

# Death

## *~ An Interlude Between Two Activities ~*

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Is death an end or a beginning? Throughout recorded history, this question has been central to human existence. Religions have been born in response to this question, as have the inspired works of many poets, artists and scientists throughout the ages. When confining our consideration of death to rationality alone, it appears that death is final, and that life inevitably runs to its end. Yet when we consider this question from an intuitive perspective, the finality of death gives way to a sense of the eternal. Deep within human consciousness there is an abiding knowledge that life is something that transcends death. Though seemingly defying reason, this knowingness gives assurance of our immortality. It is an awareness rooted in our silent knowledge of the beyond.

Within the Esoteric Philosophy, death is understood as merely an extension of life, not its end. To better understand this we must first consider the shortcomings of the human mind as it grapples with the question of death. The rational mind tends to arrive at conclusions based upon demonstrable facts. It sees and understands the world through the observation of forms, and it is limited by its inability to conceive of anything that may transcend form. The perceptual challenge of the analytical mind centers upon the relationship between the physical body and consciousness. It holds the view that consciousness is the product of the brain. Given this perceptual bias, it is not surprising that the rational mind would conclude that physical death leads to the death of consciousness. Yet the wisdom of the East has long maintained that the human body is the product of consciousness rather than the cause of it. This view sheds an entirely different light on the nature of death. For if consciousness gives birth to the body, then consciousness must exist independent of the body.

Western theology has taught that at the time of death, the soul rises and escapes the confines of the physical body. Esotericism agrees with this notion, but with an additional caveat. Though it is true that death releases the soul, it is also the soul that initiates the act. In other words, the escape of the soul from the body is not an event that happens to the soul, but instead is caused by it. Indeed, the soul is one's true identity. It is the sumtotal of one's higher consciousness garnered over countless lives. And, because the soul is the cause of outer physical life, it likewise gives impulse to its termination.

At the time of death, the soul returns to the larger living system of which it is a part (sometimes called God, Brahman, or Universal Intelligence). It does so for the purpose of assimilating the fruits of experience acquired while incarnated in physical form. This assimilation builds new faculty into the soul's nature, thus facilitating its growth toward perfection. There are some who may feel surprised by this notion. Many people believe

that the soul is already perfect. There is both truth and falsity in this view. It is true that the soul is perfect, but only as it pertains to its “potential.” The soul must “actualize” that potential in the outer world, and this as a function of its own development. To actualize its potential requires that it successfully express the fullness of itself in the outer world without the personality (ego) distorting its expression. This takes many lives to accomplish. Even so, when fully achieved, true enlightenment has been reached, and the necessity of reincarnation is then no more. Physical death is therefore nothing more than the soul abstracting itself from the body in order to assimilate what it has learned. When the soul completes this assimilation, it is poised to return to physical life once again. However, it will do so from a wiser perspective than in the previous incarnation, and with a greater capacity to express its nature through the personality. As mentioned earlier, there is a silent knowledge of the beyond within every human being. When we consider that the soul (one’s true identity) continually reincarnates, we realize that it is we ourselves that hold the unconscious memory of our eternal existence.

Another difficulty when trying to understand death has to do with the dualistic tendencies of the human mind. For every thought we experience, there is an opposite thought that the mind uses to give it contrast. The human mind functions through its power to associate one thing to another. Through these associations, understanding emerges in our awareness. To highlight a few examples, *up* is a meaningless word if *down* is not also understood. The notion of *action* is not graspable if one doesn’t have an understanding of *inaction*. Our perception of *sequence* is only realized when we consider *simultaneity*. Sometimes called the *principle of opposites*, this characteristic of the mind was closely examined by the legendary psychologist, Carl Jung. His theory of human personality was rooted in the principle of opposites, particularly as it pertained to the shadow (unconscious patterns of self-defeating behavior) as it gives contrast to the ego-self. He found this to be one of the most important contrasts within each of us. Further research has revealed that the associations used by the mind vary widely. Most give correct and useful insight into reality, but some will distort it. This illusory tendency is quite evident when the human mind tries to understand the nature of life itself. Typically, an individual perceives that the opposite of life is death. Yet, from the esoteric perspective, this is an inaccurate contrast. The opposite of life is not death, but birth.

At first glance, the notion that the “opposite of life is birth” may seem perplexing, but only from the personality’s point of view. From the soul’s perspective, birth is a great sacrifice, for the soul must descend into form. In doing so, it becomes imprisoned by the container it is forced to reside within. Incarnation is therefore not evidence of life, but instead its diminishment. Indeed, in the eyes of the soul, birth is a form of death. When out of incarnation, the soul resides in a place of relative boundless awareness. In such a condition, it possesses an awareness of the fullness of itself and its inherent wisdom. Yet when forced to incarnate, it sacrifices much (but not all) of this awareness as it descends into its incarnational container (physical, emotional and mental bodies). By analogy, it is akin to a death experience. It is death to the fullness of what the soul inwardly knows itself to be.

When we think of physical death (and the subsequent ascension of the soul) we often believe that the soul is freed. However, this is only a partial truth. The soul is free, but only from the physical vehicle it had occupied. We must remember that the soul is incarnated into three vehicles: mental, emotional and physical. The sumtotal of the consciousness of these vehicles constitutes the personality (ego). When physical death occurs, that does not mean that the emotional and mental vehicles are abandoned at the same time. Most often they are not. Given this understanding, whenever a human being dies, there is a second death that inevitably follows. This death represents the soul's abstraction out of the emotional and mental bodies of the personality.

The time when the second death occurs will vary widely among people. In rare cases, it takes place a few minutes after physical death. However, for most it will take weeks, months, or even years before the soul has fully liberated itself from these remaining personality vestures. The timing is largely determined by the emotional and mental associations an individual possesses. Every human being has attachments deeply held within his/her psyche. These attachments are shackles to the soul. They usually represent cherished feelings and ideas, particularly regarding how a person views him/herself, as well as those left behind.

These are the things that must be released to initiate the second death. When it finally occurs, the soul is able to fully return to its natural abode and complete the integration of the lessons learned, as earlier discussed. At this point it may be well to mention that when the emotional and mental attachments are unduly strong, an individual can remain in a state of semi-incarnation for a great length of time, often not even realizing that physical death has occurred. This idea lends explanation to the ghostly appearances witnessed by so many people throughout history. Within esoteric literature, this is referred to as the *earth bound soul*.

The day will surely come when the "science of dying" will be a part of the fabric of humanity's way of living. Historically, our understanding of death has been minimal. Medicine can and does provide useful information about the death process, but only as it pertains to the physical body. Its ability to correctly understand the nature of consciousness as it abstracts itself from the body is woefully lacking. This is due to the fact that science is still biased by the assumption that consciousness is the product of biological processes. Generally speaking, science is still unable to provide the deeper understanding as to the nature of the soul and its relationship to form. Fortunately, some branches of science and medicine are increasingly incorporating holistic approaches to healing that give support to the spiritual dimension of life. The slow but sure rise of complimentary medicine (which is usually supportive of spiritual ideas) gives further indication that a science of dying is gradually being formed. Contributions coming forth from the frontiers of psychology are also awakening science to an understanding of the spiritual dimension of life. This is particularly true when considering the transpersonal movement within the field of psychology—with its research pointing to the existence of a transpersonal (spiritual) component of the human constitution. These things simply

indicate that science (and humanity as a whole) is moving toward a more holistic view of life, and therefore of death.

Interestingly, in the ancient esoteric literature it has been suggested that falling asleep is akin to the death process. Drifting to sleep indicates that consciousness is extracting itself from the brain cavity, and is moving into a subtler dimension of awareness. Just as with death, falling to sleep involves the abstraction of consciousness. Given this similarity, it can be seen that when we go to sleep we are actually participating in a death rehearsal of sorts. Much could be learned of death if we would be more attentive to the movements of consciousness as we fall into our nightly slumber. Sleep provides the clues to the nature of consciousness as it draws itself away from its bodily encasement.

A second example of death rehearsal can be found in meditation. Though there are many benefits to the practice of meditation, one of the most crucial is that it mimics the death process. Fundamentally, the function of meditation is to learn to detach the Self (soul) from the physical, emotional and mental garments it is wearing. Meditation can lift consciousness above the confines of the threefold nature of the personality (ego). The same can be said of death. It, too, represents the rising of the soul out of the limitations of form. Therefore, developing a regular meditative regime in life is well advised. Such a practice familiarizes us with the transcendent state, and therefore with the death process.

In this discussion we have seen that death is not the opposite of life, but simply its extension. Though the mind will often find rational reasons for denying the existence of the hereafter, the cause of this perception relates to the mind's natural limitations. In many ways, death could be viewed as a beginning, rather than an end. It liberates the soul from its imprisonment in form. By so doing, it is then able to assimilate the lessons it had learned while it was in the incarnated state. Once this assimilation is complete, the soul is able to demonstrate a new level of wisdom. Its attention is then turned, becoming "downward-gazing" in preparation for its next incarnational thrust. A renewed agenda of outer activity can then commence. When we understand this, it becomes readily apparent that death is merely an interlude between two activities.

#### **William Meader – Biographical Statement**

William Meader is an author, teacher and counselor. Much of his work is focused on the subjects of *Spiritual Creativity*, the *Evolution of Consciousness* and the *Art of Meditation*. At present he is teaching in the United States, Canada, Europe, Australia and New Zealand. He resides in Oregon, and can be contacted through his website at [www.meader.org](http://www.meader.org).