

The Black Door

Several generations ago, during one of the most turbulent of the desert wars in the Middle East, a spy was captured and sentenced to death by a General of the Persian Army. The General, a man of intelligence and compassion, had adopted a strange and unusual custom in such areas. He permitted the condemned person to make a choice. The prisoner could either face the firing squad or pass through the Black Door.

As the moment of execution drew near, the General ordered the spy be brought before him for a short, final interview, the primary purpose of which was to receive the answer of the doomed man to the query: "What shall it be - the firing squad or the Black Door?"

This was not an easy decision and the prisoner hesitated, but soon made it known that he much preferred the firing squad to the unknown horrors that might wait for him behind the ominous and mysterious door. Not long thereafter, a volley of shots in the courtyard announced that the grim sentence had been fulfilled.

The General, staring at his boots, turned to his aide and said, "You see how it is with men: they will always prefer the known way to the unknown. It is a characteristic of people to be afraid of the undefined. Yet, I gave him his choice."

"What lies behind the Black Door?" asked the aide.

"Freedom," replied the General, "and I've known only a few men brave enough to take it."

This story illustrates the situation many of us face each day - a choice between the known and the unknown. Few people have the courage to come alive, to stop being engulfed in a sea of mediocrity. Too many are humbled and dulled by their failure to recognize their own potential. They lack the guts to stop living their lives in a mentally chloroformed condition in that ignoble mass of humanity, the uncommitted.

William James once said, "The one thing that will guarantee the successful conclusion of a doubtful undertaking is faith in the beginning that you can do it."

If you keep thinking the way you've always thought, you'll keep doing what you've always done, and you'll keep getting what you've always gotten.

Take a deep breath, and go for it.