

What is Death?

By Paul Dempsey

For most people the thought of death is a source of anxiety. Of all the fears that haunt our thoughts, perhaps the uncertainty of personal survival is the most basic. Relieving that fear and replacing it with knowledge can have a transformational effect on life. It is our hope that this short article may point the way to fuller treatments of the subject, from which a more comprehensive education may be gained – an education sadly lacking in our Western culture.

How is it possible to find joy in death – both for the one who is dying as well as for the loved ones who remain? One approach would be to see physical life as a preparation for death and death as a preparation for a new physical life. The entire cyclic process of life and death is determined by spiritual evolution – the means by which the consciousness develops increasingly effective vehicles of expression.

Why should we think about death?

Although we are certain of death as a fact, we are uncertain of its meaning and of the process that unfolds “behind the scenes.” Most people therefore tend to avoid dealing with the issue at all, sometimes expending considerable psychological energy to keep it below the threshold of consciousness. Then, when they are confronted by its impending inevitability, fears are doubled and often accompanied by other unpleasant emotions.

This is all energy that could be put to better use. If we view death as a beginning, necessary to prepare for a rebirth, and as a change in consciousness through the removal of limitations, then death becomes more of a desirable event than a threat. Certain groups now devoted to the healing of the personality will eventually undertake the essential task of opening the individual to the positive aspects of death. There will come a happy expectancy and an understanding of the need to restore the parts of the personality to their places of origin prior to incarnation.

The problem of immortality

The idea of immortality is based on the idea that under divine law nothing is lost; i.e., life is a continuum. The question of immortality is considered in one of three ways: 1) the materialist says that death is the end of all life because there is no proof to support life in any other form once the physical body has disappeared; 2) many religions allow for a continuing life and consciousness after death as long as the individual professes a belief in certain theological or philosophical propositions, and those who refuse to believe these tenets just disappear after death or are transferred to some undesirable location; 3) the concept of reincarnation (or rebirth), as described in esoteric teachings and many Eastern religions, applies to all, believers and non-believers, and solves the problem of immortality by suggesting that perfection (our highest goal) takes many lifetimes.

The fear of death can be reduced by accepting two ideas based on the third approach: 1) the fact of the immortal soul and 2) the need to live in a form in order to perfect the soul’s ability to perform its purpose. The constant interplay between life in and out of form generates cyclic creativity that is

the basis of evolution toward perfection.

As our awareness moves from emphasis on the personality form to an emphasis on the soul, so will we gradually lose our fear of the disappearing physical form. In the world of the soul, there is no death; therefore as we abandon our fixation on the material life, so will our fear of death dissipate. One of the predominant fears is that of the loneliness of the spirit entity after death. In fact (and we have been assured of this by those who have had near-death experiences), we are reunited with family and friends after death, and we also have full access to the thoughts and feelings of those still in the physical form as well as continuing to have our own thoughts and feelings. The loneliness at birth is actually far greater because of the limitations imposed by a physical constitution.

The fear engendered by various theologies is without foundation: there is no angry God, no hell and no need to pardon sins through some institution or system of belief. In the future, study of the technique of dying will be a practice known to all, and it will help to remove fear and dependence.

Understanding the experience of death

Actually we die each time we go to sleep, although it's a temporary passing. There are two energy streams (or threads) that enliven us. One relates to the brain and nervous system, and the second to the heart and circulatory system. When we sleep, the consciousness thread of energy detaches from the brain and is focused elsewhere until we awaken. During sleep we are unconscious in the physical sense. When we die, both the brain energy and the heart energy are removed, and the form commences its disintegration and returns to its original source.

At the moment of death, when the life force leaves the body (after severance of the life thread energy in the heart), it exits at one of three locations: 1) the top of the head, 2) the heart or 3) the solar plexus (at about waist level). The spiritually oriented person uses the head exit; the person of goodwill uses the heart, and those primarily oriented to the physical and emotional life exit at the solar plexus. Naturally we want to strive for the highest exit, because the next lifetime is influenced by our development in this lifetime.

The coming technique of dying will allow us to prepare for and control our passing and to treat death as a triumphant finale and a glorious prelude to a *conscious* exit. This new attitude will eliminate sorrow, grief and all sense of loss for those remaining behind. Death then becomes a greater celebration than birth. This new technique of dying will involve two lines of practice. The first requires long preparation before death and utilizes four disciplines: 1) a constant focus in the head achieved by thought and meditation, 2) group service to humanity, 3) eventual control of consciousness just before sleep, and 4) attention to the withdrawing process at sleep. The second line of practice deals with the environment at the deathbed and utilizes silence (no talking), color, music, pressure points, use of the Sacred Word (OM) and mantras.

The three phases of death

In the first phase, just before the moment of death, the physical body loses its ability to maintain itself, and the etheric body (the vital energy body) withdraws from one of the three exits previously mentioned. The key to this phase is the "word of withdrawal" sounded by the soul. This commences

a series of steps in the process of restoring the physical and vital bodies to their original source for future use.

The second phase involves casting off and eliminating both the emotional and mental bodies, just as the physical and vital bodies were cast away. But first, time is spent in the emotional body until all emotional and desire activities are balanced; then consciousness is shifted to the mental body where further balancing is undertaken. During the time in these two bodies, progress depends to a large extent upon habits created during life. A highly emotional person spends substantial time resolving these self-created conditions. The disintegration of the emotional body is known as the “second death,” and the disintegration of the mental body is the “third death.”

In the third phase of absorption or integration, the human soul is brought to its original source, the Universal Soul. Thereafter, preparation is made for rebirth.

The wider purpose of death

The wider purpose of death relates to the evolutionary need for new forms. As evolution begins to accelerate, progress requires a rapid succession of physical forms (personalities). This acceleration creates a higher vibration within the Planet, and a higher vibration requires more bodies in order for the soul to gain Earth experience. In each case death is followed by a resurrection (or rising up) that generates something new and useful, and thus the evolutionary process is promoted. The cycle of resurrection and liberation is a never-ending force in the Universe.

For a fuller treatment of these ideas, we recommend our booklet *Death: Entrance Into Fuller Life*. For those who want more information on the experiential aspect of dying, we recommend studies of the near-death experience (NDE) by P.M.H. Atwater, Raymond Moody and others. For those interested, a website sponsored by the International Association for Near-Death Studies can be found at www.iands.org.