

Life on Hold-The Weight of Death

By Edward Mills

For the past few days I've been walking around feeling like there's a big weight hanging over me ready to fall at any moment. Getting things done has been a chore. Making plans beyond the next day has taken all of my willpower. It feels as though my life is on hold and that I'm just waiting.

The waiting part is true and there's not much I can do about that. But the life on hold part is all my doing and there is much I can do about that.

You see, my wife is down in Nashville with her father who is dying. He was released from the hospital on Friday and is now on home hospice care. (<http://www.hospicenet.org/html/faq.html>) This is a wonderful site full of excellent information about end-of-life care) Melissa is there with her sister, stepmother, and others to provide comfort and be there to help him through this transition to the next world.

Melissa was down there for a week, returned last Tuesday, and then on Thursday, she received word that her father had taken a turn for the worse. She dropped everything, turned around and flew right back down there.

It's amazing how the two tiny words, "any day," spoken by a doctor can create a sense of urgency in those close to the one about whom those words are spoken. In a very powerful way, also, those words bring a certain freedom, they provide permission to step away from the responsibilities of daily life and attend to the profound and transformative issues that arise around the ending of a life.

I can sense the relief in my wife when we speak. There is lightness in her voice, a clarity that seems to have come from this letting go. Her willingness to let go of the responsibilities she has up here so that she can be there with her father and family has clearly been good for her. The opportunities she has had to connect with her father during this powerful time of transition has brought them closer than they have ever been. And her ability to acknowledge and share her grief and sadness within the supportive environment of her family has had a cleansing effect on her.

As she goes through this powerful process down there, I am here, with Ella, feeling disconnected, unclear about my role, and more than a bit helpless. How can I support Melissa while she is in Nashville?

I understand that, from a practical standpoint, my staying here and taking care of Ella is the best support I can provide. It gives Melissa the chance to be there with her family. But that has not made it any easier to be so far away.

This disconnection and helplessness is infusing the rest of my life as well. How do I plan beyond today? Should I arrange for childcare for the evenings that I teach? How about the Saturday Law of Attraction group? Should I get coverage for that? What about my early morning meetings on Fridays?

Ella and I will fly to Nashville for the funeral. But when will that be? Today? Tomorrow? In three weeks? Every time Melissa calls, I think, "This is it." And every time I call her and she doesn't answer, that same thought passes through my head. I can assure you this type of thinking is not conducive to a focused, productive work life!

In moments of clarity, I recognize this time as a powerful challenge and an opportunity to become more fully present in my life. And with clarity come questions. Good questions that can lead me into fuller presence. Here are just a few of the questions that are arising.

Can I move forward with my life knowing that, at any moment, I will be called away?

Can I let go of the picture I have of “support” and trust that my ability to be here with Ella is the most powerful support I can offer?

Can I acknowledge and take care of my own needs during this time?

Can I find the words to speak clearly with Ella about what is happening?

When I step back from all that is happening and get a bit of perspective, I really do see the blessing of this time. It is so easy to place life on hold, to wait for some momentous – or not so momentous – event in order to move on. I have seen it in myself and in my clients: We wait to hear about a job we’ve applied for. We wait to hear if an article has been accepted. We wait to hear if someone we like wants to go on a date with us. We wait for a check in the mail. We wait for a phone call. We wait...

How often do we put our life on hold waiting for some external circumstance to resolve itself?

Most of the time this waiting, this holding, is so subtle that we don’t even notice it. In this case it has been anything but subtle. This well-defined sense of paralysis has given me the opportunity to explore that place of holding. Now I am aware of it, conscious, and so I get to choose how to proceed. I get to claim full responsibility for my actions, or lack of actions.

That is both the beauty and the curse of self-awareness: As your awareness expands so too does the level of responsibility you must take for your life. I choose to take full responsibility for this moment in my life. Will I step forward, as Thoreau says, confidently in the direction of my dreams, knowing that my forward progress may be interrupted at any moment? Or will I continue to twiddle my thumbs, waiting for all the lights on the road ahead of me to turn green.

The choice is mine. And in each moment I will continue to make the best choice I possibly can. For that is all I can do.

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