Where does the longing to live forever come from?

We know that our life on earth is fragile and short. And yet we keep hoping, dreaming and looking for something that will last beyond our own time: full justice, a peace that holds, a life no longer threatened by suffering and death.

This longing is everywhere, in every culture and every generation. We want to leave something behind, to be remembered, to build for those who come after us. From the old legends of immortality to the most advanced laboratories of today, people are chasing the same thing: to cross the border that death has set.

Where does this longing come from? Just as hunger shows that there is food and thirst shows that there is water, the deep longing for eternity suggests that we were made for more than a short life. If that is so, it is not a mere illusion, but the fingerprint of the purpose for which we were created.

A climb that ends in a descent

It takes us decades to gather knowledge, to learn from our mistakes and to reach some measure of wisdom. But just when we know the most and could give the most, the decline begins. Strength fades, memory weakens, the mind loses its old clarity. The man who once led, built and advised others ends up needing help with the simplest things. Everything gathered over a lifetime seems to be lost in a moment.

Every extra year of experience ought to bring us closer to fulfilment. In fact, it brings us closer to the end. Why do we grow old? Why do we die? And what is the point of a whole life of growing, if the road ends in the grave?

This is not how we think about the stages of life. Nobody believes that a child's life is over when he grows up. Childhood and school make sense because of what comes after them. It is hard to believe that all of a person's growth, a whole lifetime of it, should have disappearance as its goal.

No builder would put up a building with such care only to let it collapse on the very day he finished it. We build bridges to last for hundreds of years and look for durability in everything. The earth, the sun and the stars have kept their order for a time the mind can hardly grasp. If lifeless things were made to last so long, it is even harder to believe that man was made for only a few years. He is the only being that thinks, loves and asks what his life is for. If we work so hard for the works of our hands to endure, it is natural to ask whether our own life was not also meant to reach beyond the grave.

From the "elixir of life" to artificial intelligence

People have always dreamed of the "elixir of life", of "youth without old age and life without death". Medicine and research fight ageing out of the same longing: to live longer. Today, with the rise of artificial intelligence, some scientists are even looking for a way to keep a person's memory, thinking and identity in an artificial system that would go on after the body stops.

All these efforts show how deeply the wish not to cease to exist is rooted in us. But two questions remain. Can man secure eternity by his own strength? And even if he could, what kind of eternity would it be, if it carried within it the same worries, the same conflicts and the same lacks we know today?

From the free brochure "The Purpose of Life". You will find the brochure under Resources.

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