

## Source A: 21<sup>st</sup> century nonfiction

Article by Arthur C. Brooks, taken from *The New York Times*.

### To be happier, start thinking more about your death

9<sup>th</sup> January 2016

- 1 Want a better 2016? Try thinking more about your impending demise.
- 2 Years ago on a visit to Thailand, I was surprised to learn that Buddhist monks often contemplate  
3 the photos of corpses in various stages of decay. The Buddha himself recommended corpse  
4 meditation. “This body, too,” students were taught to say about their own bodies, “such is its  
5 nature, such is its future, such its unavoidable fate.”
- 6 Paradoxically, this meditation on death is intended as a key to better living. It makes disciples  
7 aware of the transitory nature of their own physical lives and stimulates a realignment between  
8 momentary desires and existential goals. In other words, it makes one ask, “Am I making the right  
9 use of my scarce and precious life?”
- 10 In fact, most people suffer grave misalignment. In a 2004 article in the journal *Science*, a team of  
11 scholars, including the Nobel Prize winner Daniel Kahneman, surveyed a group of women to  
12 compare how much satisfaction they derived from their daily activities. Among voluntary  
13 activities, we might expect that choices would roughly align with satisfaction. Not so. The women  
14 reported deriving more satisfaction from prayer, worship and meditation than from watching  
15 television. Yet the average respondent spent more than five times as long watching TV as  
16 engaging in spiritual activities.
- 17 If anything, this study understates the misalignment problem. The American Time Use Survey  
18 from the Bureau of Labor Statistics shows that, in 2014, the average American adult spent four  
19 times longer watching television than “socializing and communicating,” and 20 times longer on TV  
20 than on “religious and spiritual activities.” The survey did not ask about hours surfing the web, but  
21 we can imagine a similar disparity.
- 22 This misalignment leads to ennui and regret. I’m reminded of a friend who was hopelessly  
23 addicted to British crossword puzzles (the ones with clues that seem inscrutable to Americans,  
24 such as, “The portly gentleman ate his cat, backwards”). A harmless pastime, right? My friend  
25 didn’t think so — he was so racked with guilt after wasting hours that he consulted a  
26 psychotherapist about how to quit. (The advice: Schedule a reasonable amount of time for  
27 crosswords and stop feeling guilty.)
- 28 While few people share my friend’s interest, many share his anxiety. Millions have resolved to  
29 waste less time in 2016 and have already failed. I imagine some readers of this article are filled  
30 with self-loathing because they just wasted 10 minutes on a listicle titled “Celebrities With Terrible  
31 Skin.”
- 32 Some might say that this reveals our true preferences for TV and clickbait over loved ones and  
33 God. But I believe it is an error in decision making. Our days tend to be an exercise in distraction.  
34 We think about the past and future more than the present; we are mentally in one place and  
35 physically in another. Without consciousness, we mindlessly blow the present moment on low-  
36 value activities.
- 37 The secret is not simply a resolution to stop wasting time, however. It is to find a systematic way  
38 to raise the scarcity of time to our consciousness.

39 Even if contemplating a corpse is a bit too much, you can still practice some of the Buddha's  
40 wisdom resolving to live as if 2016 were your last year. Then remorselessly root out activities,  
41 small and large, that don't pass the "last-year test."

42 There are many creative ways to practice this test. For example, if you plan a summer vacation,  
43 consider what would you do for a week or two if this were your last opportunity. With whom  
44 would you reconnect and spend some time? Would you settle your soul on a silent retreat, or  
45 instead spend the time drunk in Cancún, Mexico?

46 If this year were your last, would you spend the next hour mindlessly checking your social media,  
47 or would you read something that uplifts you instead? Would you compose a snarky comment on  
48 this article, or use the time to call a friend to see how she is doing? Hey, I'm not judging here.

49 Some might think that the last-year test is impractical. As an acquaintance of mine joked, "If I had  
50 one year to live, I'd run up my credit cards." In truth, he probably wouldn't. In a new paper in the  
51 science journal PLOS One, two psychologists looked at the present value of money when people  
52 contemplated death. One might assume that when reminded of death, people would greatly value  
53 current spending over future spending. But that's not how it turned out. Considering death  
54 actually made respondents *less* likely to want to blow money now than other scenarios did.

55 Will cultivating awareness of the scarcity of your time make you grim and serious? Not at all. In  
56 fact, there is some evidence that contemplating death makes you funnier. Two scholars in 2013  
57 published an academic paper detailing research in which they subliminally primed people to think  
58 about either death or pain, and then asked them to caption cartoons. Outside raters found the  
59 death-primed participants' captions to be funnier.

60 There's still time to rethink your resolutions. Forget losing weight and saving money. Those are  
61 New Year's resolutions for amateurs. This year, improve your alignment, and maybe get funnier in  
62 the process: Be fully alive now by meditating on your demise. Happy 2016!

## Source B: 19<sup>th</sup> century literary nonfiction

Extract from a letter sent by Fyodor Dostoevsky to his brother on 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1849.

1 Brother, my precious friend! all is settled! I am sentenced to four years' hard labour in the fortress  
2 (I believe, of Orenburg) and after that to serve as a private. To-day, the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December, we  
3 were taken to the Semionov Drill Ground. There the sentence of death was read to all of us, we  
4 were told to kiss the Cross, our swords were broken over our heads, and our last toilet was made\*  
5 (white shirts). Then three were tied to the pillar for execution. I was the sixth. Three at a time  
6 were called out; consequently, I was in the second batch and no more than a minute was left me  
7 to live. I remembered you, brother, and all yours; during the last minute you, you alone, were in  
8 my mind, only then I realised how I love you, dear brother mine! I also managed to embrace  
9 Plescheyev and Durov who stood close to me and to say good-bye to them. Finally the retreat was  
10 sounded, and those tied to the pillar were led back, and it was announced that His Imperial  
11 Majesty granted us our lives. Then the present sentences. Palm alone has been pardoned, and  
12 returns with his old rank to the army.

13 I was just told, dear brother, that to-day or to-morrow we are to be sent off. I asked to see you.  
14 But I was told that this was impossible; I may only write you this letter: make haste and give me a  
15 reply as soon as you can. I am afraid that you may somehow have got to know of my death-  
16 sentence. From the windows of the prison-van, when we were taken to the Semionov Drill  
17 Ground, I saw a multitude of people; perhaps the news reached you, and you suffered for me.  
18 Now you will be easier on my account. Brother! I have not become downhearted or low-spirited.  
19 Life is everywhere life, life in ourselves, not in what is outside us. There will be people near me,  
20 and to be a *man* among people and remain a man for ever, not to be downhearted nor to fall in  
21 whatever misfortunes may befall me – this is life; this is the task of life. I have realised this. This  
22 idea has entered into my flesh and into my blood. Yes, it's true! The head which was creating,  
23 living with the highest life of art, which had realised and grown used to the highest needs of the  
24 spirit, that head has already been cut off from my shoulders. There remains the memory and the  
25 images created but not yet incarnated by me. They will lacerate me, it is true! But there remains in  
26 me my heart and the same flesh and blood which can also love, and suffer, and desire, and  
27 remember, and this, after all, is life. *On voit le soleil!*\* Now, good-bye, brother! Don't grieve for  
28 me!

[...]

29 Write to me more often, write more details, more, more facts. In every letter write about all kinds  
30 of family details, of trifles, don't forget. This will give me hope and life. If you knew how your  
31 letters revived me here in the fortress. These last two months and a half, when it was forbidden to  
32 write or receive a letter, have been very hard on me. I was ill. The fact that you did not send me  
33 money now and then worried me on your account; it meant you yourself were in great need! Kiss  
34 the children once again; their lovely faces do not leave my mind. Ah, that they may be happy! Be  
35 happy yourself too, brother, be happy!

36 But do not grieve, for the love of God, do not grieve for me! Do believe that I am no down-  
37 hearted, do remember that hope has not deserted me. In four years there will be a mitigation of  
38 my fate. I shall be a private soldier, – no longer a prisoner, and remember that some time I shall  
39 embrace you. I was to-day in the grip of death for three-quarters of an hour; I have lived it  
40 through with that idea; I was at the last instant and now I live again!

### \*Glossary

our last toilet was made = we put on clothes for the last time

*On voit le soleil!* = We see the sun! (French)

## Section A: Reading

Answer **all** questions in this section.

You are advised to spend about 45 minutes on this section.

**Q1.** Read again the first part of **Source A** from **lines 1 to 21**.

Choose **four** statements below which are true.

**[4 marks]**

- A. The writer recommends that to be happy, you should think about your own death.
- B. 'Corpse meditation' is a term given to the practice of meditating in a grave.
- C. 'Corpse meditation' is intended to make you more aware of how precious life is.
- D. Daniel Kahneman won the Nobel Prize in 2004 for his study into misalignment.
- E. Misalignment is when you don't spend enough time thinking about how precious life is.
- F. Misalignment is when the time you spend doing things that give you satisfaction is less than the time you spend doing things that don't give you satisfaction.
- G. A 2014 survey found that the average American spends much more time watching TV than engaging in spiritual or religious activities.
- H. A 2014 survey found that the average American spends much more time surfing the web than socialising and communicating.

**Q2.** You need to refer to **Source A** and **Source B** for this question.

Use details from **both** sources. Write a summary of the differences between the two writers' experiences.

**[8 marks]**

**Q3.** You now need to refer to **Source B only**.

How does Dostoevsky use language to show how much he loves his brother?

**[12 marks]**

**Q4.** You need to refer to **Source A** and **Source B** for this question.

Compare how the two writers convey their different attitudes to life and death.

In your answer, you could:

- compare their different attitudes
- compare the methods they use to convey their attitudes
- support your ideas with references to both texts

**[16 marks]**