

By Ruth Ostrow

I recently visited a friend who was busy organising her computer, doing all those dreaded managerial things on the "To-Do" list which never get done because there's always another day. As procrastinators say: "Never do today what you can put off till tomorrow."

But for her there is no tomorrow. Not because she has any dreaded disease, but because she is acting as if she does.

She's practising a sacred Buddhist ritual where you must spend a year living life as if you've been given 12 months to live, and make every decision based on this unsettling premise. Hence, you're required to get your affairs in order as you would were you given a cut-off date.

"I am chucking out clothes, emptying files, basically finalising things and divesting myself the way my family would have to do after I'm gone.

"It's very confronting. Every time I go to fight with someone, I ponder if it's worth the effort. I find myself resolving situations, I'm kinder to people around me, I'm continually questioning if this is what I really want to be doing today, is this who I want to be with," she said.

But does the practice mean you eat tonnes of chocolate, party much harder and live more recklessly?

"I still want to die looking great," she laughed, "but, yes, I am partying harder. It was my birthday recently and normally I couldn't be bothered throwing myself a party, but if it were my last year on Earth I would want my beloved friends and family around me, and so I put in the effort, made the zillion phone calls, and we all had an amazing time."

She said the practice was bringing up her fear of mortality, especially as the final date was drawing closer, but the rewards were extraordinary. The appreciation and love she felt made her acutely aware of every second, and made life and relationships intensely beautiful.

Personally, I've never trusted that the next second will come, let alone the next year. And morbid as that may sound, it has given me enormous freedom and passion. The truth is, every time we get into our cars, we play Russian roulette.

Put this to yourself: "If I knew this day were my last, would I do it this way?" and "If I knew this day were your last, would I treat you this way?" Buddhists understand that these may be the most profound questions you'll ever ask.

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First published in The Weekend Australian SAT 13 MAY 2006