

# *The Difficulty of Being Human* \*

Milla Ragusa

**Abstract:** *The following essays contain the author's autobiographical reflections on fear, love, hatred, loss, happiness, and failures.*

**Keywords:** *Milla Ragusa; essays; autobiographical thoughts.*

## **Fear: The imprisonment of a soul**

So you discover how meaningless your suffering is and how senseless your life. You realize that there is no way out, no matter how much you keep on hoping that a miracle will happen, even though you know they are so rare, nowadays.

You continue to be the prisoner of your own misery, much like the inmate of a concentration camp or the unfortunate soldier held as a prisoner of war... Their principal pain is not the daily tortures imposed by their tormentors, but the vain hope of another future, of another time, and of another life...

Despite every plan you make, and build dreamingly deep within your mind, you know perfectly well that you will never attain the only one thing you have been looking for: the dignity of freedom. The barbed wire fence is still there for most people, and it serves to put an end to all your wishes... It holds you in modern captivity, using fear, and moral abuse as the weapons to torment your soul further. That same fence puts an end to all your secret wishes and hopes. And you asked for so little!

Being aware of this all-powerful dominion, as well as your own cowardice and permanent fear, you never build up enough courage to break through the invisible walls of fear and finally escape the confines of your moral misery... How many times do you ask yourself how it is possible for a human being to be so subject to fear?

You know what the outside world will require from you: hard work, the strength to survive and the faith to keep on fighting, something your imprisonment has almost taken away from you, along with the passageway to freedom, normality and self-respect.

Although you long for these very things every hour, each day of your life, you know deep in your broken and dispirited soul that freedom from such unbearable pressure will never come to you, unless it comes as the final liberation from all human maladies...

If such a miracle comes to pass, you will release the deep sigh you have been holding back for years on end, and, without even glancing back at the cause of your sufferings, you will welcome the peace that has come to you, wholeheartedly.

Some people see death as the ultimate horror or punishment, when what it actually grants to prisoners of fear, pressure, intolerance and dominion is freedom to inhale fresh air, and liberation from all torments.

But there are no miracles any more, are there? It seems nothing but the abduction of

your captors can release your imprisoned soul to soar high from its captivity...

“Where is the Lord, our shepherd who will lead us through the darkness and on to still waters?”

## **Love: Flimsy as silk yet dense as satin**

Perhaps the most used word throughout the centuries? But so few know its real meaning ... and the many definitions you can give to it ...

Certainly, it is full of colors like the silk veils of a sensuous Oriental dancer, and also vibrant like the sound of thunder. In this definition alone, a delirious and fleeting passion plays the major role. Not love. Thus, it does not last; it is easily torn apart, looking like silk shreds scattered around, the colors fading rapidly into a bleak gray, and the sounds formerly so vivid and thrilling dying down to the sadness of unwelcome solitude.

And yet, it can be as dense as thick, shining satin. Strong, yet smooth; heavy, yet welcome; massive in its fibers, but flexible enough to be shaped to any contour... In this definition, a mature and lasting passion plays the major role. It is too strong feeling to be destroyed easily, and nor can it be torn to shreds, for it has matured, endlessly.

You can think of love as being the ultimate sharing of previous moments from which the cherished memories will be your everyday nourishment. Or you can think of love as being the slow learning process of give and take, the lessons which will guide your life.

There is also the so-called love that possesses you in such a way as to annihilate your very self, which virtually casts you to the bottom of the pit, completely spent, exhausted and empty... And, of course, there is the other kind of love – which permits you to be yourself; which respects you as a human being; which fulfills your soul without robbing you of your identity; which makes you feel complete, alive and realized in the most intimate way.

Regrettably, there is still one other kind of love: that between a man and a woman in which there is nothing to give and nothing to receive; in which the man must impose himself for his own exclusive lusty pleasure, and also to prove his manliness to himself. In such a union, this man makes his female counterpart the scapegoat for all the frustrations and sickness in his mind. To her alone, he pretends to be what his cowardice and timidity prevent him from being: a real man.

However, the beauty of passion lies not in the glow of a wintery campfire, nor in the explosion of fire in a wheat field, but rather in the quietness and depth of a glance, and in the warm flow of a soft touch. Love is far, far more than the consummated union of two bodies. It goes beyond that, and it can only be called love if it contains all those tiny shared affinities...

Actually, it must be something that, no matter what the circumstances may be, will be able to surpass any difficulty, and moreover, even during separation, will have the strength to last, survive and thrive, with no more than a little word here, a small message there, and maybe a mute stare when the tricks of destiny allow...

That can be called love.

## **Hatred: Powerful and lasting as the cedar**

The other side of love, but so much more powerful and lasting! So easily kept alive when love can be so easily hurt, and a step further, forgotten. Not hatred though. Its constraints are strong ingredients like hate itself: anger, envy, vengeance, contempt, despair, wrath, bitterness and intolerance, among others. The mixture proves to be highly poisoning and intoxicating.

Hatred is the product of a sour harvest; its seed germinates in bitterness, and it has all the strength it needs to grow and develop its vitality out of the resentment contained in its roots. Its fruits are of a hideous green and the sweetness of them gone forever. The seedbeds cannot kill the fast-growing weeds of hatred. The whole field can produce nothing but the evil planted by this farmer whose soul is commanded by hate.

The power one finds in hating surpasses any other feeling. Courage, whether born out of chivalry or of love for one's native soil, has not half the strength which is born with hatred. It can make one kill without a blink, and it is the trigger to make evil erupt from one's soul.

Nevertheless, hatred is the stronghold for the greatest single weapon against tyranny and brute force: dreams of vengeance. It is a slow gestation where the dreamer plots, imagines and sees himself achieving his goal completely. And, as in all vengeance, "the longer it takes, the sweeter it tastes". No matter how long it may take, hatred is the continuous feeding that nourishes the sought-after vengeance. And because it counts anger, contempt, deep wounds and rebellion among its many nutrients, its power is always overwhelming.

Inflamed and passionate is the one who hates, for sometimes hatred is the only way to survive, while love is too soft and liable to perish, to be smothered by the very same hate which gives rise to vicious rule and lack of respect towards one's fellow. A soul nourished by hatred is often overwhelmed by such a violent emotion.

Of all human feelings, hatred is the strongest power and longest lasting. It is constantly revived by the living presence of its cause or the mere mention of it. It is enhanced if provoked, and almost never forgotten. Forgiveness is absent from hatred, which explains why it is so everlasting.

The other facet of hatred is the way it turns a man's soul into a dark alley with no place for merriness, faith or hope. Here blow the tempestuous winds, destroying all other feelings. The price of hatred is one's own life, health and faith in mankind. Once it takes root it will only die with one's last breath...

## **Loss: The dispossession mankind has to live with**

The red soil, eroded and parched by the merciless sun, showed cracks and deep ditches everywhere in the desolate landscape, where the long drought had put an end to all forms of life and the dried bones of the farm animals were the proof of its destruction. The bones and the dried river bed were mute witnesses, watching the man and his family abandon the place, once the source of their daily life, their daily survival... Silence filled the air, and the man's loss was complete. One more loss to be counted while taking up the road of the dispossessed...

The large, heavy boat moved with some effort, pushing forward at no more than ten knots, carrying the destitute, those poor immigrants who could no longer live their lives in

their own homelands. For one reason or another they had been denied their right to stay, thus losing all they had learned to love and keep, as the large vessel took them away from it all. A few wretched ones on deck looked bitterly at the land they were leaving behind; each one's loss was too great to be put into words; they simply stared at the vanishing land until it disappeared completely. Turning their backs forever, they sadly joined the rest of the dispossessed...

The war raged in all its fury, brutality and insanity. Those engaged in the fighting were quite aware of their personal losses, and those who watched it helplessly knew well enough that there is little a mother can say to a son who comes from the battlefield blind forever. There is little a field doctor can say to a soldier who wakes up only to discover his legs have been blown off. There is little an officer can say to a wife whose husband has been killed in action. Their losses were greater than anyone can assess, and their feelings too deep to be reached. Their destitution rested heavily upon their shoulders...

But personal losses are part of mankind. They have been part of it since its creation. One can only imagine the sadness that overtook Moses upon reaching the threshold of the Promised Land, and then not being allowed to step on it... It was an immense loss he had to bear, alone. Napoleon confided his thoughts to no-one when he was deprived of everything that held meaning for him, held captive on the cliffs of the forsaken island of St Helena, until death came for him ... How much at a loss he must have felt, then!

The deep sorrow faced by everyone was also Lincoln's bitterness regarding the poverty and loneliness of his own childhood and youth, and then later, seeing his country so divided, as well as the agony of his soul at the loss of human life – the true testimony of Gettysburg's painful memories...

When his own life was requested, and there was no way out but to kill himself, Rommel knew full well what his losses were. However, to lose his dignity, and that of his family, would be a far greater loss, one he could never have endured...

The folly of mankind has not gone from the earth, but has rather become its daily shadow; for one reason or another, all our losses have come to pass, united by the dispossession mankind has been living with throughout the centuries...

## **Happiness: The peaceful quietness of your Being**

Apart from the luxuries money can buy, putting aside the sophistication of a superficial life, where the major concern is that of showing off to people who care only for the superfluous, happiness is indeed the peaceful quietness of your being. It means being at peace with oneself. In other words, it means having found a Shangri-La, within oneself.

We find happiness when we accept life as we find it and try to make the best of it. Happiness is the result of a conscience clear of somber ghosts and guilty feelings; happiness is a part of us, if we're not greedy for more than life has offered us.

To find a purpose in life is to find happiness. The fulfillment of one's life through work and the readiness to fight one's own battles also provides this feeling. The realization that fills a man's soul when he sees his work through, when he has had the chance of accomplishing something he considers important, is all he needs to attain complete happiness.

This is doubly gratifying when there's mutual understanding in one's relationship, when everyday routine events are shared, and rare eventful occasions, too. To give happiness

is a most satisfying feeling, as well as receiving it through love, respect, understanding, dialogue and deep sharing.

The colorful rainbow makes one feel a part of nature in all its grandeur. The rainbow means peace, and peace means happiness. The very wonder of knowing that the sun will always rise takes away any bleakness one may feel. And watching the sun setting day after day brings the quietness and wisdom of another day lived in the vastness of this planet. Happiness is the magic power of being able to see all these miracles of nature, and enjoy them infinitely...

When much time has passed, there are the memories of the happiness felt at the crying of a first child being born; or at the winning of a great struggle; or at the opportunity of being truly loved; or at the sight of the first snowflakes, or the lights of a Christmas tree seen through a window misty with condensation; or the ecstasy of seeing the huge sea and its engulfing waves for the first time; or the incredulous expression in a child's eyes when discovering the metamorphosis of a butterfly; but most of all of yourself when looking at the mirror of your life and realizing you had so much to live for...

That is real happiness!

## **Failures – A reflection on old age**

Old age is the result of one's entire life, and within this life, the countless events that took place. But it is not a mathematical equation in which the results are presented in an objective and conclusive way.

It takes one's whole life to live all the experiences and events allotted to us; to endure all the ordeals one has to go through, and to learn how to pull through every crisis.

However, although time has been part of mankind, it has never been on his side. On the contrary, it has always been his enemy, since mankind is always running after time, terrified it may cease its ticking, paralyzing all our vital functions and the world itself. Time makes children so eager to grow up fast, fearing there won't be enough time left. Youngsters want to grow into adults to discover what life is all about; and here the cycle stops, for the middle-aged want to slow time down so they can do what they failed to do earlier or enjoy life as it is presented to them. The old wish time would not pass so quickly, depriving them of the chance to try again, to erase their failures and to relive their past experiences.

Only a few realize how fast life is for us all! It is only when old age has caught up with us that we have the time to look back and see what we have done with this treasured gift: life. Only then can we try to analyze it, not in terms of what might have been, but of how we have spent it.

A few of us see the failures of mankind in our old age when we look back, and only then realize how much time we have wasted. We may have been a foolishly jealous mother, full of malice; or an all-powerful father, refusing dialogue and the exchange of ideas, believing himself to be the center of the universe, someone who refused to accompany the evolution of civilization, but rather set himself aside, making his life and that of those around him miserable. Or we may have been a spoilt child, and later a grown-up who was never satisfied with life, with those trying to help him, and those trying to be friendly. We may have wasted our life forgetting to cultivate those around us, and, upon realizing this great mistake, we realize life has just passed us by.

Old age is welcomed by those who still desire to carry on and straighten out the mistakes of the past, and by those who, regardless of time, place and age, continue to dedicate themselves to concluding work they believe in.

Failures? All of us have them, at one time or another. But knowing in our old age that we have tried to improve and to succeed is at least of some comfort. Pity those who are so intoxicated by their own power! Not even in their old age will they be able to look back and be aware of their follies, cruelty and needless dominance! And what can we say of those who struggled throughout their lives, and never even realized that all they ever wanted was right there, within their reach? They failed to see, to understand and to grasp whatever was being offered to them, which represented their own long-dreamed future. For these, life has nothing more to offer...

But the greatest of all failures is that of a selfish life, at the end of which, looking back, one knows that there is no return, no time for atonement, because, fleeting as it was, time is finally up!

\*Giuliana Ragusa deeply thanks Peter Harris for revising her mother's text in English.