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| **Act 3, Scene 1 [56-89]** |

In this (quite possibly the most famous Shakespearean dramatic) soliloquy, Hamlet begins by posing the (im)mortal question:

"To be or not to be"

In fact he is reviewing his options, in an attempt to decide whether to act aggressively or remain passively submissive. Death, which he lists as an option, is desirable only for the peace it (supposedly) brings. Therein lies "the rub" or the crux of the issue, for as he says - who knows " ... what dreams may come" therein? There are so many reasons to welcome death: instead of enduring contempt, maltreatment, the pains of love, bureaucratic sloth, we could end it all with a simple knife. Who would suffer life's burdens, were it not for fear of worse in the hereafter? It is in fact cowardice (fear of the unknown) that enables us to face life's hardships, just as strong urges and great ideas are turned aside and fall short of realisation through indifference.

Hamlet's introspection ceases when he spots Ophelia, whom he quietly entreats to remember him in her prayers, since what he has to say to her will be (by intention and not sentiment) harsh.

**"Nymph, in thy orisons Be all my sins remember'd"**

We can read the depth of Hamlet's feeling for Ophelia into these words, since Shakespeare is putting Hamlet into the position where he is implicitly asking Ophelia's forgiveness for what he is about to do.

**Act 3, Scene 2 [381-392]**

In this short soliloquy, Hamlet braces himself for the forthcoming encounter with his mother by outwardly embracing the strengths of the forces of darkness: " ... now could I drink hot blood and do such bitter business as the day would quake to look on".

He resolves to be firm, even tough with her, and asks that his emotions do not let him down. He admits that his words will cut her, while his heart still feels for her: "I will speak daggers to her, but use none".

Treat her harshly as he may, it will be only with words, not actions.

**Act 3, Scene 3 [73-96]**

In this soliloquy, Hamlet can see Claudius but is not within earshot. Claudius has been attempting to pray, and Hamlet stumbles upon him in what is the perfect unplanned revenge situation.

Hamlet admits the timing is perfect (to kill Claudius), but reasons that to kill him praying would send a villain to heaven, with his earthly crimes unpunished, where he would be judged by God's standards. In our eyes, he says, he remains guilty. He questions whether it would be revenge to kill him praying, when God might be receptive to him.

In the end he declines to kill Claudius, sheathing his sword and promising it a more fitting resting place when the king is in " ... the incestuous pleasure of his bed at gaming, swearing or about some act that has no relish of salvation in't".

If, Hamlet says, he kills the king in a more suitable moment, then may " ... his heels ... kick at Heaven", and his black soul proceed to hell, where it belongs.

Hamlet brings himself back to the present with a reminder that his mother is waiting for him, and concludes with a message to Claudius that his praying is merely prolonging the agony of his eventual death.

**Act 4, Scene 4 [32-66]**

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He questions once again what man is, if his chief pursuits are eating and sleeping. Surely he asks, we were not given the god-like faculty of reason for it to go unused?

To paraphrase loosely his own words in the first person, Hamlet is saying:

Whether I retreat into "bestial oblivion" rather than focus on what I have to do, or whether I suffer from cowardice, I cannot say "why yet I live to say the 'thing's to do'" and not perform it.

Hamlet considers closely the potent and immediate example of the 20,000 strong army that

... for a fantasy and a trick of fame,  
Go to their graves like beds,

while he, with a kingdom to fight for, looks for reason to act. The soldiers face death willingly, on much smaller pretext than his. They shame him in their collective commitment, making " ... mouths at the invisible event", and scorning the uncertainty of the outcome of the forthcoming battle with Poland. Hamlet takes their lesson to heart and resolves to act in decisive and bloody manner henceforth, as necessary: "O! from this time forth, my thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!"

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