

The Value of Life

Niihama National College of Technology

Tatsuya Fukuda

Have you ever thought about your own life in relation to death? I recently had a powerful experience that made me think deeply about my life and death. The day before my twentieth birthday I was riding my motorcycle and I had an awful accident. A car in the opposite lane suddenly turned right, and before I could react, she hit me. I felt my body floating in the air. I saw my motorcycle gliding on the ground, as if in slow motion. My body was flung against the pavement and my consciousness gradually faded away. As it faded, I remember screaming inwardly, 'No, no, no! I don't want to die!' I was carried to the hospital in an ambulance, and my family and friends met me shortly afterward. It was then that I actually felt deeply and profoundly 'I'm alive' for the first time in my life. My parents told me that if I had fallen just a few centimeters more, I would have hit a wall and died. I really did have a "narrow escape from death".

My life was saved. However, the medical advice was extremely cruel. Complete recovery would take at least two years. My right ankle and left wrist were diagnosed as having compound fractures. The doctor said to me "you need an immediate operation." So, I had the operation, and after the surgery, I felt like I was in hell. Intense pain took me and I couldn't sleep. The next day the doctor came to my room and said, "The operation was successful, but there is one thing I need to tell you, and I hate to tell you this, you won't be able to do any sports for two years." I couldn't say anything. I loved sports, and until then I had practiced Karate everyday. It was my life. This was horrible news.

After the operation my life changed totally. In the hospital I couldn't walk by myself. I had to use a wheel chair whenever I wanted to go somewhere. I discovered what a great hardship it is to live with a wheelchair. I could hardly sleep because of the intense pain every day. I became weak mentally and physically. Even though I had escaped death, I began to think I would rather die than spend my life like this. I felt like I had lost it all, and neither my friends nor my family could cheer me up.

But then an unexpected event changed that situation. One day when I went for rehabilitation, an older man in a wheelchair spoke to me. He said, "Hey, you look so sad. What's wrong?" I told him what had happened and he said to me, "Hey, you don't have it so bad. I have total paralysis because of a stroke. You can't imagine the

hard days I've had. It was an awful knowing that I must live in an electric wheelchair for the rest of my life. I can't even eat by myself! However, thanks to my parents, I have never given up. I live more passionately and I do what I can as well as possible. I want to live my life without regret."

The man's story moved me deeply, and after that day I made up my mind to also "live life without regret." I worked so hard at rehabilitation every day. I was able to leave the hospital two weeks earlier than planned.

I think life is filled and fulfilled by experiencing and getting over hardships. Before the accident, my days were very ordinary. But now I think my life is both fuller than before and richer. Because of my accident I know intimately the fear of death and the value and preciousness of life and loved ones. It's funny: it took an almost fatal accident for me to remember that I am alive and surrounded by love.

I now tell my friends to please acknowledge the preciousness of their own lives. After all, the world has only one of you. You are like a precious jewel. Please take care of this life; it is a gift. Nobody knows when they will die. Therefore, please experience life without regret. I think that now, even if I happen to meet another awful hardship, I will never give up. The older man at the hospital taught me that there is always someone worse off than you, and not to forget the support and love from your parents and friends. He was an amazing teacher, and his lesson changed my life.

Thank you for listening to my story.