

HOW TO DIE by Swami Yogaratna Saraswati

What is the end!? Many of us think that we are the body, that we are only the body. But if you realize that you have thoughts and can think and feel, you may realize that this is a subtle part of yourself that is connected and part of your body but not dependant on it. For example when you go to sleep at night, the body is there, at rest, but where is the mind? When a dead body is there, the body is there but where is the mind? Just as you can experience the mind, or an inner reality even when you dream or are very still and you are not feeling or aware of the body at that moment, in the same way, the mind or subtle aspects of yourself are in existence even when the body 'dies' or ceases to exist.

Death is just like going to sleep. You close your eyes, feel comfortable, and gradually you loose consciousness. When you go to sleep, the next morning, after a good rest, you wake up. When you die, after a good rest, you wake up but in a different body! And when you wake up it is in a new and different body and without a memory of yesterday. It is like waking without the memory of yesterday. It is like waking up in a new body and having to learn how to operate, how to use this new body, how to learn to talk and gradually you get used to the new life without any memory of the old one.

We hear that the greatest and ultimate fear is fear of death. Perhaps it is not the fear of death but the fear of loss (of our present familiar life), or fear of non-existence, or fear of the pain and suffering that sometimes leads to death. When you ask people how they would choose to die, most would say "Peacefully without too much suffering" or "In my sleep." How would you choose to die? Think about it. Then make a conscious preparation for it. The only thing we can be absolutely sure of is that one day we (at least, this body) will die; so may as well prepare for this grand event.

How to prepare for death? Some would say by living life to the full. Yes, if you live life to the full then death will be as fulfilling as life is. Some would say by being more conscious of "Who am I?" Yes, and this can be done through gnana yoga the yoga of self enquiry and contemplation and also through dhyan yoga or meditation, as mentioned above. It can also be done through bhakti yoga, the yoga of love and devotion (surrender to God, singing bhajan & kirtan, pooja or worship, repeating God's name or mantra japa, etc.

When we die, the subtle aspects of ourselves leave the physical body and retreat to a most subtle level of energy usually experienced as light. We can actually do a meditation to prepare for this: Sit or lie in a comfortable position. Make the body comfortable and still. Then calm and concentrate the mind by focusing on stillness or the breath or your personal mantra of what ever focus of concentration appeals to you. Then visualize either a bright light like a jyoti (candle) flame or like the sun, moon or bright star. Focus on the light and keep focusing on it till you forget about everything else and you gradually merge with the light. Keep practicing this daily and, at the moment of death, if you are awake and aware that you are dying you will be able to consciously merge your

consciousness with the Higher Consciousness. Another way which is well known in tradition is to keep mentally repeating your personal mantra as often and continually as you can, especially when you are going to sleep at night. Then at the time of death either you will be repeating your mantra automatically or you will remember to repeat it and then you will merge into the Higher Consciousness through the mantra.

The last thought that you are thinking of when you die is the force that pulls you to the next life and the kind of life you choose for yourself when searching for a situation in which to be born. So if you are worrying about money when you die, you will be worrying about money in your next life. If you are worrying about your son when you die, you will be worrying about him and striving to look after him again in your next life. If you are thinking of God when you die you will merge in God or be reborn close to God when you are reborn.