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Seeking
direction
and
meaning
in life

In Japan almost everything revolves around trains. Most people use this kind of transportation to go to work or to school.

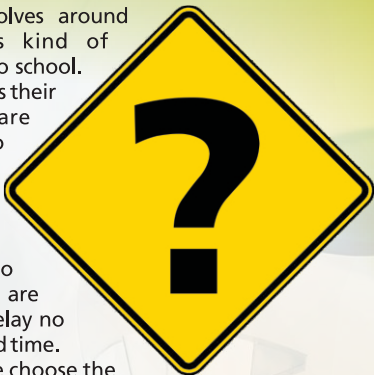
Commercial addresses have stations as their references. The train stations are meeting points. Akita Hachiko used to wait for his owner to come back from work at the university. And that's where the dog kept waiting for him even after his death. We can even adjust our watches according to the shinkansen (bullet train). They are punctual, but if they are late they delay no more than six seconds of the scheduled time.

On the other hand, many people choose the train when they want to commit suicide. In Japan a suicide happens every 15 or 20 minutes. People without meaning in life and a great emptiness inside only have one direction in mind, the train tracks. In order to try to reduce the number of suicides the Japanese train companies set up very high fines for the families of those who commit suicide at the stations. But this has not solved the problem. In Osaka, many of the ones who commit suicide choose to die on the tracks of a certain train company that charges the lowest fines.

How can we explain such lack of hope in one of the countries which has the best quality of life in the world?

Even achieving everything planned for life isn't enough to have internal peace or meaning for life. Ever since the world was created, human beings look for solutions for those needs. Plato, the Greek philosopher said: "Do not wait for a conflict to find out what is important in your life".

When do people usually think about the meaning of life and about the importance of what they accomplish? As a doctor I have seen that the majority of the people deeply meditate on these subjects when they receive tragic or unexpected news, like an accident or when they feel the impact of a serious illness. In other words, the proximity of death (or the perception of how fragile life is) makes us value what is really important. People dying of an incurable disease are not concerned with how many times their team has been champion or worried about a course they should have taken 20 years ago. Their concern is focused on priorities that were not properly valued in their busy everyday life.



A research was done in the USA to find out what are the most important factors at the end of someone's life. It involved 340 terminally ill people, 332 family members of someone who had recently died, 361 doctors and 429 professionals who work with terminally ill people. There was a tie for the first place within the 44 questions related to the quality of the end of life, in the opinion of the ill people and their family members: "lack of pain" and "peace with God". This reminds us of Edith Stein who died in a concentration camp during the II World War and was later canonized by the Catholic Church. She said: "Whoever seeks the truth is seeking God, whether consciously or unconsciously."

There comes a time when everyone will have to stop and consider carefully about the real meaning of life, even if he/she does not believe in God. It is said that Nietzsche, the important philosopher of the XIX century who declared that "God is dead", wrote the following to a friend about Jesus Christ: "I know that if I don't find Him, I won't have the answers for my life."

Like Nietzsche, everyone is seeking for something that makes sense in life. Carl Jung the famous psychiatrist, declared decades ago, that "the world today suffers of the emptiness neurosis".

We live in a time of contrasts: babies with more life expectancy (the average number of years that a newborn would expect to live), but also more people without hope in life, fact that has increased the number of suicides, including old people. The world is getting more and more crowded with less space to live, and yet people feel emptier and emptier and longing for peace and a meaning in life.

Gerald Jampolsky, an American psychiatrist, affirmed that others don't need to change in order for you to experience internal peace. Peace with God is possible through Jesus Christ (as it is written in the Bible, in Romans 5:1). Believing is a personal decision that each one has to make individually.

Walt Emerson said: "What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us."

The spiritual emptiness is related to the separation between man and God. The Bible affirms that our sins separate us from God (Isaiah 59:2). You might not be a liar, a murderer or a thief, but evil is born within all of us. For this reason we make mistakes, be it by thoughts or by actions, or by omission. This is what the Bible calls sin. We are all sinners – and this is a barrier between God and us. We cannot, with our own efforts, break this barrier, and overcome this distance that separates us from God, not even with good works or religious rituals.

But God provided a solution when he sent Jesus to the world. He came to die on the cross, where He shed His blood to forgive all our sins. He rose again, defeating death. Jesus Christ is alive and it is our duty to respond to his invitation: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." If your answer is yes, say:

"Lord God, I come just as I am. I believe in you Lord and believe that Jesus died in my place. I want Jesus to be my God and Savior. I admit that I have sins, I don't even remember all of them, and because of these sins I deserve your condemnation. But I want to receive the forgiveness that Jesus conquered for me when He died on the cross in my place. I ask you to forgive me and come right now into my life, cleansing me from all sins and fulfilling the emptiness that is within me and giving perfect meaning and direction to my life. Thank you for the Salvation that Jesus offers me. In His name, amen".

This is the beginning of a new life, where there was emptiness once now hope rules. "Christ in you, the hope of glory." (Colossians 1:27)

If you have prayed this prayer or if you have any questions, feel free to send an e-mail to fikedo@hotmail.com