

What Is Death?

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How do we approach this gruesome subject: "What is Death?" What a subject! "What is Death?" And yet, it is because we have certain preconceived ideas about death, it makes it so hard to approach the subject in a reasonable rational way. That's the only trouble with the subject death. And our Master has said, "Death does not mean annihilation. It is simply change." Death is change; and we encounter this change all the time.

The cells of our body, for instance, change and in a few years every cell is gone, new ones have taken place. But we don't mind that. Also, certain changes, bodily changes, take place. For instance, you're nice and plump, and big, and you lose it. It's fine. You don't care. But death has taken place in those cells. But what has happened? You've preserved your identity. That's the thing. The entity is the same, which you realize that you have. Our Master has pointed it out this way. You take a candle, it burns, it disappears, but nothing is lost. The elements return to that place from whence they have come.

And so, it is with the hydrogen atom, comes to my mind. If you annihilate it, one proton and one electron, the mass is gone. But nothing is lost, because you have the weight of that mass in the one photon, or the light cell, which remains. Nothing is lost. Scientists tell us that matter is forever changing into energy and finally into light. Nothing is stable; there is change all the time. And so, we should understand this change and not be overwhelmed by it. Both matter and energy are indestructible.

And so, if matter and energy are indestructible, how much more so should we realize that life is indestructible. Consciousness is indestructible, and that's all we are. When you reduce it right down to that, in your meditation you've forgotten the body; nothing remains but Consciousness, life, and that is indestructible. It changes, of course, but it is indestructible. And so, even when the human consciousness, or when the human being, rather, dies and passes on, so to speak, this Consciousness, the Self-consciousness, or the ego, slips out from the vehicle, and it functions in another place. That's all. It is not lost. It is indestructible. We must realize that and we can prove these very things by meditation. We can know we are not this body, we are the Eternal Light and Love of God, which does not change. You can prove it by meditation. You can

prove what death is, if you practice meditation, and I will come to that in just a moment.

And so, realize this, that it is because we do not understand that people have that belief, that death means the end of all things, or especially of this bodily vehicle, and that happens, because we become attached to that bodily vehicle. A Soul, instead of realizing its oneness with God and the Great Ones, and Consciousness, and Energy of God, Cosmic Consciousness plus Cosmic Energy, which has produced all things, and we are rays of that, we forget it. That's why we fear death. That's why we do not understand death – for that reason only.

And so, our Master has this to say, which I'd like to read at this time for you, from his Autobiography [of a Yogi]: "Many yogis are known to have retained their self-consciousness without interruption by the dramatic transition to and from 'life' and 'death'.¹" Now you can do that yourself. Every day in meditation, you can consciously die. Then you'll begin to live. I'll come to it in just a moment. "If man be solely a body, its loss indeed places the final period to identity."² That's the key. We're identified with the body. We're afraid we're gonna lose our identity. "But if prophets down the millennium spake the truth, man is essentially of incorporeal nature, the persistent core of human egoity is only temporar, temporarily alive with sense perception."³

So there you have a few words, which Master put so wonderfully well. What we're trying to do, we're trying to really, consciously die, so we'll know what it's like. These are facts. Don't be afraid of it. When you do it, you'll never be afraid of death, because it cannot touch you again. If you can once consciously die and know it's the same state as death, how can you fear death? Yoga will give you that experience. Self-Realization Yoga will do that, without question of a doubt.

So, death is change; bodily changes. We are used to, as I have said, bodily changes. When we were small, little, we had a state of consciousness; then we grew up, and later in life, the whole thing changes. Your whole consciousness is not the same, because...but you do not fear that. Why? Because you didn't lose your identity, that's all.

And so, matter, matter, even though it seems so far from Consciousness, matter really is life itself. Matter is the Sleeping Intelligence of God. But behind that

¹ Chapter 1, 1946 Release

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

Sleeping Intelligence is His All-pervading Intelligence, which knows and does all things. We see this little rose. See how cute he is, or she is. I don't know. There is a manifestation of what? The Intelligence of God. So, this rose is a vibration of the Consciousness of God. That's all. A particular vibration and you know it as, as a rose. But realize, in that particular vibration that is behind it, is the Intelligence of God. How did that little rose be formed? Look at it; so perfect, and so humble, and so nice. Because behind that particular vibration, as the rose, is God's Great Intelligence. When you see those beautiful flowers, they're nothing but rates of vibration of God's Consciousness, that's all. But how did they get that way? Because, the Intelligence of God is behind every variation of Consciousness of God, which produces this material universe and all objects of sense.

So, it's all right to say, "Everything is God's Consciousness vibrating at a different rate of vibration." But how did it happen? Because behind every rate of vibration is God's Intelligence; and so are we vibrating rates of God's Consciousness; a certain rate producing us as human beings. But behind that, is His Great Consciousness, His Love. We have to prove that, that's all. Proving that, then we rise above the change of form, which takes place in outward manifestation to that reality which doesn't change, the Consciousness of God within us. That's what we have to prove. Then we will know what death is.

And so, understand, that when you see something in, in nature, remember it's a vibration in the rate of God's Consciousness. But never forget that behind that rate of vibration, whatever it is, is the Intelligence of God. Otherwise how could it happen? How could it happen? The materialists say, say that everything is a different rate of vibration. Sure. But how does that come about? Because God's Great Consciousness is behind it. That's what we must realize and understand.

Now, this great Indian scientist, J.C. Bose, he has shown, without question of a doubt, that life is manifesting in, even in the minerals and the metals, and, of course, in plants. And he sure has shown that they respond to stimulation. Why? Because there's life there; and the electron microscope has shown that metals like tungsten are simply vibrating atoms of light. Why do they vibrate at that particular rate to make tungsten? Because of the Intelligence of God is behind the vibration. That's the lesson we must learn. Not these scientific facts alone, but the noumena behind the scientific facts; the real truth behind the scientific facts. Then you are all right. Then you are not deluded. Science follows these things. They understand this space business that goes on, and speed of light, and all that. That's fine, but unless they know who makes the

light, who makes the speed of light, who makes the plants, who makes the flowers and all things, unless they know that Consciousness, they do not know at all. They know the attributes of the Consciousness, but not God Himself. We must know Him.

So, I have another reference from Master's book I'd like to read at this time which fits in here: "The stream of knowledge says one of the scientists, James Jeans, is heading toward a non-mechanical reality. The universe begins to look more like a great thought than like a great machine (sic).⁴" Well, in our own dream through thought, through Consciousness, we produce all sorts of things – objects of senses and everything. And when you resolve it, what is it? Just as he said, "a great thought." And so, our dreams are thoughts projected through light, with all the manifestations of this material creation. And finally, the Master says: "Twentieth century science is thus sounding like a page from the hoary Vedas."⁵ These truths have been known throughout the ages by those who meditated and tried to know God as their own self, the one reality.

And so, the purpose of all things that exist is to express the various aspects of God. Just like planets, and suns, planets, trees, animals, human beings. They are to express a certain aspect of God and we have to be made in His Image so we can express Divinity. The stones cannot. The trees cannot. But everything expresses an aspect of the One Eternal Father, and we, luckily, can express His Fullness. Realize that. That's the wonderful thing of being a human being in spite of all the detriments and the distractions and all things that go with it. We have a way out. The tree doesn't have that like we do. So, let us understand these things, and then death will not trouble us.

Natural death comes when the object, or the human being, has reached a point when he cannot express anymore. Now, that should mean a lot to us. You begin to feel you're going to pass away, realize that you are getting to the point when you can't express anymore – get busy. Know God. Then you can express Divinity. Then you won't care whether the vehicle is there or not. Then you'll know what death is. It's simply an expression of the Presence of God in you. That's why we're here, to express Divinity. To allow God to express through us

⁴ Chapter 30, 1946 Release, "The stream of knowledge," Sir James Jeans writes in *The Mysterious Universe*, "is heading towards a non-mechanical reality; the universe begins to look more like a great thought than like a great machine. Twentieth century science is thus sounding like a page from the hoary Vedas."

⁵ Ibid.

our oneness with Him, just like the flower expresses the beauty which you see. That cannot be compared with what we can express.

That's why Master said in one of his articles, he said, "Lord, let not the song of the nightingale detract my love from Thee (sic)."⁶ Meaning that if we, he was distracted by the song of the nightingale he would not express fully the Presence of God in him as Eternal Love.

And so, death comes for two reasons. Death comes to the struggling Soul as a promotion to a better state. That's all. And death comes to the unsuccessful Spiritual Soul as another chance, in another vehicle, in another environment to express Divinity. And so, death should not be feared, especially if we realize, and truly realize, there is no death. There is change, but there is no death. Nothing is lost, especially consciousness. Consciousness always was and will be, because that's the One Eternal Substance from which all things have come.

⁶ Whispers From Eternity, 1949 Release, "Prayer At Night," "**Prayer at Night**

With closed eyes, I sit in the temple of night and worship Thee. The sunlight, revealing a million alluring things, has vanished. One by one, I have closed the doors of my senses, lest the fragrance of the rose, or the song of the nightingale, distract my love from Thee. I am alone in this dark, dark temple. I have left everything, but where art Thou? Darkness is haunting; but, unafraid, I am groping, seeking, crying for Thee. Wilt Thou leave me alone? Come, show Thyself!

The door of my memory swings open. Throbbingly thrilled, my heart looks for Thee, but I find Thee not. Halt! Ye throng of a million thoughts and experiences past! Come not into my sacred temple. I close the bursting, thought-pressed door and run everywhere to find Thee. Where art Thou?

Darkness deepens, and as I sit still, in anguish of despair, I behold a little taper of concentration burning within me. I stand up, and madly rush through the dimly lighted temple—the farther I go, the deeper grows the gloom. I clasp the empty darkness in hope of seizing Thee. Finding Thee not, I return again, and see the taper dimly burning.

I sing outwardly a loud prayer. My large teardrops, and my gusts of prayer almost extinguish the taper. I will pray no more with words nor rush or run about in the temple of Stygian darkness, nor drown the taper with my tears. I will sit still, and command my breath to make no sound. I rebuke my boisterous love for Thee. The taper of meditation burns brighter now.

O, how maddening! I cannot worship Thee with words, but only with wistful yearning. Brighter the light grows: I behold Thee now. Thou art I. I worship Thee.

As night hides everything, I will worship Thee in hidden silence. I am glad with the joy of all minds. I will use the screen of the night to hide myself from the tempting things of the day.

O Night, when I am worried, throw thy veil of silent darkness around me. Create a dark temple for me wherever I go, that I may invoke and call Him, whom I love, at any time, anywhere, everywhere."

And so, now, we come to the question, why do we fear this change called death? Analyze yourself. Why do we fear it? There are two reasons why you do. First there's an uncertainty, isn't there? And with that uncertainty comes the idea that you may suffer. And the second thing is that with that uncertainty, comes the idea that you may lose your identity. Those are the two reasons why we fear death – nothing else. Once more; there's an uncertainty that comes with death, and in that uncertainty is the fear that we will suffer; and finally, the fear that we'll lose our identity – what we're used to. Those are the two reasons why we fear death.

Now, in sleep; in sleep, which is called "the little death," there's a loss of continuity of consciousness. There's an uncertainty, and, also, in death. In death we fear there'll be a loss of continuity of consciousness, and there's an uncertainty, also, in death, and we are afraid we'll lose our identification, as so-and-so. We are afraid to lose our identity. Those are the reasons.

Now, here's the point. In sleep we remember that we'll come back. In death we also remember, subconsciously, and within our Souls that we cannot get back. Understand those two things. That's why we fear death. That's all.

Now, comes the question, if this is so, what are we gonna do about it? We are going to do this, if we're wise. We are going to follow Self-Realization practices of yoga until we can become familiar with the state of sleep and death and retain our consciousness through those states. In other words, we should practice Conscious Death. That's all.

In sleep you lose your consciousness. In death we think we lose our consciousness. In sleep we know we come back. In death we also know we *cannot* get back here. That's why we're afraid of it. But, if we practice Conscious Sleep, or Conscious Death, then we will be able to retain our continuity of consciousness through sleep. And when you can retain it through sleep, you can retain it through death, because sleep is "the little death." That's why Self-Realization Yoga is so wonderful. That's why the science of yoga is so wonderful, because it helps you to know just what death is.

Even doing one of the techniques – the simple technique, or the highest technique of concentration – there you can sit. And, if you persist, your heart will slow down; your breath will slow down. It will stop, if you go deep enough. You'll be fully conscious. You'll know there is no death. Kriya Yoga will do it in a faster way; but the simple technique of, the highest technique of concentration,

which our Master has given, will enable you to retain the continuity of your consciousness through the state of sleep. And when the heart is slowed down, and the breath is slowed down, and you're fully conscious, how can you ever die? And you can prove this thing. And until you prove this point, you will not know there is no death. But when you can do that, then you'll know that your consciousness does not pass away, and you can laugh at death, because death does not exist as we think it is.

Change exists, but when you can retain the continuity of your consciousness by this Conscious Sleep, the practice of Conscious Sleep. Now, in other words, when you can sit, shut out visual sensation, pass into the state of sleep, and not go to sleep; be fully conscious; then you have overcome sleep. Then when you go deeper, and the internal organs slow down; the muscles first slow down, and then the racing heart and the mind slow down; and finally the internal organs slow down. Then you know that you can live through anything, and that death does not exist.

Now, these are practical things, and they're not difficult. They simply require you to do them, that's all, and follow one who was able to live through Conscious Death. You keep, simply keep, the continuity of your consciousness through these different states. Knowing them, they do not exist as you thought they did. Change exists, but not death. These are important things, and we should realize them and practice Conscious Sleep. When we do this, then we realize the Soul within us, our real nature, as God's Pure Consciousness, and death will not affect us in the least. We can do these things, but we must make the effort.

And so, when we can retain this state of the Immortal Wakefulness; now, the fish in water, you take him out, he dies. Most of us feel if we stop breathing, we're gonna die, sure. But practice Conscious Sleep and you will not die. Your breath will stop; you'll slow down; you'll be fully conscious. You have proved right then, immortality. You have proved there is no death. That's why yoga is so important, and especially Raja Yoga, which gives these higher techniques.

Our Founder has said this. He has said, and I quote him about the practice of Conscious Death. Don't be afraid of it. It's the most wonderful state, because there's no trouble, no fights, no distractions, nothing but the Peace and Bliss of God's Presence, and you're fully conscious, and you know that this bodily vehicle is the vehicle of your Soul – nothing else – and that it will pass away.

Who cares? But your Soul will not die. You know that, but you have to *know* it and realize it through meditation.

And our Master has said this, our Master: “Those who try by devotional yogic methods to understand and perceive the phenomena of sleep and death during their conscious physical existence, it is they who can retain their consciousness through and after death.” Now, I’ll repeat that once more: “Those who try by devotional yogic methods...” by the techniques of Self-Realization Fellowship, which combine yoga plus devotion; those who try by these “methods to understand and perceive the phenomena of sleep and death,” physical existence, “it is they who can retain their consciousness through and after death.”

Now, next Sunday, if you come, you wanna know about the rest of it, as was spoken of earlier, you come, and you will see that by following these devotional methods you will know just what state your consciousness will be in on the other side, and you’ll know what class to put yourself in. That is, these things are scientific. And I know you’ll enjoy the talk next Sunday, if you will come.

And so, in conclusion, let us understand that to understand this change called death, we simply have to be familiar with our real vital part, the Soul within us; and the Soul is not subject to death. Your consciousness is not subject to death, except if you have allowed your Soul to become attached to this changeable body. That’s all. Now, if you can break that attachment, if you can break that attachment that makes you feel you are the body, and realize you are not the body but the Soul within, which never dies; then you will not be subject to death, and death will never touch you again.

That’s why these teachings are so wonderful. And that’s why we must realize, unless we know that here and now, unless we know it while living, how can we know it after death? But you can easily know it while living. You can prove it. And then you won’t have to worry so much about what’s coming later. You’ll know for sure that you will not die and that you are Immortal. You can absolutely know that through the teachings of our Founder, Paramhansa Yogananda.

As it says in Revelation, the 2nd Chapter 11th Verse: “He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.”⁷ Also Revelation, the 2nd Chapter the 10th Verse:

⁷ Revelation 2:11, “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.”

“Be thou faithful unto death...” What does that mean? “Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life.”⁸ Do the people know what that means? “Be thou faithful unto death,” simply means be thou faithful in retaining your consciousness through the state of Conscious Sleep, or death, and you will have “a crown of life.” You will know there is no death. These are from our own scriptures. Revelation, 2nd Chapter, 10th Verse. “Be thou faithful unto death...” That is, by striving to keep the continuity of your consciousness through the state known as death, or Conscious Sleep, you will receive “a crown of life.” Such is the promise of the scriptures.

Now, if you meditate, you’ll know these things. If you dive deep, you will realize these things, and you will know, for sure, there is no death. If you will just do your meditation; follow one who had that state of Conscious Sleep and Conscious Death, as our Master. He left the techniques. If you have accepted him as the path home, God, to God, and [unintelligible word] his teachings; why not follow? If you have accepted him, follow. Do them, and you’ll know there is no death. You’ll realize there is change, but there is no death.

And having that realization of your own true nature, the Soul, the One Eternal Light from which all things have come, in your consciousness; in your Soul will rise the Sun of Righteousness⁹, and you will know, without a doubt, that that Sun of Righteousness will never set, and that you are Immortal.

⁸ Revelation 2:10, “Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”

⁹ Malachi 4:2, “But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.”