

## Dear Friends,

When I was little, I wondered if one died when one's heart stopped working, or if it was the brain that really mattered. I wondered what made something count as being *alive* as opposed to *dead*. What pushed something over the line from dying to dead? And was 'dead' the same thing as 'not alive'? Some plants in our garden seemed to die and grow back with the seasons, whilst others died and didn't come back; still others were replaced by similar-looking plants when they died... a bit like reincarnation, I supposed. I was really taken by hibernation – mammals bouncing back to life the way plants do each spring... wow!

My biology teachers later talked about metabolism and offered other descriptive definitions of *life*, but it was still hard to grasp what caused the final shift from dying to being dead. Similarly, I wondered what caused something to shift from being not (yet?) alive to living? Take seeds, for instance. They didn't look very alive, but they held potential for life that would be activated by the right conditions. And yet recreating the right conditions (as we understand them) doesn't always work, does it? Perhaps we'll never know what tips the final balance...

I find the forest floor very reassuring: somehow when trees and plants die, their physical remains go back to feeding the ground and the soil, enabling something else to spring to life and others to grow and live. Decomposition leads to nourishment, and nourishment to new life. So 'dead' isn't really and only 'dead', but life in a different phase or form. Life continues, whatever this 'life' thing really is... is this what we might perhaps call God or God-ness?

Earlier today, feeding my sourdough starter, I had a sense that whilst the potential for life is found within a seed, the conditions that nudge the seed into life are found in its habitat, which comprises things that might be alive or not alive on their own, but when brought together in particular ways have enormous power to encourage or decimate life. Are each of us seeds and our communities, our habitats?



In friendship,  
*Jennifer Mui, editor*