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## THE FEAR OF DEATH

For many people, the study of Theosophy has alleviated their fear of death. When my father, a lifelong Theosophist, was lying in a hospital after a severe stroke, I felt the need to ask him if he was afraid of dying. Although he was a quiet man who kept things to himself, I wanted to take that opportunity to find out what was in his heart. His reply was both immediate and reassuring. With a trace of a smile, he gently shook his head from side to side, indicating that death held no trepidation for him. It was such a natural response that I had no reason to doubt him. A few days later he passed over to the other side.

The Roman philosopher Marcus Tullius Cicero, in his later years, wrote the now famous essay "On Old Age." Written in the style of the Platonic dialogues, its popularity has endured throughout the centuries; both U. S. President John Adams and Benjamin Franklin were admirers of this timeless essay. In one remarkable passage, Cicero uses a maritime simile to describe his feelings about death: "As I approach death I feel like a man nearing harbor after a long voyage: I seem to be catching sight of land."

At the moment of birth, each soul embarks upon a voyage, one that is sometimes turbulent or foreboding, while at other times, placid and serene. We have navigated this sea before, although we know it not. But whether our journey is barren or fruitful, hasty or prolonged, one thing is certain—at some point our tired vessel will return to the harbor and we will disembark.

When death beckons at the end of a long life, its arrival is often presaged by a sense that the journey has run its course. Faintly catching a glimpse of the shoreline through the seaborne haze, we are as the wayfarer who left port ages ago and now returns home. Then, just like Tennyson's Ulysses, we may triumphantly exclaim: "Much have I seen and known . . . I am a part of all I have met."

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