

Getting Out

Life in the world of big business, particularly in Colombo and the ever growing industrial suburbs of the city has in recent decades become quite a whirl. No one appears to have time. This you can see from the mad rush on our roads in the mornings as company executives set off to work and in the evenings as they return to what they hope would be the relative calm of their homes. Yet, increasingly these days people are beginning to stop in their tracks and take stock. Their thoughts are centered on life after death and near-death, or post death experiences, of people who have had extensive tours of the world beyond success and come back to tell their tales.

Responsible people and people whose business in the world is only concerned with studying the share market figures and balance sheets and taking stock of financial returns can hardly be concerned and are downright sceptical of those so-called spiritual encounters they pooh-pooh the idea. But once in a while there are the hard realities of career death which people do come up against.

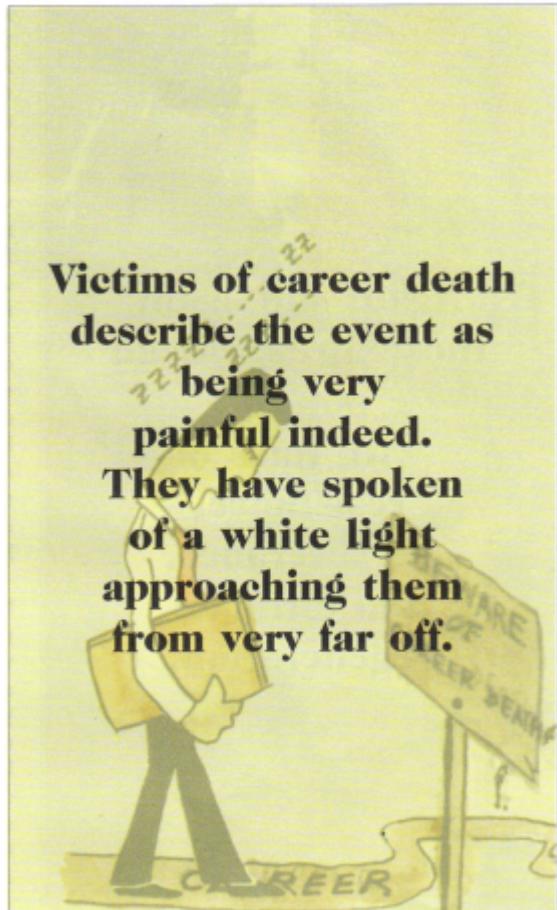


Here the experience they have, however vehement their denials may be, have that numinous quality verging on the spiritual which is undeniable.

Victims of career death describe the event as being very painful indeed. They have spoken of a white light approaching them from very far off. Quite often they do not recognize this illumination as anything to fear. Once they view it up close, however, the horror sets in and they try to flee, but it is too late. Moments later they are sucked into a vortex that spins them down into a realm of surprising depth and scope, a world much like ours, except that the restaurants aren't nearly as good as the one's mushrooming along every nook and corner of Galle Road and now on Duplication Road.

'I'm very busy, nose to the grindstone, trying to get things done,' said my friend Captain Karu whose post-death experience was very fresh, given the fact that his career life ended just the other day. What was perhaps unusual about this case of career death was that I was actually privileged to see it happen at close quarters. It was grim. He was just walking along, minding his own business, when he was pummelled to smithereens between our senior executive vice-president and the heavy weight chairman of the company who resented him ambling into their territory.

The experience is still so fresh that the Captain doesn't even know that he is dead yet. This may actually not be a totally bad thing, since it obviously hasn't had a negative impact on his attitude, although he seems a bit disoriented. 'Right now I'm working on projections for a fashion fabric company launched recently,' he told me, as he walked by carrying a brand new brown Samsonite brief case in one hand and a bundle of brochures in the other. I could see that although he was still in an expired state, he was already strolling around among the living and headed for his career life. Survivors claim that's the key, a quality that may be described as the desire to get back and, if possible get even. Those who focus on these simple goals early in their career death are able Others, to achieve excellent results. Who take longer to wake up will find themselves going around in circles attached still to thoughts of what they might have been had they a chance to carry on and regretting their past failures. They may have to languish in the nether regions for quite some time. The good news that we should bring home to business humanity is that resurrection is possible in virtually all cases. The only one's who will virtually be disqualified from making a comeback are those people who like our swiftly changing governments, make large promises which never see the light-of-day - promises or profits eventually ending up in miserable losses.

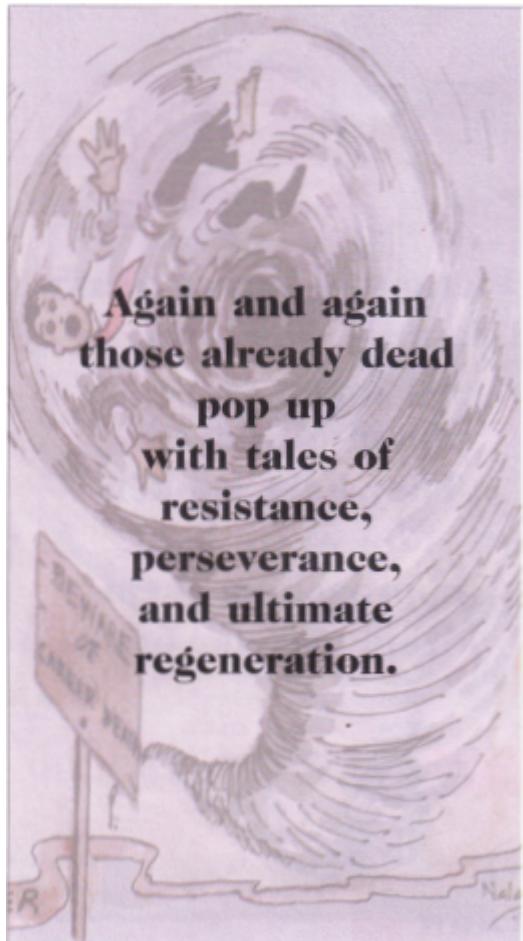


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Hope nevertheless springs eternal in the human breast. Rahula was a director of a company who had worked his way up through the ranks. He was highly thought of and recognised as a superb organiser and a people person. When the time came to fill in the vacancy for vice chairman Rahula was overlooked despite everyone in the company agreeing he would simply walk into the position. The chairman was a bit of a stuffed shirt, jealous of the power he commanded and didn't quite trust Rahula's guts. 'I was sort of crushed for a while,' said Rahula, recalling his stint in purgatory with a compressed smile. 'Then I went out and did what I had to do.' What Rahula did was to go outside the company and acquire the position he was entitled to. A few years later he went back to his original firm with a new surge of self-assurance and was constantly on overdrive. Today, he makes more money than God and has tons of fun doing it.

What fuelled Rahula, and others who have died and come back to tell about it, was the dead's most important asset: rage against injustice. Majid Ismail, now a multimillionaire who owns an entire enclave in Panadura and invited nearly the

whole of the town for his daughters' wedding recently was also passed over by his behemoth several years ago. Nobody needs to worry about him now. Even the street down which he lives is named after him. He owns it. What did he do to get back? He carefully sorted out his options after he quit, then waited for the right opportunity. He went into the Cycle industry first as a partner and then took control. In 1992, with expectations of a business boom, he was perfectly positioned to come back to real functional life. Beyond anger lies patience. My Pal Dayawansa was grossly underappreciated for years before the new regime swept him back, quite deservedly, to position and power in 1994. He didn't do anything. He just stayed dead long enough, tending his garden and growing cloned guava and mango trees which have now begun to bare the juiciest of fruits. With new nutrients available, his personal life too, buttressed by his hearty resilience, has begun to bloom. Again and again those already dead pop up with tales of resistance, perseverance, and ultimate regeneration. Painful experience though has left its indelible mark on many of them and this shows in their steely coldness of manner and a tendency to lash out even when such behaviour is least called for. A few of the revitalized have been killed more than once stomped, crunched, sliced, pureed, and left to die over and over-only to rise like one of those zombies in the movies to feast again on the blood of the living



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Let me recount from my own experience wherein I suffered perhaps the most dramatic career death of my life. Crossed over into the misty vale over on the other side but returned again to this world of the living to tell the dreadful tale. It was pretty horrible. The senior management in my company were determined to create obstacles in my way, that of my colleague Louis who was just short of being as blind as a bat and even poor Dewadasan my companion on so many road trips. All three of us were put on such a hectic course, we finally ended up in one of the roundabout ponds by the Cinnamon Gardens Police Station luckily for us there was no fountain, only a pool. Deva had his head bashed on the hood of the vehicle we were travelling in and Louis who awakened from his stupor, looked around and asked, where are we? He kept on asking anyone who passed by, So what's going on?, And Deva in a daze kept murmuring over and over again, "We're going to come out of this thing fine!" And then there was me. I passed out.

Many have asked what it was like beyond the vale of the living. First, there is a

sense of dislocation. You drift, as in a dream, weeping for yourself. People don't talk much. Those who do speak chatter on inconsequentially about matters of very little importance. Many are dressed in last decade's power clothing — consisting of a white dhoti and long shirt down to the knees

Yet, today, my friends and I are all with some exceptions, basically all right. Best of all, I'm doing great, I don't fool myself, though. I know just around the corner, inevitably, lies the next career death. Still I'm not scared. No matter what happens, I know I'll be back.