such is the gift of dying.

The baby made soft, cooing noises with its eyes brightly lit and lips curled mischievously at something only it could see. Jaimie turned towards the cot and smiled warmly at her child.

"Jaimie?"

Jaimie stirred and awoke instantly. It was just a dream, albeit a pleasant and beautiful one. She turned on her side and looked fondly at her husband who was muttering sweet nothings in his sleep. She blushed and hugged him tight. She continued to smile to herself as she recounted the image of the baby from her dreams.

Smiling sheepishly and still in a sleepy stupor, her husband stirs awake. She slowly gets out of bed and lovingly offers to make him breakfast.

"Milo. I love your Milo." He says, with a romantic glint in his eyes.

"It's just Milo, silly." She replies.

Early signs of trouble

"It's not just Milo. Promise me you'll make me a cup every morning."

Jaimie was a good friend. I visited the newly married couple about five months after their wedding and was very concerned when I noticed that Jaimie had lost a considerable amount of weight. Her belly was a little distended. In fact, we were wondering if she was expecting.

They sat across from the doctor with Jaimie gripping her husband's hand tightly, a bloating sorrow building in her gut. The last few weeks had been a nightmare. Their brief joy at the prospect of conceiving a baby had been cruelly wiped away. Instead, they were waiting for the final prognosis.

The results were out. She was suffering from a massive ovarian tumour. Their world came crashing down and their journey of life together now transformed into a journey of death.

For three months Jaimie went through a rigorous palette of treatments and chemotherapy. In four months time, it would be their first year anniversary.

The last goodbye

Jaimie did not respond to the treatments and her condition deteriorated drastically. Worse still, the effects of the treatments and chemotherapy were especially devastating to her physical well-being.

At this point, despite her husband's attempts to change her mind, Jaimie refused treatment. She told him softly one day, "Look at me now. I am ugly. Let me die as I am. Let me leave as I am. Please." She held him close as he began to weep uncontrollably.

"I miss your Milo. You make the best Milo." He replied, wiping away his tears.

Mustering whatever strength she had left, she got up wearily. Because of her condition, she had not been able to make him a single cup for the past three months. Jaime got up weakly and went to the pantry area. With shaking hands and a trembling heart, she made him a cup of Milo. He watched on, barely able to hold his emotions in place. He wanted to stop her at that very moment but he could not. He was yearning for the cup of Milo, which had come to symbolise her undying love for him.

She carried the cup to him and gave it to him, whispering softly with tears flowing freely, "I will not be able to make any more cups for you. Let this be my last. Please."

In her heart, Jaimie could not bring herself to ask him to let go. Within himself, he immediately understood the significance of that moment. It wasn't merely just a cup of Milo. Jaimie was asking him to let go.

He drank the Milo, tears falling as he did. She watched silently with a tinge of regret.

She whispered, "My only regret is not being able to have a baby. But then, the baby wouldn't have a mother, right?"

The fragility of life

With that, she drifted slowly into unconsciousness. The stress and exertion of the moment proving too much for her weak body to handle.

Jaimie received home-based hospice care. It was what she wanted. She fought the cancer for a few more months even though her condition had surpassed the critical stage. Perhaps she wanted to fight on till their first year anniversary.

Jaimie died barely a few days after their anniversary. She could not hang on any longer. He held her hand softly for the final time. He did not know how much more of himself he could give but somewhere nearby, he thought he heard the crying of an unborn child.

Even after the months of pain and anguish, the death of Jaimie came as a shock to everyone around her. Most questioned the unpredictability of life and God's decision to take away someone who was at the prime of her life.

At the end of the day, "What does it all mean?" was the recurring question on everyone's lips. ♥

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