



MATTERS OF LIFE AND DEATH

Most of us hate pondering how long we have left, but philanthropist Satish Modi says focusing on when we are going to die is the key to a better and more fulfilling life

BY JAMIE DOWNHAM



We don't tend to like thinking about it, but we're all going to die. Yes, unfortunately, that even applies to *Mayfair Times* readers.

However, by focusing on our inevitable fate, we might be able to lead better and more positive lives. That's the theory behind Satish Modi's fascinating new book, *In Love With Death*.

The St James's-based philanthropist and businessman has written an entertaining and thoughtful book – but it certainly doesn't pull any punches. On the first page, readers are invited to write their name and their estimated date of death. A warning below reads: "This is not a misprint."

So when I meet Satish at his apartment overlooking Green Park, we compare statistics. As a 33-year-old man, I give myself another 45 years, all being well.

"I have very little time because I'm 67," says Satish. "I hope to live for another 10 years."

It all feels a bit uncomfortable. Unlike the death-obsessed Victorians, modern society is easily spooked by the notion of The End. The book's central message is that we must overcome our fears about death and strive to fill our lives with goodness and reject things that don't make us happy. And that, insists Satish, includes focusing on generating and keeping money.

The arts philanthropist is from one of India's wealthiest families and has been described as "the son of the founder of modern industrial India". But an extraordinary meeting in 2004 with a 93-year-old Buddhist leader who said she knew Satish from a past life set him on the path to writing this book, and focused his belief that materialism does not bring happiness.

"No matter how big a bank account you have, how big a house you live in, ultimately you go in the same box penniless – that is a great equaliser," says Satish. "At birth we are all unequal. Somebody is a prince, like baby George, somebody is a pauper. But at death it's all simple. When we know that we are all going to be equal in the end, what is it we want in life?"



"I checked out all the lottery winners over £10 million. Ultimately they committed suicide, their families were wrecked or they became depressed. This whole thing is a mirage."

Satish, who splits his time between London and Delhi, is committed to giving away his money. He supports a range of charities, including Arts for India, which he founded to support underprivileged artists from the subcontinent. All his proceeds from the book – which, it's worth mentioning, is not a religious one – will also go straight to charity.

"This whole world is so fake," says Satish. "Everyone is running after money. The people who don't have money think that if they get money they will become happy. The people who have money think people are after them for their money. I realised real happiness comes from love and friendship and from being humble."

"I checked out all the lottery winners who won more than £10 million. Ultimately they all either committed suicide, their families were wrecked or they become depressed. What does it tell you? It tells you that this whole thing is like a mirage."

In writing the book, he spoke to interesting people of all walks of life. Their stories are peppered between his own thoughts – little vignettes designed to get you thinking about how you can make the most out of life.

One theme Satish keeps referring to as we speak is that of "detachment" – being prepared to let go.

"Detachment is important," he says. "Supposing you're going from point A to point B on a ship and you have a seven-day journey and you know that you get from birth to death. You don't get attached to the boat, you enjoy the travelling. When you take a flight, you don't get attached to the aircraft. In fact, you want to get off because your end point has come. That's the love in death. You'll say: 'OK, everybody who's born has to die.'

"Whatever you have will never go with you. However, all the good deeds you do, all the help you give to the poor, all the philanthropy, that will go with you. Take control of your life, whatever is left. When you came into the world as a baby, you were crying and the world was laughing. When you depart this world, you should be laughing as the world is crying. Afterwards, everybody should say, 'what a good person he was or she was.'"

This book, and its engaging author, pose a lot of challenging questions, and my mind is full of dizzying thoughts about the uncertainties of life as I head past the Ritz and back into Mayfair. But one thing is for sure: this will be the only interview where I ask someone when they're going to die.

In Love With Death is available to order online from Amazon, The Guardian Bookshop or from the publisher, Birlinn, priced £9.99.