

Daily Meditation on Death

At night when you can drop the activities of the day, you should engage in a series of meditative contemplations similar to these:

"All right, soon I'm going to fall asleep. How many people have I heard about who went to sleep and never woke up? When I lay my head down on my pillow, I may not wake up again. Death is not that complicated. It is simply a matter of not being able to take in one more breath. Then I am dead. That could happen to me tonight in my sleep."

Then critically and honestly look at your life and think, "If I die tonight in my sleep, what did I do with my day? What have I done with my life? Have I been of benefit or have I caused harm?"

Sometimes it is not so pleasant to see how self-centered and selfish you have been, how focused on "me, my, mine." Whenever this has been the case, you have created karma that ultimately propels the mind in a difficult direction at the time of death. It is like forward motion. If you put something into motion, it continues to go that way. If your mind has been moving along a negative course, when you die it continues exactly the way it has been going all along.

So each night you should assess the general and specific direction of your life. You must recognize where you have indulged in the faults of your mind and harmed others. This negative karma must be purified, which means you must confess your faults before the wisdom being who is your object of spiritual commitment and devotion. You should take refuge in a perfect wisdom being, without any fault, the absolute expression of enlightened mind.

Begin by confessing, "I did it again. I have hurt others. I have caused harm. I have been wrong. I know better, but mistakenly I have done it again."

Then accept absolution from whomever you know to be a perfect wisdom being. If, for example, you have faith in Jesus as your object of wisdom, visualize that blessings descend from him in the form of light or nectar and actually wash away your accumulation of non-virtuous karma and negative mental habits.

Then, with the wisdom being as your witness, reaffirm your intention to benefit other beings by vowing, "I will help others in whatever way I can until I truly have the enlightened strength to bring them perfect bliss and happiness."

As important as it is to recognize your mistakes, it is equally important to recognize where you have been kind and where your activities of body, speech, and mind have been of benefit. The virtue of such activities creates merit that you dedicate generously with a pure, selfless heart to the immediate and ultimate benefit of all beings: "By the power of this dedication may each being find happiness and may all without exception attain the qualities of their intrinsic buddha nature."

With this, rest in the thought: "I have purified my karma. I have committed myself to selfless work for the benefit of others. I have dedicated my accumulation of merit to their happiness. Now if I die tonight I will have no regrets."

Having reflected on the day in this way, meditate on your own death. Imagine that you are really going to die, that you actually enter death's passage and there is no way back. Imagine vividly different scenarios—an airplane crash, an automobile accident, terminal illness, stabbing by a mugger. Use your power of mind to make the event immediate and real. Any scenario you choose has some possibility, because you really do not know where and when your death might occur.

People often express fear about this kind of meditation and say, "If I think this way, maybe it will happen to me." But think of all the things that have ever crossed your mind—you would not have time in an eon for that many things to happen to you. Thinking about death is not going to make it happen, but it does prepare your mind for the death experience. So, courageously, imagine the details of your death as clearly as possible:

"There is a stabbing pain in my chest. It's my heart! I'm having a heart attack!

"I hear the ambulance sirens. I am placed on a stretcher, my wife is crying, and the dog is frantic. The paramedics trip on the stairs as they carry me out. The ambulance lights, the chaos, the bright lights of the emergency room ...

"I overhear the doctor say, 'I am sorry, Mrs. Jones, but he's in pretty bad condition. We may not be able to pull him out of it.'

"My wife looks at me, stunned and broken-hearted. She's my last link. I can't say anything. I can't see her now. I'm so lonely, helpless ...

"I am dying, but everyone dies. My life feels like a dream, and now it's going to end. Death feels very familiar. I know I've been through it before. Life, death—they are transitions I must make. What choice I have lies in the intention of my prayer, the power of my meditation, and the decision to use my spiritual connection to the wisdom being in whom I have faith."

With your mind and your heart, offer all that has been positive in your life to the benefit of every other being. Do not cling to anything. With the wisdom being who is your spiritual refuge as witness, say this heartfelt prayer:

"By the virtue I have accumulated in my life, may I and every other being who passes through the door of death find rebirth in a state of pure, sacred awareness."

Then allow your consciousness to merge into the heart of flawless wisdom. This completes the second phase of meditation.

Finally, in concluding the night's meditation on death, recall impermanence and the suffering it brings to all beings, and let compassion expand from the most profound depths of your heart-mind.

Suffering is so pervasive in our world, in all realms of existence, that there seems little we can do. Who has not been frustrated in trying to help even one person? How can we think of meeting the needs of the countless beings who are lost in the ocean of suffering? Only an enlightened wisdom being can truly benefit all beings, just as the radiance of the sun shines for all who stand in its light. With this thought aspire to enlightenment:

"From now until enlightenment, I will work ceaselessly for the welfare of others. In each moment I vow to reduce my faults and increase my qualities of compassion and wisdom. By following this spiritual path and the merit it generates, may I and all others find freedom from suffering and realize our innate enlightened potential."

Then drop all activities of the mind and relax. This relaxation is like the openness that occurs after the last thought passes and before the next one arises. The mind remains as the mind is, not unconscious, not dull, not analytical, just naked in open awareness. Let the mind rest there.

Source: Rinpoche, Chagdud Tulku. *Life in Relation to Death* (Second Edition). Junction City, CA: Padma Publishing, 2006. (Pages 23-29.)