

The Last Hour of Life by G. I. Gurdjieff¹

Imagine, that you have only a few minutes, maybe an hour left to live; somehow you have discovered exactly when you will die. What would you do with this precious hour of your stay on Earth? Would you be able to complete all your things in this last hour, do you have a conscious idea about how to do it?

And letting go your last breath would you feel satisfaction from knowing that you have done everything possible in this life to fulfill that you are constantly present, always vibrating, always waiting, like the son is waiting for the father-sailor? In the manifested world everything has its beginning and its end. In the Real World everything is always present and one beautiful day you will be allowed to forget everything and leave the world “forever”.

Freedom is worth a million times more than [political] liberation. The free man, even in slavery, remains a master of himself. For example, if I give you something, let’s say, a car, in which there is no fuel, the car cannot move. Your car needs a special fuel, but it is only you who is able to define what kind of fuel is needed and where to get it.

You have to define yourself how to digest my ideas to make them yours, so that they belong only to you. Your car cannot work on the same fuel my car is working on. I suggest to you only the primary material. You have to get from it what you can use. So, more bravely, sit down at the steering wheel.

The organic life is very fragile. The planetary body can die at any moment. It is always one step from death. And if you could manage to live one more day, it is only a chance accidentally given to you by nature. If you will be able to live even one more hour, you can consider yourself to be a lucky person. From the moment of conception we are living on borrowed time.

Living in this world you have to feel death each second, so settle all your life affairs, even in your last hour. But how can anyone know exactly his last hour? For the sense of security make up your things with nature and yourself in every hour given to you, then you will never be met unprepared. The man has to be taught this starting from the [esoteric] school: how to breath, to eat, to move and to die right. This has to become a part of an educational programme. In this programme it is necessary to include the teaching about how to realize the presence of “I” and also how to establish consciousness.

Question: How to act if you do not feel that there is something unfinished?

Gurdjieff answered after a pause. He took a deep breath and replied:

¹Information has surfaced in forum postings and online book reviews that indicates Eugene Jeffrey Gold may have authored *The Last Hour of Life*. EJ’s friend, Frank G., provided the genesis when he conveyed his perspective on living each day as if it were his last. In the 1960’s, EJ eventually transcribe the “Last Day” concept into a workshop format, and the exercise came to fruition as “Last Hour”. *Source: personal correspondence between Claude N. and Barbara H., January 4, 2012.*

Ask yourself who will be in difficulty if you die like a dog. At the moment of death you have to be wholly aware of yourself and feel that you have done everything possible to use all, within your abilities, in this life which was given to you.

Now you do not know much about yourself. But with each day you dig deeper and deeper into this bag of bones and start knowing more and more details. Day by day you will be finding out what you should have done and what you have to re-do among the things you have done. A real man is one who could take from life everything that was valuable in it, and say: “And now I can die”. We have to try to live your lives so that we could say any day: “Today I can die and not be sorry about anything”.

Never spend fruitlessly the last hour of your life because it can become the most important hour for you. If you use it wrongly, you may be sorry about it later. This sincere excitement that you feel now can become for you a powerful source of the force that can prepare you for perfect death. Knowing that the next hour can become the last one for you, absorb the impressions which it will bring to you as a real gourmet. When lady death will call you, be prepared, always. The master knows how to take from each tasty piece the last bit of the most valuable. Learn to be the master of your life.

When I was young I learned to prepare fragrances. I learned to extract from life its essence, its most subtle qualities. Search in everything the most valuable, learn to separate the fine from the coarse. One who has learned how to extract the essence, the most important from each moment of life, has reached a sense on quality.

He is able to do with the world something that can not be done by an aboriginal.

It could be that in the last moments of your life you will not have the choice where and with whom to be, but you will have a choice to decide how fully you will live them. The ability to take the valuable from life—is the same as to take from the food, air and the impressions the substances needed to build up your higher bodies. If you want to take from your life the most valuable for yourself, it has to be for the good of the higher; for yourself it is enough to leave just a little. To work on yourself for the good of others is a smart way to receive the best from life for yourself. If you will not be satisfied with the last hour of your life, you will not be happy about the whole of your life. To die means to come through something which is impossible to repeat again. To spend your precious time in nothing means to deprive yourself the opportunity to extract from life the most valuable.

In this world, to live life through, from the beginning to the end – means another aspect of the Absolute. All greatest philosophers were carefully preparing for the last hour of their life. And now I will give you the exercise to prepare for the last hour on the Earth. Try not to misinterpret any word from the given exercise.

The Exercise

Look back at the hour that has passed, as if it was the last hour for you on the earth and that you have just acknowledged that you have died. Ask yourself, were you satisfied at that hour?

And now reanimate yourself again and set up the aim for yourself. In the next hour (if you are lucky to live one more) try to extract from life a little more than you did in the last hour. Define, where and when you should have been more aware, and where you should have put more inner fire.

And now open your eyes wider, and by this I mean—open more possibilities for yourself, be a little more brave, than you were in the previous hour. Since you know that this is your last hour and you have nothing to lose, try to gain some bravery—at least now. Of course, you don't have to be silly about it.

Get to know yourself better, look at your machine as if from the outside. Now, when you are dying, there is no sense to keep your reputation and your prestige.

And now onwards, until the real last hour, aspire with persistence to receive the most you can from life that is of value, develop your intuition. Take just a few moments each hour to watch at the hour that passed, without judgment, and then tune yourself to extracting more from the following hour.

If we look at each hour like at a separate life unit, you can try to do as much as you can to use every unit totally. Force yourself and find the way to make the next hour much more than the one before, but also be aware that you have taken care of the debts you collected till now. Increase the self-sensing and self-knowledge of yourself, and also increase the ability to master yourself, this will change the work of your machine, which is always out of your control. And these abilities can become the indication of the real changes. And it is absolutely unimportant what the machine is thinking about this.

...To live the rest of your life rehearsing your death hour by hour—is not at all pathological. None can receive more from life than the cancer patient, who knows approximately when he will die. And since he already recognized how he wishes to spend the rest of his life, he will not have to make the total change in it, but he will be able to go somewhere, where he always wished to go, but would not do it in other circumstances.

The man who knows that he will die soon, will try to use to the maximum every hour of the rest of his life. This is exactly what Christ meant when he said that the last days will come soon—the days before the Last Judgment. We are all standing in front of the Judge, but it is not the others who are judging us, but we ourselves do the last estimation of our life. We do not have to fail the most important examination, where the most serious judge is ourself.

Each moment, taken alone, represents the particle of the eternal Creation. Therefore each moment we can extract the most subtle substances, that we can call “the essence of life”.

Imagine yourself the substance “air” or the substance “impressions”. Finally, draw in your mind the substance “moment”. Yes, even the moments of time are the substances.

If we will be able to extract the finest substances from the coarser, sooner or later we will have to pay for it. This law is called The Law of Balance. That is why we will learn how to pay immediately for those that we receive from life. Only then we will not have any debts. To pay

immediately—this is what is called “real doing”. “To do”—is to think, to feel, to act, but “real doing”—is to pay immediately.

To do—may mean only one thing: to extract the essence from each moment of life and at the same moment to pay all the debts to the nature and yourself; but only when you have “I”, can you pay immediately.

Real life is not a change of activity, but a change of the quality of the activity. Destiny—is destiny. Each one of us has to find himself in the whole order of things. It is not too late yet to start doing it now, although you have spent the greater part of your life in sleep. Starting from today you can begin to prepare yourself for death and, at the same time, to increase the quality of your living. But do not delay with the start—maybe you really only have just one more hour of life.

Question: Can we share this with others? I think it is very important what we have heard about this evening.

- You can retell it word by word, but until you will [can?] do this [exercise] yourself, it would mean nothing for others. Existence is the means, or the instrument, for action. Think about this and you will find out why it is so.

Question: Therefore, we cannot pay the debts, if we do not exist, or if our “I” is absent?

- Why do you have such a need to pay? Pay for what? If life is only a coincidence, then there is no sense to go on. This does not mean that you have to end your life with a suicide. Opposite, you have to put all your effort into “to live”. Ordinary man always lives, just going with the flow. He is not just sleeping, he is absolutely dead. To really live, it is necessary to support the efforts of nature, to take actively from life, and not to act passively—wherever it flows.

Extracting from life the most precious, you have to be able to operate your emotions. See how fairly you can estimate yourself. Look attentively at yourself and you will see many remarkable ways to be fair. Each time notice for yourself different moments when the desires appear. Act as before, but always be aware of their presence. Transport to the world the part of your blood, but one of the higher level.

At the end of each hour after you have estimated its usefulness, imagine that you just woke up in the absolutely unknown in comparison to the previous one gone by. It is important to note that the apparent continuation of the last hour is in reality changing with every hour, although things and people seem the same as before. With the time you will learn to see yourself as a spirit of a special substance, who is coming from one world to another, as an uninvited guest of nature.

Looking from this point of view evaluate everything you do in your life. Looking at the results of all your efforts of the past and think what sense they all have now, in the last hour of your life. Those who are engaged in the Work, are dead to this world and at the same time they are more alive in this world than anyone else. Work...something strange, imperceptible, but for many it is impossible to live without it.

The ordinary way of understanding life is vanity of vanities. However big the result is according to earthly measures, sooner or later it will fail. Even the sand is being rubbed into dust by time. Even the most significant people of history are being forgotten. To understand the real possibilities of this world, it is necessary to find what we can reach in this world that will be very useful in the Real World.

Attentively look at the lives of all the greatest people, those who were commanding armies, who had power over others. What is the benefit for them from all their great actions now, when they are dead? Even when they were alive, all these great actions were no more than empty dreams. We are not here to praise ourselves and to prove ourselves, the most disgusting in the ordinary man is the ability to quickly satisfy his flesh.

The majority of people find many excuses not to work on themselves. They are in a complete prison of their weaknesses. But right now we do not speak about them, but about you.

Understand me right, I do not need followers, I am rather interested in finding the good organizers, the real warriors of the new world. I understand the weakness of the organization, because right now we do not speak about the usual organisation which would consist of initiates.

I remind you once again, learn to live each of your hours with a bigger benefit. Create a detailed plan of the last hour of your life. To understand how one should die, you should grow deep roots into life, only then you will be able to die like a human being, not like a dog. Although, it is not given to everyone—to die. You can become manure for our planet, but it does not really mean to die. To die to this world forever—is an honour. For this honour you have to pay with Conscious Labour and Intentional Suffering. You have to earn this right.

Try to imagine yourself relatively clearly the last hour of your life on earth. Write a kind of a script of this last hour, as if you were writing the script for a film. Ask yourself: “Is this how I want to dispose my life”. If you are not satisfied with the answer, rewrite the script until you like it.

Look at life like as business. Time is your money for life. When you came into this world, a definite amount of money was given to you and this you cannot exceed. Time is the only currency with which you pay for your life. Now you see, how you used the biggest part of it in a stupid way. You have not even reached the main goal of life—to have rest. You failed as a businessman, and as a user of life—you deceived yourself. All your life you thought that everything is given to you for free, and now suddenly you discovered that—it is not free. You pay for using the time, that is why each moment of your stay here costs something.

So how would it be possible for you to reimburse [recover] at least somehow these losses? Check, if the deficit on your bank account is only temporary or is it perhaps constant? Did you loose the time or could you invest it successfully? If you have spent all your money on vacations, then there is nothing to do but to be sorry about the past.

For many years you have been spending you life as if your parents gave you a bank account with unlimited credit. But now the amount is used and you see that you are all alone and that there is none to rely on. There is no more time on your bank account. Now you are forced to earn each

hour of your life. All your life you behaved like a child and spent time just like a newly married couple on their honeymoon.

Our main enemy, which is hindering us from applying the necessary efforts—is hopelessness. I know, you will have many excuses not to prepare yourself for the last hour of your life. The habit is a big force, but starting once, you can learn to do each time more and more.

Do not fiddle all day, force yourself at least one hour a day to make an effort, otherwise you will lose everything. Think about the rehearsal of your last hour as if it was ballet exercises—you have to do it all your life.

I dedicate four hours a day for this exercise, but when I was young, I spent on it two times longer.

Translation from Russian by Alexandra Kharitonova, with free English rendering by Reijo Oksanen. Unearthed by Ilya Kotz & Avi Solomon of the Jerusalem Nyland Group.